Norwegian University of Life Sciences
School of Economics and Business

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
Thesis 2021:18

Approaches to branding and behaviour: Studies of HRM and employee voice through organizational branding

Studier av HRM og ansattes ytringsrom gjennom organisasjonsmessig merkevare-bygging

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Ås (2021)

Thesis number 2021:18
ISSN 1894-6402
ISBN 978-82-575-1790-8

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father Åsmund.
I think you would have been mildly astounded, but also curious and supportive of my efforts,
if you had lived.

Acknowledgements

Several people have been important for my PhD journey, and deserve a big ”thank you”. First and foremost I would like to thank my main supervisor Arild Wæraas for his relentless scholarly guidance and emotional support from start to finish. He has provided high-quality advice in a friendly and mild manner, seen when valuable encouragements were needed, and willingly shared his considerable experience and contacts in the academic world. And it has been a breeze writing papers together.

I would also like to thank my co-supervisor and friend Sivert Skålvoll Urstad, who has been with me all the way with qualified comments and advice, important contributions to the paper we co-authored, and supportive messages of concern on days of distress and little progress. It has been and is highly appreciated.

Thank you, Bård Kuvaas, for providing the best (and most demanding) PhD course of them all, and, thus, providing insights into the research front in HRM research. Thanks for detailed and to the point-advice as my co-supervisor, and for guidance and backing in the final seminar. I am also grateful to Bernt Aarset at NMBU's School of Economics and Business, for friendly and welcoming advice and discussions on methods, teaching and Tromsø, and to Frode Alfnes, who, as head of research, demonstrated interest in and support of my PhD project. Reidun Aasheim, Hanne Marie Fischer, Kirsti Pettersen and Berit Pettersen deserve hugs for great help and important know-how. And thank you so much to Kine Josefine Aurland Bredesen and Ulrik Meisner, my two office colleagues and partners in crime at NMBU, who were fundamental in providing a great micro-environment in which to strive as budding researchers.

Many thanks also to Viv Ellis, who saw value in my research, gave good advice, and graciously invited me to King's College London, where I presented one of the papers in this dissertation. Big up's go to my new colleagues and leaders at Østfold University College, namely Rita Duesund, Magnus Frostenson, Frode Hübertz Haaland, Inger Marie Hagen, Trond Hammervoll, Mari Kjos Hellum, Jan Moren, , Mats Gøran Persson, Sol Skinnarland, Elin Sørum Skjeklesæter, Charlotte Sørensen og Elise Øby, for giving me a job opportunity which allowed for the work needed to finish the dissertation, and for providing me with time and space to do so.

Thanks to my family and good friends in Oslo and Tromsø, who have enriched my PhD life with interesting conversations, loud rock music, and strong beer. Last, but not least, I thank my own family for support, patience and hugs during the years of working towards the PhD – Nina, for tolerating my somewhat mental absence in periods, and Nora, Noah and Dennis for unconditional love and curious questions about their dad's work.

Summary

After decades of research there still are few studies which draw lines between research on HRM, employee voice and organizational branding. Such an academic cross-fertilization is offered by this dissertation, as a core argument in this work is that scholarship value is generated by exploring the three themes in the context of each other, and to see them as trajectories crossing each other. The intervowen nature of the present research is reflected in the main research question for the dissertation: What is the relationship between organizational branding, HRM, and employee voice in work organizations? Based on this, four sub-research questions are formulated: (i) What are the primary intra-organizational facilitators for active employee strategy support, and how do these facilitators conform to the control-commitment continuum? (ii) What is the role of HRM in reputation management, and what are the implications of reputation oriented HRM for employee voice? (iii) How do managers in public sector organizations experience and handle the tension between empowering employees as dedicated brand ambassadors while at the same time regulating their voice, and what are the possible implications for the public interest? (iv) What kind of HRM approach, as perceived by employees, facilitates internal branding, and specifically, employee brand support? The research questions are explored and answered in four academic articles.

The first paper, titled "Trust and shout: HRM as facilitator for active strategy support", is based on a systematic review of the literature on factors which facilitate employees' active support of strategies decided on by management in organizations, including branding strategies. Identified facilitators are analyzed in light of HRM approach. 12 main facilitators are identified, of which the most prevalent ones, albeit not all, gravitate towards the commitment side of the control-commitment continuum. Thus, commitment-gravitating HRM practices are found to be most effective in getting employees to actively support strategy in general, and branding strategies in particular.

In the second paper, titled "When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice", 30 interviews are analyzed to explore the tension between organizational desires for a flattering external reputation and the risk of negative communication about the organization by employees, termed

prohibitive voice. Rooted in the theoretical span between trusting employees to act as brand ambassadors and distrusting them enough to impose voice restrictions, findings reveal that organizations handle the tension with coercive HRM and technocratic control, which manifested itself as restrictions on the use of voice, and not with the brand ambassador approach. The HRM function is being utilized to protect the desired reputation, which entails that reputation management in reality is people management.

Relatedly, the third paper, which is based on interviews with principals in public sector upper secondary schools in Oslo, reveals that brand ambassadorship seems to be an unrealistic approach in organizations exposed to marketization, in this case public sector schools. As a consequence, internal branding, usually an approach for ”selling” the brand to employees in order for them to ”sell” the brand to external stakeholders, is not the preferred approach by school executives. It is being trumped by voice restrictions in the form of prior message control imposed on teachers, all in order to build and protect the desired brand image. Organizations exposed to high market pressure where the brand is crucial and much is at stake do not seem allow for the trust needed to stimulate brand ambassadorship. The outcome of the restrictive approach is public silence by teachers in general, in that they shy away from taking part in public debate due to fear of sanctions. This takes part on the expense of the public interest, which, arguably, is that public sector organizations in general and public sector schools in particular shall serve the general public in a satisfactory way.

Moving from a qualitative to a quantitative approach, the relationships between HRM approach, leader-member exchange (LMX), and different manifestations of employee brand support are explored in the fourth paper, titled "Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM approach and LMX in internal branding". Based on data from employees at a public sector hospital, a mediated and moderated path model was tested. Findings unveil positive relationships between both high-commitment HRM and LMX and employee brand support measured through reputation strategy embeddedness, brand-congruent behaviour, and brand development participation. As hypothesized, the relationships are mediated by organizational commitment. LMX moderates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness, but not between high-commitment HRM and brand-congruent behaviour and brand development participation, respectively, and none of these

relationships when they are mediated by organizational commitment. Analyzed in light of internal branding theory, the findings suggest that it is mainly a commitment-leaning HRM approach, not a control-leaning approach, which facilitates internal branding. Findings also suggest that high quality LMX relationships function as facilitators for successful internal branding.

Sammendrag

Få forskere har trukket linjer mellom forskning på HRM, ansattes ytringsrom (employee voice) og organisasjonsmessig merkevarebygging (branding). Denne avhandlingen bøter på nettopp dette, i og med at jeg studerer de tre temaene i lys av hverandre. En slik interdisiplinær tilnærming er reflektert i den overordnede problemstillingen for avhandlingen: Hva er forholdet mellom organisasjonsmessig merkevarebygging, HRM og ansattes ytringsrom i organisasjoner? Basert på den overordnede problemstillingen følger fire forskningsspørsmål som avhandlingen søker å gi svar til: (i) Hva er de primære intra-organisasjonsmessige fasilitatorene for at ansatte aktivt støtter virksomhetens strategi, og hvor står disse fasilitatorene i forhold til kontinuumet mellom kotrnoll og forpliktelse i HRM-forskning? (ii) Hvilken rolle har HRM i håndteringen av organisasjoners omdømme, og hva er implikasjonene av omdømmefokusert HRM for ansattes ytringsrom? (iii) Hvordan opplever og håndterer ledere i organisasjoner i offentlig sektor spenningen mellom det å gi ansatte tillit som merkevareambassadører samtidig som de regulerer ansattes ytringer, og hva er implikasjonene av dette for hensynet til samfunnets beste? (iv) Hvilken HRM-tilnærming, erfart og opplevd av ansatte, legger best til rette for intern merkevarebygging (internal branding), og spesielt, for ansattes oppslutning om og støtte av organisasjonens merkevare? Disse forskningsspørsmålene er utforsket og besvart i fire vitenskapelige artikler.

Den første artikkelen, som har tittelen "Trust and shout: HRM as facilitator for active strategy support", er basert på en systematisk gjennomgang av litteraturen på fasiliterende faktorer for ansattes aktive oppslutning om og støtte av strategi initiert av ledelsen i virksomheten der de jobber, herunder strategier for merkevarebygging. Identifiserte fasilitatorer blir analysert i lys av ulike HR-tilnærminger. 12 hovedfasilitatorer blir identifisert. Av disse graviterer de fleste, men ikke alle, mot forpliktelse, altså mot forpliktelsessiden i kontroll-forpliktelse-kontinuumet. Fasilitatorene som er påvist i flest studier graviterer også mot forpliktelse. Følgelig ser det ut til at forpliktelsesbasert HRM fungerer best og er mest effektiv når det gjelder å få ansatte til aktivt å slutte opp om og støtte strategi generelt, og merkevarestrategier spesielt.

I den andre artikkelen, kalt "When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice", ble data fra 30 intervjuer analysert for å utforske spenningen mellom organisasjoners ønske om et fordelaktig eksternt omdømme og risikoen for negative og kritiske ytringer (prohibitive voice) om organisasjonen i eksterne fora. Studien tar utgangspunkt i det teoretiske spennet mellom det å la ansatte agere som merkevareambassadører, som er basert på tillit, og innføre restriksjoner på ytringer, noe som er basert på mistillit. Studien indikerer at organisasjoner håndterer denne spenningen med kontrollorientert HRM og såkalt teknokratisk kontroll, noe som her manifesterer seg i restriksjoner på ansattes muligheter til å ytre seg. Spenningen håndteres i mindre grad ved å gi ansatte tillit som merkevareambassadører. En implikasjon av dette er at HR-funksjonen brukes for å beskytte organisasjoners omdømme, noe som innebærer at håndtering av omdømme ofte er håndtering og ledelse av mennesker.

Artikkel nummer tre, som er basert på intervjuer med rektorer ved offentlige videregående skoler, tyder på at merkevareambassadør-tilnærmingen ikke er realistisk i organisasjoner eksponert for marketisering; her offentlige videregående skoler i Oslo. En konsekvens av dette er at intern merkevarebygging (internal branding), som er en strategi for å "selge" organisasjonens merkevare til ansatte slik at de i sin tur vil "selge" den til eksterne interessenter, ikke er den foretrukne tilnærmingen for skoleledere. I stedet foretrekker skoleledere restriksjoner på eksterne ytringer på føre var-vis, altså kontroll av læreres mulige ytringer før de blir ytret – alt for å bygge og beskytte skolenes ønskede merkevare. Organisasjoner eksponert for markedsmessig press der merkevaren er essensiell og mye står på spill demonstrerer ikke den nødendige tilliten til ansatte for å la dem være merkevareambassadører. Konsekvensen av denne restriktive strategien er offentlig taushet fra lærere, i og med at de ikke deltar i offentlig debatt og ordskifter av frykt for sanksjoner fra skoleledelsen. Dette går på bekostning av det som er en sentral oppgave for organisasjoner i offentlig sektor generelt og offentlige skoler spesielt, nemlig å tjene offentlighetens og samfunnets interesser.

I den fjerde artikkelen, som baserer seg på kvantitative analyser av survey-data fra ansatte ved stort offentlig sykehus, studeres forholdet mellom HRM-tilnærming, forholdet mellom ansatt og leder (leader-member exchange) og ulike uttrykk for ansattes oppslutning om og støtte av organisasjonens merkevare. I artikkelen, som har

tittelen "Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM approach and LMX in internal branding", analyseres data med stianalyse. En modell med en mellomliggende variabel (mediator) og mulig samspill mellom to variabler blir testet. Resultatene viser at at det er statistisk signifikante sammenhenger mellom både forpliktelsesorientert HRM (high-commitment HRM) og leader-member exchange (LMX) og tre uttrykk for ansattes oppslutning om og støtte av organisasjonens merkevare (reputation strategy embeddedness, brand-congruent behaviour, and brand development participation). Som antatt er sammenhengene mediert av organisasjonsmessig forpliktelse (organizational commitment). Samspill mellom forpliktelsesorientert HRM og LMX gjør at LMX modererer forholdet mellom forpliktelsesbasert HRM og reputation strategy embeddedness, men ikke mellom forpliktelsesbasert HRM og variablene brand-congruent behaviour og brand development participation. LMX moderer ingen av disse forholdene når de medieres av organisasjonsforpliktelse (organizational commitment). Analysert i lys av teori om intern merkevarebygging (internal branding) tyder funnene på at forpliktelsesbasert HRM fasiliterer intern merkevarebygging. LMX-forhold av høy kvalitet ser også ut til å legge til rette for suksessfull intern merkevarebygging.

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1. Introduction

The research presented in this thesis is crossdisciplinary in its nature, as it belongs equally within the fields of (i) corporate branding, (ii) human resource management (HRM), and (iii) employee voice.

(i) Corporate branding, defined as a "systematic effort to develop and present the organization as one unified brand" (L. T. Christensen et al., 2008, p. 64), is increasingly being recognized as crucial and necessary for organizations facing external constituences (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Today it is being utilized by public as well as private organizations, and, to mirror this, in this dissertation it will be termed *organizational branding*. It is widely recognized that both private and public organizations apply branding principles to gain an advantage over competitors in market or market-like situations (Evans & Hastings, 2008; Eshuis & Klijn, 2012; Leijerholt et al., 2019).

(ii) The present dissertation advances the argument that organizational branding also involves human resource management (HRM), and, more directly, people management (Wæraas & Dahle, 2020). In an organizational context, people management is in reality management of employees, which entails to management of the human resources in an organization. Thus, HRM, often defined as "the management of work and people towards desired ends" (Boxall et al., 2007, p. 1), is to a certain extent interwoven or entangled with organizational branding, indicating that it is scholarly fruitful to study HRM through organizational branding. The thesis presents a new perspective on HRM, where HRM is studied through the application of organizational branding in modern organizations. In addition the dissertation explores developments prior to the present situation where branding is given priority and prominence. Here the application of New Public Management in the public sector is given special attention. Regard is also given to the present situation and the characteristics and implications of what Kornberger (2010) calls the 'brand society'. Last, implications of HRM policies are explored, namely how HRM approach affects the conditions for employee voice in organizations.

(iii) The dissertation draws light onto whether employee voice, defined as "the discretionary or formal expression of ideas, opinions, suggestions, or alternative approaches directed to a specific target inside or outside of the organization with the

intent to change an objectionable state of affairs or to improve the current functioning of the organization, group, or individual" (Bashshur & Oc, 2015, p. 1531), may come in conflict with branding efforts in organizations (Dahle & Wæraas, 2020).

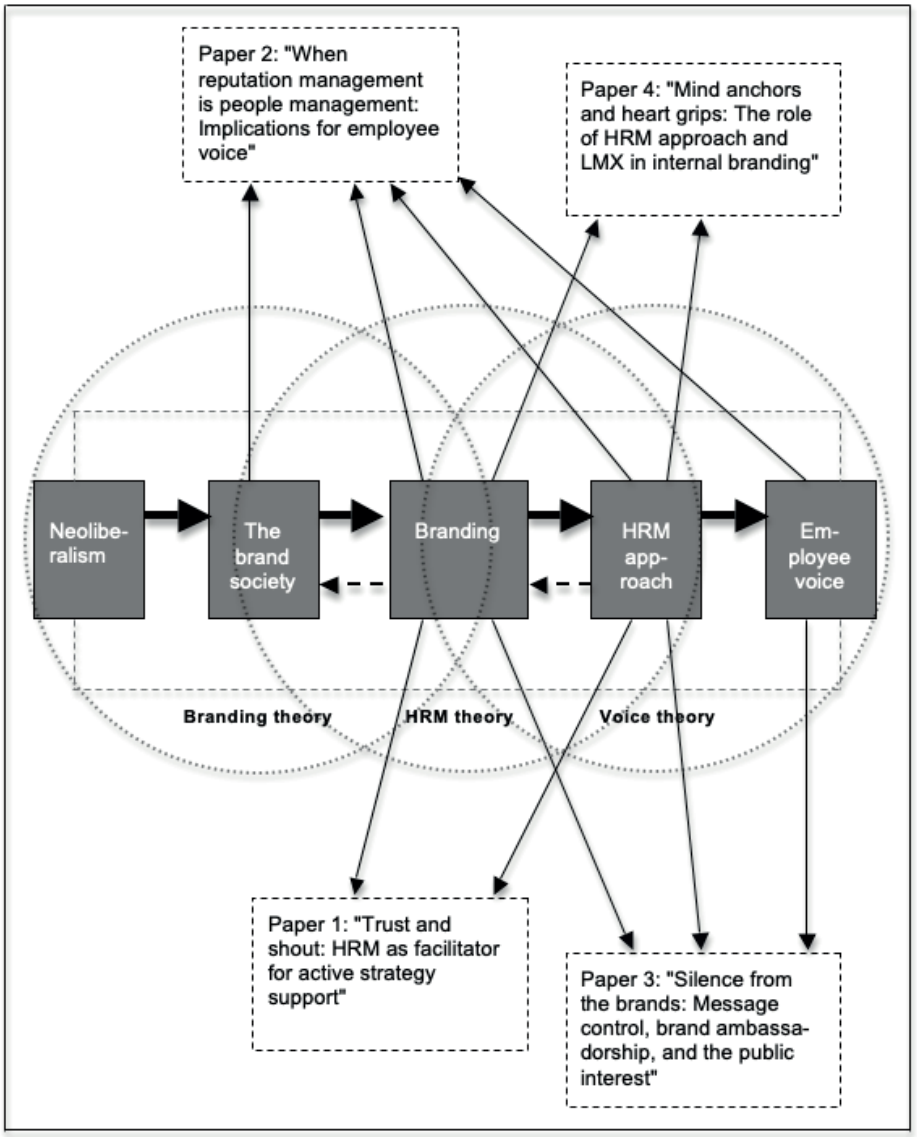

Figure 1: An overall model for the thesis.

The fields of corporate branding, human resource management (HRM), and employee voice represent three trajectories along which the present research motions towards an answer to the overall research question. A visual representation of how these trajectories constitute an overall model for the dissertation, how the trajectories are connected and intervowen, how they are discussed and analyzed in light of corresponding theory, and how the articles in the dissertation discuss the trajectories, is shown in Figure 1. As an overall visualization of the present research, Figure 1 includes developments ahead of and leading up to organizational branding, as well. Correspondingly, the model incorporates a temporal dimension, where neoliberalism set the scene for a 'brand society', which in turn set the scene for use and implementation of organizational branding. Successively, as the dissertation shows, branding concerns seem to affect the choice of HRM approach in organizations, which in turn affects the scope for employee voice. While neoliberalism and New Public Management is present in several of the articles, they are not trajectories per se, but developments ahead of the emergence of the 'brand society', and are not main trajectories in any of the articles. The brand society is a core feature of article nr. 2, while the trajectory of organizational branding is a core feature of article nr. 2, 3 and 4, and, to some extent, in article nr. 1. The trajectory of HRM approach is a core feature in all four articles in the dissertation. The trajectory of employee voice is a core feature in article nr. 2 and 3.

1.1. Neoliberalism, NPM, and marketization

In order to understand why branding is regarded as important by organizations in the public sector, it it necessary to understand how certain overarching changes have set the scene for reputation as a vital, even crucial, factor for public sector organizations. These changes can be traced back to the late 70s, and particularly, the early 80s. In the beginning of the 1980s the state-controlled and regulated policies of the 70s gave way to a more decentralized and market-friendly approach in several countries, partly as a result of conservative governments gaining power. Norway was no exception, as the country followed policies by the Thatcher goverment in the UK and Reagan administration in the US, and opened up former monopolized markets for marketization and competition. Norway liberalized wage formation, which in the

particular Nordic system based on tripartite cooperation between employers, trade unions, and the goverment formerly had been centralized and kept under control (Olberg, 1995).

After the economic downfall and stock exchange crisis of the late 1980s several countries, including socialdemocratic goverments in New Zealand and Australia, introduced measures to run public administration more efficiently. This was also on the agenda by the Clinton administration in the US. As early as 1989 Norway embraced OECDs recommendations and introduced NPM-inspired principles through a Norwegian Official Report (NOU) (Hermansen, 1989). In this period the Public Management Commitee and Secretariat of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommended the implementation of a set of principles meant to effectivize public administration. These principles, which by now were introduced in Norway and several other countries, came to be known as New Public Management by a term introduced in a seminal paper by the scholar Christopher Hood (1991). Hood stated that "the rise of 'new public management' (hereafter NPM) over the last 15 years is one of the most striking trends in public administration" (Hood, 1991, p. 3), and did not invent NPM per se, but described and analyzed an observable trend. He summed up the trend as a shift towards 1) less government growth, 2) privatization or quasi-privatization, 3) automation, and 4) internationalization. While Christopher Hood and colleague Ruth Dixon in recent years have stated that NPM has failed (Hood & Dixon, 2015), Hood nevertheless saw it as a trend where the public sector was to be improved by using private sector management principles, including management by objectives. During the 1990s and 2000s NPM was introduced and became a managing principle in public administration, education, social services, and health services in Norway, and continues to be in use to this day.

1.1.1. Health care

Reforms and new legislation play a central part in the history of New Public Management in Norway. The health sector is a prime example. Berg and Byrkjeflot (2014, p. 380) state that "reforms in the hospital system were inspired by New Public Management (NPM) and formulated as responses to perceived weaknesses in the

traditional public administration model, which, according to the reformers, was too rigid and inefficient".

First and foremost, The Patient Rights Act of 1999, implemented in 2001, gave patients the right to freely choose between public hospitals and other health institutions when they were in need of health care, and thus, the act set up a system in which patients' rights became an important part of Norwegian health care. Hence, "the principle of patient autonomy has been formalized with the The Patient Rights Act of 1999. At the same time consumerism has entered health care" (Førde & Aasland, 2008, p. 521). In 2012 The Health Care Interaction Reform made municipalities responsible for facilitating basic health care for its inhabitants, adding to a similar development: The patient as consumer.

The Norwegian Hospital Reform of 2002 plays a central role, as "responsibility for the Norwegian hospitals was transferred from the counties to central government. The ownership was thereby centralized to a single body - the state" (Lægreid et al., 2005, p. 7). At first glance, this might not indicate implementation of New Public Management principles. But a defining part of the reform was that hospital trusts were established as owners of the hospitals. These trusts are organized much like private corporations. Relatedly, "the reform also set up new management principles for the hospitals based on a decentralized enterprise model" (Lægreid et al., 2005, p. 7), where each enterprise or trust " is given enhanced local autonomy with their own executive boards and general managers with powers of authority to set priorities and manage the regional and local health enterprises" (Lægreid et al., 2005, p. 7). As a result, the reform transformed the country's public hospital from public institutions to partly private enterprises run by NPM principles .

Berg and Byrkjeflot (2014) sum up the reforms as measures to counteract the 'perceived weaknesses' in the current governing of public hospitals, mainly by introducing "better measurements of outputs, incentives for administrators to become managers and a 'voice' for the citizen as consumer. The emphasis was on choice, management, autonomy, and transparency, i.e. creating pressures for the introduction of new forms of governmental control" (Berg & Byrkjeflot, 2014, p. 380) - in reality typical NPM characteristics like governing by measurable output, objectives, and results.

1.1.2. Education

Similar developments have taken place within the educational sector in the same frame of time. Norwegian education has, in line with other Scandinavian countries, traditionally differed from the education models in many other countries. Imsen et al. (2017, p. 569) state that while "very strong tendencies in the UK and the USA have emphasized a scientific curriculum and focus on national aims and measureable outcomes, Nordic legislation has focused on a comprehensive school and an education for democratic *Bildung*, participation, and equality". They describe three periods in the development of the Nordic model of education, in which the third period, beginning in the 1980s, is especially relevant to the present research, as it denotes "the era of globalisation and neoliberalism, when the "new right", new forms of management, and market-inspired technologies were embarked upon" (Imsen et al., 2017, p. 569).

The deregulation, decentralization, and marketization of comprehensive schooling in Norway began with several amendments to the Educational Act of 1998. The changes were sped up by the first results from OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2001, and the Trends in International Mathematics ans Science Study (TIMSS), in which Norwegian comprehensive education was given a mid-level assessment. The results were certainly not a 'national failure' as portrayed by the media, but they neither placed Norway among the top countries assessed by PISA and TIMSS. The results gave legitimacy for educational reforms by the centre-right governement in office at the time, first leading to a Norwegian Official Report (NOU) by the Quality committee (Søgnen-utvalget) (Søgnen, 2003) and a governmental white paper (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2003). Both recommended an increased focus on measurement of student results, particularly the introduction of annual national tests for all Norwegian pupils - in order to improve the PISA and TIMSS results. A few years later the Knowledge Promotion Reform of 2006 was introduced, which was a major reform for all school levels up to and including upper secondary school. Core changes were more pronounced goals for learning, the final introduction of national testing, publication of test results per school and school rankings on an official website, and, thus, a national evaluation system based on transparency. Additionally, the reform introduced a new national curriculum based on "less detailed syllabuses" and "focus on clear competence goals" (Helgøy & Homme,

2016, p. 57). As such, the "new curriculum implied measurability and comparability and so enabled competition for the purpose of output control", and brought Norwegian education "a large step towards implementing the typical NPM steering element of management by objectives and results" (Helgøy & Homme, 2016, p. 57).

As part of the decentralization, municipalities were given increased responsibilities on several levels, for example for student admission systems. As follows, "free school choice became an option for municipalities" (Imsen et al., 2017, p. 574). The municipal school administration in Oslo embraced this option fully, and introduced free choice of schools in 2004. At the comprehensive school level, children still had a legal right to attend its local school (Imsen et al., 2017, p. 574), but at the upper secondary level students have no such right, as student intake is based on former grades alone. Already in 2003 Oslo began providing funding for the city's schools based on per capita funding where 'money follows the student'. This system entails that the schools' "financial resources are based on the number of students they admit", and whether "students complete and pass their studies" (Haugen, 2020, p. 6). The education administration in the city practices a combination of free choice of school and per capita funding, "stimulating competiton within the system" (Haugen, 2020, p. 6). Nationally, the centre-left governments in office after 2005 and the right-wing government currently in office have continued the NPM-friendly governing of education. Although the current centre-left city government in Oslo has promised to reverse elements of the governing model for upper secondary schools in the city, the combination for free choice of school and per capita funding is still in use.

1.1.3. Towards branding

One of the consequences of the introduction of New Public Management principles is a more widespread regard for organizational branding in the day-to-day running of organizations. Kornberger (2010) describes how New Public Management and its subsequent reforms position the brand as crucial, so as it "plays an important role in the defence of the free-market principles: brands create accountability, loyalty, and wealth for everybody. In other words, brands liberate" (Kornberger, 2010, p. 205). Inherent in this is an avid consumer thinking, where choice is viewed as an all-important, "autonomous and ultima ratio" (Kornberger, 2010, p. 216) and humans are

seen as consumers in areas where consumerism has not been particularly prominent, for example in public sector organizations within healthcare, welfare, and education. When the notion of choice is prominent, it is often paired with part or full marketization. Creating markets often sets up an institutional logic based on marketization, and thus, competition (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), where branding becomes an unescapable feature.

The literature has traditionally been rather optimistic when it comes to the gains of successful branding and a favourable reputation. According to Aaker (2009), a strong brand enables an organization to differentiate its qualities from competing organizations, resulting in market success. Thus, branding leads to competitive advantages (Leijerholt et al., 2019), favourable stakeholder perceptions (Gromark & Melin, 2013), and, ultimately, solid financial performance (Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Scholars differentiate between a brand's image and its reputation, with the main difference being of temporal character. A brand's image reflects current, shifting, external perceptions of the brand, a brand's reputation is more stable and of a more long-term character. It is defined as "a collective representation of a brand's past actions and results that describes the brand's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders" (Balmer et al., 2001, p. 445). Seen the other way around, a strong reputation may lead to a solid brand. Indicated by the optimism concerning branding, research on less positive aspects of branding is generally thin on the ground.

Alvesson (1990) draws attention to effects of the global shift from industrial production til service provision, particulary increased attention to 'corporate images' and 'impressions' instead of substantive issues. Here branding is a key to success. This is accompanied by a shift towards more liquid and temporary identities based on individualism and less solid identities tied to collectivism. People identify less with class, community, or family, and more with organizations or brands. In this perspective the image or the brand of an organization is given more weight.

For public sector organizations neoliberal ideas have come to the fore most prominently through New Public Management ideas based on the notion of utilizing principles and practices from the private sector in the public sector. NPM is frequently seen as a management trend based on traveling ideas (T. Christensen & Lægreid, 2002). Branding-induced features like marketization, competition, and choice are closely related to NPM, and can be seen as features introduced as a result of NPM.

Relatedly, an increased demand for transparency in public organizations may reflect the shift towards consumerism. The same may apply to increased focus on accountability, key performance indicators, measurement, and reporting, while, alternatively, it may be seen as efforts to achieve legitimacy among different stakeholders. All these developments set up a necessity to build a strong organizational brand. When organizations, private as well as public, act as competitors in a market, the mechanisms of marketization give them no choice: If they want to succeed, they have to play the game, that is, the branding game.

1.2 The brand society

An implication of the brand society is that "brands transform the way we manage organizations", so that "the brand becomes the organizing principle that transforms management practice" (Kornberger, 2010, p. 267). At the core of the change is a change in organizational identity creation, where the identity is closely tied to outsiders' views of the organization as such as the brand becomes the channel for actual identity construction. Kornberger (2010) puts it like this:

> *"Defining a brand means defining a set of values, a way of behaving, right down to minute details such as the tone of voice of an email. From management's perspective, brands are scripts that promise to direct the organization in two ways. First, the brand should guide employees' internal sense-making processes by providing readily available meanings and interpretation of events. Second, the brand should ensure the smooth production of consumable experiences for an organization's consumers and clients. As such, the brand imposes its logic across the boundaries between internal organization and external environment" (Kornberger, 2010, p. 268).*

As organizational identity creation is happening between internal and external forces, it is up to management to succeed with the brand-building process. The process represents challenges for executives used to be in control and overseeing organizational processes. Brand-building implies losing some of the control executives

usually possess, simply because branding is interwoven with external processes and external forces which, from a management perspective, is harder to control.

> *"While a brand manager might create a certain identity, the brand inevitably escapes management's control. Like beauty, a brand exists in the eye of the beholder. And there it is hard to control: the sense-making process of the reader (consumer, employee) co-constitutes, and sometimes, overrides, the text of the author. This poses a fundamental challenge to management. Management's instinct is to use brands as mechanisms of control" (Kornberger, 2010, p. 269).*

Hence, branding is a challenging task. The preferred solution to these challenges seem to lie in the brands themselves, which has an element of the saying: 'If you can't beat them, join them'. According to Kornberger, executives turn the situation around, so what seems to be a case of losing control is transformed into a case of taking control. How is this done? It is all at the core of the brand: "The equation is simple: since brands can influence consumer behaviour, they should also be able to direct employee's conduct" *(*Kornberger, 2010, p. 269). Hence, the brand society and its corresponding focus on organizational branding facilitates a transformation of management practices towards a more control-oriented way of managing organizations, and accordingly, towards more control-oriented human resource management practices. Summed up, the scripting takes place on three stages: 1) How to create "available meanings and interpretation of events", 2) how to ensure "smooth production of consumable experiences" (Kornberger, 2010, p. 268), and, 3) how to manage employees and their conduct so that executives retain some control.

1.3 Research gaps

My reading of core contributions to the literature suggests that scholars have paid little attention to management practices and human resource management approaches in light of the brand society. Few have investigated empirical links between organizational branding and the ways that employees are treated through HRM and management practices. Herein lies the mission of the present dissertation. Despite some progress the last decade (Ind, 2003; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Wallace & de

Chernatony, 2007; Morhart et al., 2009; Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2010; Chang et al., 2012; Rokka et al., 2014), significant empirical and theoretical gaps in the current literature exist. Here I briefly highlight some of the gaps and the corresponding pressing issues waiting to be explored.

Research gap 1:

Few scholars draw lines between different disciplines when exploring research themes. This applies to organizational branding research as well as other disciplines within social sciences. Theoretically, it seems fruitful to let research on organizational branding be informed by human resource management (HRM). However, in this dissertation these themes are informed by strategy, so as to approach the matters in a novel way. The question that managers should ask themselves once the official brand or desired reputation is defined, is this: How do I make employees behave in a way that supports the brand? Or, put more generally, how do I make employees support our strategy. Because branding is a highly strategic activity, the challenge of stimulating on-brand behaviour in employees is a matter of understanding the challenges of creating strategy support and the approaches that enable such support. To date, these challenges have not been significantly examined. Thus, instead of exploring antecendents to employee support of branding alone, the perspective was widened to explore antecedents to employee support of strategy, including support of branding. By analyzing antecedents in light of HRM appoach, lines are drawn between strategy support, branding support among employees and HRM approach in organizations. These gaps are adressed with a systematic literature review, which is presented in paper nr. 1: *"Trust and shout: HRM as facilitator for active strategy support".* The paper has been revised once and is currently under review in an international journal.

Research gap 2:

As organizational branding is much about creating a favourable image of the organization in the eye of the beholder, it is much about building and maintaining a favourable reputation in relation to external stakeholders. This process, termed

reputation management, involves communicating favourably about the organization. Here the position of unfavourable communication, for example when employees speak negatively about their employer in external fora, remains little explored. The risk for an organization's reputation posed by such use of prohibitive voice (Liang et al., 2012) is largely unadressed in the literature, including the role of HRM in handling and reducing this risk. This represent a major gap in the literature, which is adressed in paper nr. 2: *"When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice"*. This paper has been published in European Management Journal.

Research gap 3:

In order to get employees to "sell" the brand to external stakeholders, employers face the task of "selling" the brand to employees through internal branding. If they succeed, employees will become efficient sellers of the brand. This entails dedication from employees, which may be a challenge, especially for public sector organizations who struggle to get a favourable reputation and brand image, for example some public secondary schools. In the branding literature this challenge is optimistically met by efforts to turn employees into brand ambassadors (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). However, it is unclear whether trust-induced brand ambassadorship strategies are utilized in the day to day-running of organizations, or whether a more control-oriented strategy with restrictions on employees and their use of voice is commonly used. Possible consequences of utilizing a control-oriented strategy remains unchartered territory, as well. In general, such internal aspects of branding, particularly in the public sector, is relatively unexplored, something which represents a distinct research gap. This gap is adressed in paper nr. 3: *"Silence from the brands: Message control, brand ambassadorship, and the public interest"*. This paper has been published in International Journal of Organizational Theory and Behavior.

Research gap 4:

Employee brand support entails that employees align with and actively support the brand so as to "sell" it to external stakeholders. Organizations seek this objective either through an internal branding strategy such as brand ambassadorship, or through voice

restrictions. An under-explored matter is the role an organization's HRM approach plays in internal branding efforts (Piehler et al., 2018). Relatedly, equally little explored is the position of leadership in internal branding, specifically leadership by employees' closest supervisor, also termed the perceived quality of the leader-member exchange (LMX) between employee and leader. In addition, the literature is thin on the ground with regard to studies on mediators (Piehler et al., 2018) between HRM approach, LMX and different manifestations of employee brand support, and on interaction between HRM and LMX (Leroy et al., 2018). These related gaps are adressed in paper nr. 4: *"Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM approach and LMX in internal branding"*. The paper has been revised twice for The International Journal of Human Resource Management.

Reflecting the overall approach and model of the present dissertation, as seen in Figure 1, this is the overarching research question for the dissertation:

- What is the relationship between organizational branding, HRM, and employee voice in work organizations?

On a more particular level, , the thesis will contribute to the identified gaps by adressing the following research questions:

> *What are the primary intra-organizational facilitators for active employee strategy support, and how do these facilitators conform to the control-commitment continuum? (paper nr. 1)*
>
> *What is the role of HRM in reputation management, and what are the implications of reputation-oriented HRM for employee voice? (paper nr. 2)*
>
> *How do managers in public sector organizations experience and handle the tension between empowering employees as dedicated brand ambassadors while at the same time regulating their voice, and what are the possible implications for the public interest? (paper nr. 3)*

What kind of people management, incorporating HRM approach and LMX quality as perceived by employees, facilitates internal branding, and, specifically, employee brand support? (paper nr. 4)

2. Theoretical framework

In this section the present research is positioned within the chosen theoretical framework, consisting of three interwoven trajectories: Organizational branding, HRM, and employee voice.

2.1. Branding as strategy

While strategy clearly is about goals and how to reach them, the concept has been defined in different ways since the 1960s, from planning and executing company growth (Chandler, 1962), to "a broad formula for how a business is going to compete, what its goals should be, and what policies will be needed to carry out those goals" (Porter, 1980), and, a from a more critical grounding, "a plan, or something equivalent - a direction, a guide or course of action into the future, a path to get from here to there" (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 23), "a pattern of decisions (which represent) the unity, coherence and internal consistency of a company's strategic decisions that positions a company in its environment and give the firm its identity, its power to mobilize its strengths, and its likelihood of success in the marketplace" (Andrews, 1987, p. 112), and more broadly, "a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, actions, decisions, or resource allocations that define what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (Bryson, 2015, p. 46). By adapting the definitions by Andrews (1987) and Bryson (2015), I define strategy as a pattern of plans, decisions, and actions that guide and build an organization's course forward, involving its identity, strengths, and competitive power.

Theoretically, there are strong links between the constructs of branding and strategy. Branding is a 'systematic effort', which corresponds with strategy being 'a pattern of plans, decisions, and actions'. Branding seeks to 'gain an advantage over competitors', which corresponds with strategy building 'strength, and competitive power'. The brand being a major arena for identity construction (Kornberger, 2010) corresponds with strategy defining an organization's 'identity'. As follows, in the present research organizational branding is viewed as a strategy.

2.2 Branding as theory

2.2.1. External branding

Branding has both an internal and an external dimension[1]. For practitioners and outsiders, the most familiar dimension is probably external branding, as it deals with external stakeholders' perception of an organization. While the notion of corporate branding is little disputed, one question needs clarification: What is a brand? According to Farquhar (1989, p. 25), a brand is a "name, symbol, design, or mark that enhances the value of a product beyond its functional purpose". The term product does not only apply to material products typically offered by private corporations, but can apply to "any type of product, service, or organization, including those in the public sector" (Leijerholt et al., 2019, p. 127). Consequently, the purpose of a brand is to enhance the value of a product, service, or organization present in markets or market-like settings.

While the term 'organizational branding' encompasses both private and public organizations, its origin lies in the private sector and the term 'corporate branding'. Like organizational branding, corporate branding is systematic work towards an organization with one unified brand, but at the same time it is a processual approach involving several factors or principles. The principles of corporate branding constitute "a holistic approach that highlights the interrelationships among strategic vision, organizational culture, and corporate images" (Leijerholt et al., 2019, p. 127). The approach involves formulating a desired organizational identity fueling a branding strategy, setting up the strategy plan behind the corporate communication meant to build the brand, and implementing activities and behaviour building and strengthening the brand. As argued for by Harris (2007, p. 105), corporate branding is guided by principles, and not rules, as principles allow for different ways to achieve success, and the application of corporate branding in public sector organizations. Due to introduction of New Public Management and other major reforms, which have led to an increased focus on performance, competition, and consumerism (Fledderus, 2015) and per capita funding (Dahle & Wæraas, 2020), public organizations have increasingly turned to corporate branding as a means to navigate in the new

[1] *In addition comes the dimension of employer branding, which will receive little attention in the present research.*

landscape. However, public organizations differ from private corporations in their role as providers of societal value and services serving the public interest, including how well they live up to public sector values like equality, democracy, pluralism, security (Kallinikos, 2006), and legitimacy (Wæraas & Sataøen, 2014). Here, the literature provide contradictory findings, from benefits generated by branding activities (Wæraas, 2008; Whelan et al., 2010; Gromark & Melin, 2013) to less optimistic findings, including negative consequences for employee commitment (Hoggett, 2006; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015). Public sector employees may in fact resist use of corporate branding principles because they see such commercial concepts as being in conflict with the greater purpose of public sector organizations (Hariff & Rowley, 2011; Wæraas & Sataøen, 2014; Hytti et al., 2015). This calls for adaptations and adjustments of branding principles and strategies before introducing them into public sector organizations (Leijerholt et al., 2019).

2.2.2. Internal branding

Internal branding represents the internal dimension of organizational branding. In the task of presenting the organization as one unified brand in the eyes of external stakeholders, one question is crucial: Which parts of the organization shall take care of the actual delivery of the brand? Scholars have identified organization members, particularly regular employees in non-executive positions, as having an essential role in the process of delivering the brand. The delivery is done through externally directed employee communication and behaviour. The internal branding dimension, which can be said to be the less visible side of branding, has been poorly connected to external branding processes in many organizations. Boone (2000) puts it like this:

> *"Many companies do a brilliant job of advertising and marketing to customers. Then comes the hard part; delivering. While they put millions of dollars into marketing (external branding), most companies invest little to ensure that employees transform brand messages into reality in terms of the customer's experience. (Boone, 2000, p. 36)*

Internal branding is utilized in the step before the external brand delivery. Organizations use internal branding principles to get employees to actually deliver the brand, the brand message, and "the brand promise" (Judson et al., 2006, p. 99). Internal branding involves 'selling the brand' to employees effectively so that they, in turn and through their delivery, 'sell' the brand to external stakeholders in order to build and strengthen the brand.

> *"It's one thing to tell customers who you are and quite another to show them who you are. Employees have to be engaged to make the brand come alive. Therefore, the messages sent to employees about the brand are just as important as the ones sent to customers". (Boone, 2000, p. 36)*

The success of this "depends on the ability to leverage cognitive, affective, and communicative differences" (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2010, p. 181) among employees. Successful internal branding entails that branding begins "from the inside-out" (Sartain, 2005; Ind & Bjerke, 2007) or "from within" (Judson et al., 2006), so that the brand values are "anchored in their minds and hearts to encourage brand supporting behaviour" (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2010, p. 182). This will help employees to "understand the brand, take ownership of the brand, and provide evidence of the brand in their organizational responsibilities" (Judson et al., 2006, p. 100). By this, employees will "live the brand vision on a day-to-day basis" and even be "living, breathing advertisements for an organization" (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Judson et al., 2006, p. 100; Ind, 2007). The fairly optimistic assumption is that the outcome of the internal branding process is highly motivated brand champions (Ind, 2007) or brand ambassadors (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Dreher, 2014)

Brand ambassadorship is one of two possible mian strategies used by employers to get employees to deliver the brand in a brand-strengthening manner. The brand ambassador position, which can be seen as the outcome of a well-functioning internal branding process, presupposes a certain level of trust in employees, so that employers trust employees to fill the role of brand deliverers through the right level of brand-related commitment needed for the task (Miles & Mangold, 2004). Alternatively, employers may chose a more restrictive strategy based more on control than on trust. A lack of trust in employees may be bolstered by the

possible brand-threatening risk of employee behaviour and employee voice. Employees may not always behave in accordance with their organization and its brand, and may act as brand saboteurs, which reduces the level of trust the employer has in her employees. In these circumstances, employers may introduce control measures, censorship and even surveillance to make sure that employees deliver the brand in the desired way (Dahle & Wæraas, 2020).

The construct of branding has similarities with the construct of marketing. External branding, for example, shares features with corporate level marketing, as they are both about presenting positive features of a product or an organization to external stakeholders. However, whereas marketing involves establishing awareness among potential customers, branding involves creating, shaping and communicating meanings, identities, and values to external stakeholders. Similarly, internal branding shares features with internal marketing, but nevertheless the constructs differ. Internal marketing is about treating employees as internal customers to "align, motivate and inter-functionally coordinate and integrate employees towards the effective implementation of corporate and functional strategies in order to deliver customer satisfaction" (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000, p. 454), meaning to treat employees well so they are satisfied and motivated enough to make customers satisfied. Internal branding, on the other hand, is to get employees to internalize brand values in order to deliver the brand and its values to external stakeholders. The construct of employee branding is more than similar to internal branding, as "employee branding and internal branding are essentially synonymous in the literature" (Aurand et al., 2005, p. 164). For the sake of clarity, the term internal branding will be used throughout the present research.

2.3 HRM theory

The roots of human resource management (HRM) are found in the late 19th century, from welfare secretaries of industrial companies in the 1890s to employment offices in the same decade and later employment departments in the early 20th century. And in the interwar period; the emergence of personell management, industrial relations, welfare capitalism, and the connotation of the terms *human factor* and *human resource* (Kaufman, 2007), followed by McGregors theory X and Y in the 1960s (McGregor,

1960). However, the field of HRM is regarded as being born at a later stage, as it is "generally accepted to have emerged from US business schools in the mid- to late 1980s" (Mansour et al., 2015, p. 214). Underlying forces were US competition with Japan, globalization, deregulation, digitalization, less unionization, higher educational levels, and a more service-based economy on the expense of manufacturing. Human resources were seen as a source of competitive power.

2.3.1. HRM as a continuum

Two distinct approaches to HRM came to view during these times. Scholars at the University of Michigan argued for an economic-instrumental approach where employees were to be treated like any other organizational resource and managed by incentives, rewards, punishment and control (Devanna et al., 1981). In contrast, other scholars argued that a more commitment-oriented approach was needed to unleash the competitive powers of human resources. The most prominent approach came from scholars at Harvard University, who argued that the most effective way of managing employees in order to gain the most from an organization's human resources was to utilize a humanist approach where employees are managed with trust, their intrinsic motivation is sought to be stimulated, and performance is sought through commitment and not control (Beer et al., 1985). Of the various labels attached to the approach, 'high-performance work systems' and 'high-commitment HRM' came to be the most prominent. In the present research the label 'high-commitment HRM' will be used as a label of an approach focusing on “developing committed employees who can be trusted to use their discretion to carry out job tasks in ways that are consistent with organizational goals” (Arthur, 1994, p. 672).

A main driver of the shift was a search for better performance and higher productivity to match high-performing competitors in other economies, particularly in Japan. To achieve this, management of employees was deemed to be successful only if it catered for employees’ psychological needs. The idea was that "by treating employees as organizational assets rather than disposable commodities, (...) and creating mutual-gain forms of compensation, the employment model is transformed from an inflexible, high-conflict, and low-productivity system, to a flexible, low-conflict, high-productivity unitarist HRM system" (Kaufman, 2007, p. 35). In this view, control

was seen as being detrimental to the desired fulfilment of employees' psychological needs. Walton, an influential champion of the commitment-oriented approach, summed it up:

> *"Recently, however, changing expectations among workers have prompted a growing disillusionment with the apparatus of control. At the same time, of course, an intensified challenge from abroad has made the competitive obsolence of this strategy clear. A model that assumes low employee commitment and that is designed to produce reliable if not outstanding performance simply cannot match the standards of excellence set by world-class competitors. Especially in a high-wage country like the United States , market success depends on a superior level of performance, a level that, in turn, requires the deep commitment, not merely the obedience - if you could obtain it - of workers. And as painful experience shows, this commitment cannot flourish in a workplace dominated by the familiar model of control"* (Walton, 1985).

But what, exactly, is at the core of a high-commitment HRM approach? The waning focus on employer control of employees implied a rising level of self-control by employees. It is described as "a move from external control through management systems, technology, and supervision to self-control by workers or teams of workers who, because of their commitment to the organization, would exercise responsible autonomy and control in the interests of the organization" (Guest, 2007, p. 130). Such a shift in the locus of control implied that employers gave away some of the control they traditionally had imposed on employees, and managed employees similarly to the ways managers, professionals, and experts were managed. The shift can be characterized as powerful, as it represented fundamental changes in the management of human resources.

Over time, this shift has been utilized to form a contrast, a distincion, between two sides of a continuum, as there has been an increasing "tendency of the various taxonomies to array in reasonably comparable continua" (Dyer & Reeves, 1995, p. 5). According to Guest (2007, p. 130). the control vs. commitment continuum "has also been described as top-down vs. bottom-up management (Appelbaum & Batt, 1994), a 'low road' vs. a 'high road' approach (Milkman, 1997), and 'hard' vs. 'soft' HRM (Storey,

1992)". Similarly, other proposed continuums include coercive vs. enabling HRM (Adler & Borys, 1996; De Koeijer et al., 2014), traditional vs. innovative (Ichniowski et al., 1997), mass production-oriented vs. flexible (MacDuffie, 1995), and calculative vs. collaborative HRM (Gooderham et al., 2008). Some of these include some sort of middle category, as well, like the 'mixed' category from Ichniowski et al. (1997), and the 'transitional' category from MacDuffie (1995). These continuums are not alternatives to the control vs. commitment continuum, but are regarded as being partly or wholly based on the distinction between control and commitment. Thus, the control vs. commitment continuum represents a fundamental contrast in HRM research, and will be used extensively throughout the present research. It is important, however, to note that it is a continuum, not a dichotomy. A dichotomy allows for only two positions, and, in this context, represents an over-simplified either/or notion of HRM. A continuum, on the other hand, allows for variations along a line between two end points, in this case control on one side and commitment on the other side.

Studies show that many organizations make use of elements from both sides of the continuum (Collins & Kehoe, 2017), and hybrid versions may be successful in improving performance (Hauff et al., 2014). An example is a more performance management-oriented type of HRM, with high-commitment elements, but with control still in the hands of management (Guest, 2007), and a so-called 'high performance' or high involvement' approach (Batt, 2002) with employees at the centre, but with little focus on their well-being and satisfaction. Hauff et al. (2014) identify two hybrid approaches, namely 'long-term oriented control systems' and 'regulated commitment systems'. Atkinson (1984) developed an integrative model based on flexibility, with a core and peripheral group of employees with high-commitment HRM directed towards the core group only. Lepak and Snell (2002) have presented a four category model where distinct HRM approaches reflect different categories of employees.

2.3.2. Building blocks for commitment: Social exchange theory

What stimulates, facilitates, and, ultimately, creates commitment in high-commitment HRM? The paradox of HRM research is that it is a field characterized by extensive use of theory, but much of the theory and associated constructs stems from other disciplines (Guest, 1997)., particularly organizational behaviour research. Among

these are two theoretical streams that are regarded as being fundamental, namely psychological contract theory and social exchange theory (SET).

High-commitment HRM has very much to do with fulfilling psychological needs in order to increase organizational performance. The task of "achieving both organizational and individual goals - of gaining both high performance and high employee satisfaction - implies some form of exchange, a deal in which both sides can win" (Guest, 2007, p. 132). We are now moving towards social exchange theory, and its focus on "the exchange of social rewards" (Blau, 1964, p. 14). While social exchange theory includes different sub-theories, a social exchange can be defined precicely as "a series of interactions that generate obligations" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 874). The term 'exchange' gives associations to economic principles and 'economic man', but it is about a *social*, not an economical, exchange. While extrinsic benefits always will be present through wages and other forms of compensation, and the first stages of the exchange may be economical in nature, it evolves into a social exchange of intrinsic benefits based on one actor's treatment of the other, and the other's response to the treatment. Cropanzano et al. (2017) outline the core features of a social exchange:

> *"(1) an actor's initial treatment toward a target individual, (2) a target's reciprocal responses (both attitudinal and behavior) to the action, and (3) relationship formation" (Cropanzano et al., 2017, p. 2).*

Inherent in social exchange theory is the principle of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which sets up a reciprocal relationship between two parties, that is, between employer and employee or between leader and employee. Blau uses the construct of imbalance to underline his argument, stating that an imbalanced relationship between two actors stimulates action, as "a given balance in social associations is produced by imbalances in the same associations in other respects" (Blau, 1964, p. 28). The idea is straighforward: To reduce a perceived imbalance, one actor offers something to the other, which creates an obligation for the other. The result is reciprocity, as "a person who supplies services in demand to others obligates them to reciprocate. If some fail to reciprocate, he has strong inducements to withhold the needed assistance from them in order to supply it to others who do repay

him for his troubles in some form" (Blau, 1964, p. 28). In reality, reciprocity is repayment.

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) outline the rules of reciprocity as they work in social exchanges. Of the three main rules they describe, *reciprocity as interdependent exchanges* is the most relevant for human resource management. They posit that reciprocal interdependence, that is, interdependence where "outcomes are based on a combination of parties' efforts" and a bidirectional transaction necessitates that "an action by one party leads to response by another", and "something has to be given and something returned" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 876). Additionally, contingency is key.

> *"A reciprocal exchange is understood as one that does not include explicit bargaining. Rather, one party's action are contingent on the other's behavior. Because of this, interdepence reduces risk and encourages cooperation. The process begins when at least one participant makes a 'move', and if the other reciprocates, new rounds of exchange initiate. Once the process is in motion, each consequence can create a reinforcing cycle" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 876).*

Due to the reinforcing qualities of the process, social exchanges rooted in reciprocity contributes to a long-term positive relationship based on a two-way commitment and mutual gratifications between parties. Often the 'parties' involved are leader and employee, who are interdependent actors. The exchange process usually "begins when an organizational actor or perpetrator, usually a supervisor or coworker, treats a target individual in a positive or negative fashion", for example by providing "organizational support or justice" or, negatively, "abusive supervision, incivility, or bullying" (Cropanzano et al., 2017, p. 2). Reciprocate responses from the targets, usually a subordinate or a coworker, include "good or bad behaviour" (Cropanzano et al., 2017, p. 2). In the present research it is the relationship between supervisor and subordinate, leader and employee, which is explored, while the coworker dimension is not. Also not explored are social exchanges between employees and their “employing organization” (Wayne et al., 1997, p. 82), commonly termed perceived organizational support (POS). Consequently, leader-member exchange (LMX) (Graen & Uhl-Bien,

1995) is utilized at the variable level. LMX theory describes the dyadic relationship between supervisor and subordinate, and depicts the two as 'dyadic partners'. LMX theory posits that "effective leadership processes occur when leaders and followers are able to develop mature relationships (partnerships), and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring" (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 225), and "high-quality social exchange relationships" with a "long time span of reciprocation" (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, pp. 229 - 230).

2.3.3. Towards a psychological contract

The social exchange is regarded as being a cornerstone in the psychological contract between employer and employee. The psychological contract has been defined in various ways incorporating different aspects, but according to a much cited definition it consists of "individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between between the individual and their organization" (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9), which, in turn, sets up mutual obligations between the two parties based on either "an employee's interpretation of explicit and implicit promises" (Conway & Briner, 2009, p. 71), or "the perceptions of both parties to the employment relationship, organization and individual, of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship" (Guest & Conway, 2002, p. 22). Whereas there is some disagreement about whether the perceptions of leaders should count, there is a general agreement about that a psychological contract "should be viewed as a two-way exchange of perceived promises and obligations" (Guest & Conway, 2002, p. 22). The links between a psychological contract and a social exchange, which, as seen, consists of "a series of interactions that generate obligations" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 874), are obvious. However, the psychological contract is based on the involved parties' *beliefs* in and *perception* and *interpretation* of that the exchange involves reciprocity, which, in turn, gives the psychological contract a more processual nature closer to the day to day features of organizational life. As such, "the psychological contract is about a set of ongoing dynamic, reciprocal processes, where its terms are actively renegotiated, fulfilled or breached, on a daily basis by both parties to the contract. This distinguishes the psychological contract from many other organizational psychology theories" (Conway & Briner, 2009, p. 72).

An important feature is the role of balance, which is one of the ways identified by Conway and Briner (2005) in which the psychological contract can affect employee behaviour through human resource management. Such contracts "may operate through a form of equity theory, reflected in a balanced psychological contract. Where there is a balance between the promises and obligations of employer and employee, it would be predicted that the outcomes will be more positive than when there is imbalance" (Guest, 2007, p. 136). Psychological contracts may also set up goals directing behaviour, and, "operate through a system of social exchange (...) and the norm of reciprocity" (Guest, 2007, p. 136).

2.4 Voice theory

Employee voice has been defined in several different ways, partly due to the fact that it has been studied by scholars belonging to different disciplines, including HRM, employment relations, organizational behaviour, industrial relations, and labour economics.

Defining voice

Some scholars use very wide definitions where voice are seen as "providing workers as a group with a means of communicating with management" (Freeman & Medoff, 1984, p. 8), and as "the ability to have meaningful input into decisions" (Budd, 2004, p. 23). Others incorporate direct and indirect use of voice, voice in task-based and team settings, and voice in unionized and non-unionized organizations. Further, definitions have incorporated promotive voice, prohibitive voice (Liang et al., 2012), and more critical use of voice, including criticism, complaints, and 'silent' forms like sabotage and absence (Marchington, 2007) and whistleblowing. There has been a long-running tradition of viewing voice as promotive of the organization, leading to desirable outcomes for organizations. The way LePine and Van Dyne (1998) define it reflects this view, as they see voice as "nonrequired behaviour that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge with an intent to improve rather than merely criticize" (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, p. 854). Such a promotive view of voice has evolved into a more multi-dimensional view where voice which is not only meant to improve matters are

included. Liang et al. (2012) term this prohibitive voice. As both promotive and prohibitive voice clearly is used in work organizations, a suitable definition is sought. In the present research the definition by Bashshur and Oc (2015) is used throughout, as it, in addition to promotive voice, allows for voice which is not entirely promotive:

> *"We define voice as the discretionary or formal expression of ideas, opinions, suggestions, or alternative approaches directed to a specific target inside or outside of the organization with the intent to change an objectionable state of affairs or to improve the current functioning of the organization, group, or individual" (Bashshur & Oc, 2015, p. 1531).*

This definition does not only include suggestions or ideas on how to improve the current state, but also includes 'opinions' and 'alternative suggestions'. Relatedly, the outcome is not only to 'improve', but also to 'change', and, that is, to change 'an objectionable state of affairs'. Theoretically, this definition is connected to the seminal work by Hirschman (1970), where voice was regarded as a means to intentionally bring about change or betterment to a current state which the user of voice saw as objectionable. Hirschman defined voice as:

> *"...any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions or protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion" (Hirschman, 1970, p. 30).*

Hirschman saw voice as one of the three categories of responses by customers to deteriorating quality of goods, namely exit, voice, and loyalty, later supplemented with the category of neglect (Farrell & Rusbult, 1992). Hirschman's original notion that loyal customers are more likely to voice their opinions can be seen as questionable in work organizations, as employees who voice their opinions, and especially opinions which object to the current state of affairs, may be seen as disloyal. However, his notion of voice as intended to change objectionable state of affairs represents the basis

of a view incorporating both promotive and prohibitive forms of voice. Bashshur and Oc clarify their take on voice by underlining that they position voice as "problem focused" and "change oriented", encompassing "a broad content area to include research on voice in different literatures as well as related concepts, such as upward feedback and whistleblowing" (Bashshur & Oc, 2015, p. 1531). However, they also see voice as "constructive", implying that changing an objectionable state of affairs is constructive, even if it involves whistleblowing.

2.4.1. Promotive and prohibitive voice

In the present research the constructs of promotive and prohibitive voice are used throughout. Liang et al. (2012) define promotive voice as "employees' expression of new ideas or suggestions for improving the overall functioning of their work unit or organization". They state that such a positive take on voice can both be promotive and challenging; challenging because it implies propositions for "ways of changing the status quo", and promotive because suggestions for improvement is given "a future ideal state" in mind (Liang et al., 2012, p. 74). Prohibitive voice is defined as "employees' expression of concern about work practices, incidents, or employee behaviour that are harmful to their organization" (Liang et al., 2012, p. 74). The authors contend that such alarming messages may lead to improvements of the organization they contribute to, either by placing existing problems on the agenda, or halt possible pernicious decisions or actions before they are implemented. As promotive voice is about "realizing ideals and possibilities", while prohibitive voice is about "stopping or preventing harm", the authors see both forms as constructive. At the same time, however, they describe how prohibitive use of voice provides no solutions to the identified problems, and they admit that prohibitive voice "carries far more personal risk, because pointing out dysfunction more directly implies the failure of important stakeholders in the workplace", in reality "failure of those responsible", which may lead to "conflict and negative emotions among co-workers and supervisors" (Liang et al., 2012, p. 76). It seems that possible negative implications of prohibitive voice is somewhat underplayed by the scholars, as many managers will not perceive employee communication pointing out management failures as particularly constructive, or as a desirable outcome of voice. Table 1, which is an expanded table of

the work by Liang et al. (2012), shows how promotive and prohibitive is operationalized in the present research. Accordingly, in the present research prohibitive voice does include voice that is perceived by managers as partly or wholly destructive. Thus, these two constructs are connected to the definition by Bashshur and Oc (2015) in the following way: As Bashshur and Oc, in their definition, aim to 'improve the current functioning', this is in line with promotive voice. As they aims to 'change an objectionable state of affairs', it is in line with prohibitive voice, including prohibitive voice seen by management as destructive.

Table 1: Promotive and prohibitive voice compared

Characteristics	**Promotive voice**	**Prohibitive voice**
Distinctions		
Behavioural content	• Expresses new ideas or solutions for how to improve the status quo. • Future-oriented; points to possibilities of how to do things better in the future.	• Expresses concern about existing or impending factors (i.e. incidents, practices, or behaviours) that are harmful to the organization. • Past- or future-oriented; points out harmful factors that have negatively affected the status quo or could harm it in the future.
Functions	• Points out ways that the organization can be better.	• Points out factors that are harmful to the organization.
Implications for others	• Suggests improvements that may bring forth changes that inconvenience others in the short run, but can be beneficiary over time. • The good intention behind suggested improvements is easily recognized and interpreted as positive.	• Calls attention to harmful factors and consequently implicates the failure of those in charge. • The good intention behind pointing out harmful factors may not be easily recognized or interpreted as positive because of the potential negative emotion and defensiveness involved.
Overall desirability for management	• Perceived as constructive by most managers. • Desired by most management	• Perceived as destructive by some managers. • Not desired by some management.
Commonalities	• Seldom specified in formal job descriptions; regarded as "extra-role". • "Constructive", as it improves the organization or work unit. • Motivated by a desire to help the work unit or organization.	

3. Methodological choices

The present research is positioned within a framework of "moderate" social constructivism and a pragmatic social contructivist view of reality and science (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Collin, 1997). While scholars disagree on whether social constructivism is a paradigm, that is, an "entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community" (Kuhn, 1970), and "ways of looking at the world" (Laudan, 1978), some regard social constructivism as having a “paradigmatic status” (Knoblauch & Wilke, 2016). A social constructivistic way of looking at the world implies a certain take on ontology and the theories of being, existence, and reality (Blatti & Lapointe, 2016). As people’s perceptions of and experiences with the recurring themes is at the core of the present research, the ontological stance is relativistic, that is, that reality is something that is constructed by and among human beings. Such a position is associated with institutionalist theory. Berger and Luckmann themselves stated that "the institutional world is objectivated human activity, and so is every single institution" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 78), drawing lines from social constructivism to institutional theory even before the terms were established.

3.1. Pragmatic social constructivism

First, what is social constructivism? In Berger and Luckmann's seminal book "The Social Construction of Reality" they see "human reality as socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 210 - 211). The focus is on the *sociality* of reality, in which reality, ontologically speaking, is collectively constructed by human interaction, and not considered to be an external objective which is decoupled from subjects. The process is accurately summed up by the scholars: "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 79). Thus, reality is an intersubjective reality, as it is shared by others and continually being constructed through human interaction and institutionalized into 'ways of doing things', before it is being transformed to an objective reality through a process of objectivation. Subjects construct a universe of meanings and patterns, which is transformed into an objective reality, which in turn is internalized by humans, due to a

process where the "objectivated social world is retrojected into consiousness in the course of socialization" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 78 - 79). I find this view valuable and rather powerful in contrast to a positivistic orientation, and see it as necessary to uncover and "come to grips with the social reality" in which people find themselves. However, I also find that social constructivism has an element of reductionism, that is, to reduce too much to the social (Hacking, 1999; Latour, 2004).

Goodman (1995), among others, advocates a pragmatic position where elements from both constructivism and positivism are tentatively being utilized. To escape such a reductionism I find this stance to be a fruitful position, as it might be a route to escape the reductionism where 'everything' is regarded as socially constructed. Such a pragmatic social constructivism is based on an acknowledgement of that there are pronounced differences between a physicial and a social reality. Exemplified, trust can not be deemed as physical reality, even if there are certain indicators of trust which can be measured. Another foundation for such pragmatic social constructivism is an acknowledgement of how a complex and dynamic physical reality best can be understood if it is viewed and studied from different angles and in light of data from different sources. My stance can be exemplified by first thinking about the semi-structured interviews that are the basis for two of my papers (article nr. 2 and 3). Here I focused on the informants' perceptions of the reality they dealt with, that is, 'their reality', but not a universal, unquestionable reality in itself. The latter would adhere to a "strong" social constructivist stance, while the former, which is my approach, can be characterized as a pragmatic social constructivist stance. Relatedly, my informants have no choice but to relate to certain elements in reality, which may be socially constructed, but are perceived and experienced by actors as "social facts that, although essentially constrained about the way we think about them, still forever transcend our conception" (Collin, 1997, p. 20). Having a boss, for example, is something which my informants express perceptions of and experiences with, but their perceptions and experiences can hardly be seen as an unimpeachable reality. It is their reality, while a hierarchical system with employees, line managers and executives can be said to be socially constructed. The same can be said about admission statistics analyzed in article nr. 3. A system where students are admitted into schools based on their grades can be said to be socially constructed, but admission requirements can, on the other hand, be seen as social facts that "are 'out there',

something we come up against and that we may understand more or less adequately, they do not necessarily coincide with our conception of them" (Collin, 1997, p. 20).

3.2. Research design

The dissertation was designed with triangulation in mind, in order to achieve a broader understanding of the overall research question, and a thorough examination of the relationship between organizational branding, HRM, and employee voice in work organizations. I chose to conduct a systematic literature review for article nr. 1, which laid out a scholarly canvas on which the findings in the articles could be placed. Specifically, its examination of what, according to existing research, works most effectively when aiming for employee strategy, and thus, brand support, was used as a reference point for the empirical findings in the papers.

Hence, article nr. 1, 2, and 3 the present dissertation are empirical by nature. The articles represent a diverse approach to methodological choices, as different designs, sources of data, methods, procedures, and sampling strategies are utilized. This is summed up in Table 2. Overall, the dissertation is based on a multi-method approach to research design (Webb et al., 1966) where quantitative and qualitative methods are seen as complementary, and not rivals, to each other. Here, method triangulation is a core feature. The roots of triangulation can be traced back to Campbell and Fiske (1959) and their "multiple operationism". Later it was defined by Norman K Denzin (1978, p. 291) as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon". Early on triangulation was seen as a way of improving both the validity and reliability of research. Additionally, triangulated research was regarded as more objective than non-triangulated research Later this has been criticised (Bloor, 1997) on the basis of a different view where "every different method constitutes the issue it seeks to investigate in a special way" (Flick, 2004, p. 179). Silverman (1985, p. 21) casts "great doubt on the argument that multiple research methods should be employed in a variety of settings in order to gain a 'total' picture of some phenomenon", and states that "what goes on in one setting is not simply a corrective to what happens elsewhere". Consequently, triangulation is now commonly seen as a "strategy leading to a deeper understanding of the issue under investigation,

and thereby as a step on the road to greater knowledge, and less towards validity and objectivity of interpretation" (N. K. Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Flick, 2004, p. 179).

In the present thesis qualitative and quantitative methods are not combined within each article, but used separately for the research presented in each of the papers. The article "Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM approach and LMX in internal branding" (article nr. 4) is based solely on quantitative analysis on survey data. The articles "When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice" (article nr. 2) and "Silence from the brands: Message control, brand ambassadorship, and the public interest" (article nr. 3) are based on qualitative analyses of interview and document data, plus official school admission data. The paper "Trust and shout: HRM as facilitator for active strategy support" (article nr. 1), on the other hand, differs as it is based on a systematic literature review.

3.3. Qualitative methods

Qualitative, semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out for the articles "When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice" (paper nr. 2) and "Silence from the brands: Message control, brand ambassadorship, and the public interest" (paper nr. 3).

3.3.1. Interview considerations

A qualitative approach with interviews was chosen for both articles because I aimed to unveil perceptions, experiences, feelings and thoughts about the themes and guiding questions in each paper. Qualitative interviews fit this purpose well, as they tend to set up a a safe space for interviewees, allowing them to speak freely at length, and possibly share with the researcher what they really feel or think about the themes at matter. This is especially pertinent if themes are touchy and something the interviewees are not used to speak about, as was the case for prohibitive voice, including restrictions and sanctions, in both articles. Additionally, the interview situation facilitates a co-construction of meaning where statements, and thus, data, are a result of the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee.

Table 2: An overview of research design, sampling, source of data and analysis strategies.

Paper	Design	Setting / sampling	Theory	Findings	Theme
Paper nr. 1: Trust and shout: HRM as facilitator for active strategy support	A systematic literature review, papers analyzed with content analysis.	The final review included 57 empirical papers, mostly in international peer-reviewed journals, published from 2000 to 2019.	> Strategy support enhancing HRM (SSEHRM) is introduced.	A) 12 core facilitators for active strategy support are identified. B) Most, but not all, facilitators gravitate towards commitment.	> HRM approach. > Strategy support.
Paper nr. 2: When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice	A qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews analyzed with content analysis, and analysis of strategy documents.	N = 30 employees and executives in 25 work organizations in various industries in Norway, both public, private and partly private.	> Internal branding theory. > HRM theory. > Control theory.	A) HRM is used in order to strengthen reputation. B) With technocratic control prohibitive voice is being restricted.	> The brand society. > Corporate branding. > HRM. approach. > Employee voice.
Paper nr. 3: Silence from the brands: Message control, brand ambassador-ship, and the public interest	A qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews analyzed with content analysis, and analysis of official school admission statistics.	15 principals in 15 upper secondary schools in Oslo, Norway, and the organi-zational field of upper secondary education in the city.	> Internal branding theory. > Brand ambassa-dorship vs. restrictions.	A) Brand alignment is sought through voice restrictions, leading to public silence on the expence of the public interest. B) Privileged schools impose more restrictions than marginalized schools.	> Corporate branding. > HRM. approach. > Employee voice.
Paper nr. 4: Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM and LMX in internal branding	A quantitative approach based on a survey. Data were analyzed with regression and path analysis, including bootstrapping.	N = 388 blue collar employees at a large university hospital in Norway, organized as a state hospital trust.	> Social exchange theory. > Control vs. commit-ment HRM.	A) There is a positive relationship between high-commitment HRM and LMX, and employee brand support. B) This relationship is mediated by organizational commitment. C) LMX moderates between HRM and one of the three manifestions of employee brand support.	> Organi-zational branding. > HRM. approach.

Silverman (2013, p. 154) describes that, "by abandoning the attempt to treat respondents' accounts as potentially 'true pictures' of 'reality', we open up for the culturally rich method through which interviewers and interviewees, in concert, generate plausible accounts of the world". Thus, interviews for article nr. 1 were useful so as to extract data on the role HRM plays in organizations' management of their reputation, and on possible implications for employee voice. The same applies to interviews for article nr. 2, where they were an effective way of getting principals to speak about how they handle the tensions between trusting employees to be brand ambassadors and ensuring that they do not use voice in brand-damaging ways, and to which extent this affects the public interest.

3.3.2. The topic guide

As the interviews were semi-structured, the topic guides for the studies presented in paper nr. 2 and 3 were designed to ensure that the interviews evolved around the necessary and planned themes, while at the same time allowing the informants to elaborate and speak as freely as possible and let their deeper thoughts and reflections come forward. Both guides followed the structure recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, pp. 97 - 116), with three to five central topics and a maximum of 12 - 15 open questions that enable elaboration by the interviewee. Some of the questions were based on prior studies on the topics in question, something which was done to tie the studies to existing research. The topic guide worked reasonably well for the purpose, and facilitated elaboration by the informants. A few of the interviews lasted far longer than expected, due to informants speaking at length about the topics in the study. As both employees and executives were interviewed for article nr. 2, the wording was changed to make the probing fit each group of informants. This worked quite well for both groups.

3.3.3. Sampling

The informants for article nr. 2 were recruited through purposive sampling (Silverman, 2013) at first, followed by the snowballing method (Noy, 2008). This was done to get a sample covering well-known medium- og large-sized organizations in

Norway with both public, private and public/private ownership. The mix of organizations can be discussed. The sample includes organizations from industries like oil and gas, aviation, IT, broadcasting, automotive parts, certification, law enforcement, education, and health care. It is a possible weakness that large industries like construction, sales, tourism, public administration, retail, and finance are not represented in the sample. Another aim was to include both employees and executives. Here, 2/3 of the sample consisted of employees. Initally, the ratio was supposed to be 1/2 with equally as many employees as executives, but a 2/3 ratio was chosen because employees' experiences and perceptions of the guiding questions for the study was regarded as crucial. In addition, interviews with ten executives should be sufficient to exctract core managerial views of the matters in question.

For article nr. 2, the sampling strategy was entirely purposive, as the aim was 1) to interview principals in public upper secondary schools in Oslo, and 2) to build a sample that equally reflected schools at the three identified admission levels. As intended, the sample consists of principals for five schools at each level, in total 15 schools. A possible weakness of this sample is that it does not cover all 23 of the public upper secondary schools in the city. Including data from principals at the other eight schools would probably have improved the study, although a final sample covering 2/3 of the schools might be said to represent a fair sampling of the research universe. The reason why not all schools were represented was that the principals at the other schools denied to participate in the study. Despite reminders and prompts, they simply said no. Their motives for saying no are unknown, but it does not seem improbable that it has something to do with the theme of the study, and that they possibly did not want to talk about imposing restrictions on their employees. Seen from such an angle, their denial might reflect one of the findings of the study, namely public silence. Although a researcher can hardly be classified as a public outlet, the principals, fully or partly, might have seen it that way. On the other hand, the principals who did speak seemed to enjoy the possibility to present their view of matters which, in the media, mainly had been presented from a critical teacher standpoint for some time.

In both sets of interviews, I made sure to include both men and women in the respective samples. For paper nr. 1, however, women made up only 1/3 of the sample. Ideally, the ratio should have been closer to 1/2, but several of the women I asked to participate declined, while fewer of the men I approached said no. For paper nr. 2, the

composition of the sample was rather even when it came to gender, with eight men and seven women included in the sample.

3.3.4. Content analysis

For both studies, content analysis was used to analyse the transcribed interviews. Content analysis, an often used approach to make inferences based on observed statements (Holsti, 1969), is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Content analysis has been criticized on several accounts. The prime criticism is that the method, particularly quantitative content analysis with excessive word-counting, often relies on a simple count of individual words or expressions, which can lead to manifest content only being identified and data only being *described*. Manifest content can be characterized as "the surface structure in a message", while "latent content refers to the deep structural meaning" (Royse, 2007, pp. 256 - 257). Thus, to improve the reliability of a given study, the latent content should be identified. Relatedly, the method has been criticized for disregarding the context that produce text passages. To counter these pitfalls, content analysis was combined with thematic analysis, leading to content analysis with thematic coding. Kuckartz (2014, pp. 65 - 66) describes the advantages with this type of qualitative content analysis:

> *"Interestingly, thematic analysis is also by far the most commonly used method in the field of quantitative content analys. In this area, it is mostly done as frequency analysis of themes. What distinguishes qualitative text analysis from quantitative analysis can be seen particularly well in thematic analysis: While the atomizing manner of quantitative analysis aims to convert the verbal data into precise categories (represented by numbers) and then to statistically evaluate the resulting data matrix, qualitative analysis is interested in the text itself, notably based on the text its entirety".*

Qualitative research, including discourse analysis and content analysis, has been criticized for being plagued by an "absence of clear and concise guidelines" (Braun &

Clarke, 2006, p. 5) and an approach where "anything goes" (Antaki et al., 2003, p. 2). By using content analysis together with elements from thematic analysis, including advice by Braun and Clarke (2006), I aimed to counteract these criticisms. I used content analysis with thematic coding as it is a qualitative, not a quantitative, type of content analysis which goes deeper than simply describing the data based on the surface structure, and is able to identify the latent content in data. Additionally, the interviews were coded for latent content, with manifest content playing a secondary role, to ensure that the 'deep structural meaning' became visible. To increase reliability, two coders coded the interviews separately, as recommended by Weber (1990) and Neuendorf (2011). The outcome is inter-coding agreement, defined as "the amount of agreement or correspondence among two or more coders" (Neuendorf, 2011, p. 141). In our studies, the procedure led to a good inter-coding agreement at 78.9 and 92 percent, respectively.

A pure inductive approach to analysis of interviews was not chosen, as both set of interviews were approached with some relevant theory in mind. A combination of inductive and deductive analysis (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017) was utilized, though slightly differently in the two sets of interviews. For the interviews for article nr. 2, we followed recommendations by Kuckartz (2014) and tied initial coding, made with the software QDA Miner, to three core constructs in the literature, and thus, in the research questions: HRM, voice, and reputation. The second round of coding were more data-driven, and subcodes and subcategories related to the three core contructs were identified. The interviews for article nr. 3 were approached with a more inductive flair than the interviews for article nr. 2. Here, we first chose an inductive approach and applied purely descriptive codes to the text in the first round of coding. Then, with theory on internal branding and employee voice in mind, we developed the initial codes into subcategories and themes, ending up with four overaching themes.

3.4. Quantitative methods

Survey data is the basis for the paper "Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM approach and LMX in internal branding" (paper nr. 4). The survey is not an external survey from which data I was allowed to use and analyze, but was designed by me

based on guidelines from Schuman and Presser (1996). It was distributed electronically by e-mail.

3.4.1. Survey strenghts and limitations

Data from the survey were analyzed with regression analysis and path analysis, with the latter as the main method of analysis. The choice of path analysis, inluding its advantages in relation to the study, are discussed in section 3.3.2. While strengths and weaknesses of the data set are discussed in the paper itself, a further explication of pros and cons follows here. The primary strength is the use of internationally well-known scales with, in former use, good values for internal consistency. Validation of the scales through principal component analysis plus exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis for my data set proved relatively high reliability. Cronbach's Alpha values were generally high.

Another strength of utilizing tried and tested scales is that they have been frequently used in studies similar to mine, which should increase the validity. This is especially true for the LMX and organizational commitment scales. A possible criticism is that these scales and their accompanying theories are borrowed from organizational behaviour research, but at the same time they are highly present and frequently used in HRM research. A fore is the development of the first order model for HRM approach by Lepak and Snell (2002) into a second order model. In this model high-commitment HRM is a second order construct consisting of five first order latent factors, as indicated by items, which can be said to increase both the validity and the reliability of the study. A possible weakness of this scale is that several items had to be removed from the scale because of insufficient factor loadings and cross-loadings. While they were removed so as to get a good factor structure, the final scale had fewer items than the initial scale by Lepak and Snell (2002), and might give a different representation of the HRM approach than intended by the scholars. However, the final scale used in the paper represented the same factors as the initial scale by Lepak and Snell (2002).

There are demographical limitations to the data set. Using a sample consisting of blue collar employees, instead of a sample from the big medical professions like medical doctors and nurses, was done intentionally. These highly educated professions find their autonomy less affected by management policies than the less educated

hospital and health care workers, as their ”historically formed professional authority, habitus, dispositions and imperatives of medical professional culture” (Numerato et al., 2012, p. 631) kick in when they are contronted with managerial initiatives, providing explanations to ”medical strategies of resistance against management” (Numerato et al., 2012, p. 631). This may represent a source of bias in a study like this, however, sampling blue collar workers were done to avoid this. The most prominent limitation to the data set is the relatively low response rate, which ideally should have been higher to limit a possible skewedness in the data. Nonetheless, "lower education levels tend to result in reduced levels of cooperation" (Glaser, 2012, p. 201), leading to low response rates. Relatedly, web-based surveys tend to have lower response rates than traditional surveys (Manzo & Burke, 2012). In sum, the present study does not differ dramatically from similar studies. Another limitation is that two out of three respondents were women. The ratio should ideally have been more even, but it provides a fairly accurate representation of the gender rate among blue collar workers in hospitals, which, for example, are secretaries, medical assistants, assistant nurses, and other unskilled workers, which all tend to be female-dominated.

Additionally, common method bias, which can inflate effect sizes due to the data being provided by the same respondents at only one period in time, could have been countered by gathering data at two different periods in time. Although calculations show little common method bias in the data, it could have been eliminated using the mentioned approach. Data for model fit, meaning how good the model fits the data, is not always provided in papers based on path analysis. For reliability purposes it was provided in the present paper. Results revealed acceptable model fit, but ideally the fit should have been better than acceptable.

3.4.2. A path analytic approach

As path analysis is an extension of multiple regression, it offers several advantages over multiple regression. The primary advantage is that while regression allows for a single dependent variable, path analysis allows for several. As a result, it moves beyond regresssion. Path analysis is "extremely powerful", as "it can examine situations in which there are several final dependent variables and those in which

there are "chains" of influence, in that variable A influences variable B, which in turn affects variable C" (Streiner, 2005, p. 115).

For article nr. 4 path analysis was chosen as procedure for two main reasons. First, it is a means for testing an entire model with related regression relationships between different variables and several dependent variables, which corresponds with the model formulated in the article. My model contains eight variables, of which three are treated as dependent variables. This enabled me to simultaneously test theoretically hypothesized relationships (paths) between variables. Second, as a variable in path models can be both dependent and independent, both direct and indirect relationships can be estimated. In my model, direct relationships between the independent variables high-commitment HRM and LMX and the dependent variables reputation strategy embeddedness, brand-congruent behaviour, and brand development participation were tested. Simultaneously, indirect relationships between the variables were tested with organizational commitment as a possible mediator (Hayes, 2017). In a second model HRM and LMX were studied simultaneously to examine whether there was interaction between them, and whether LMX had a moderating effect on the relationship between high-commitment HRM and the three outcome variables. Additionally, by using the Process macro to SPSS, a possible conditional indirect effect (Preacher et al., 2007; Hernandez et al., 2016; Hayes, 2017) was tested, so as to determine whether moderated mediation was present. Consequently, path analysis is well suited for testing mediating and moderating effects (MacKinnon, 2008).

3.5. Ethical considerations

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), which handles data protection matters in research projects in Norway, approved both the quantitative and the qualitative part of the project in may 2017. The approval from NSD was sought and secured before any contact with informants and respondents was made and before any data was collected. Two changes, which were about the method for survey distribution to teachers, were approved during the research process. All interview informants were presented with a written description of the project, including how data would be stored and handled, and signed a written consent form based on the

principle of *informed consent*. This principle entails that the participants are aware of and consent to being studied, that they participate voluntarily, and that they can withdraw from the study an any given time. None of them have chosen to do so. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymized by me after they were carried out. The digital files holding the recordings were deleted after transcription. The finalization of the project has been reported to and is confirmed by NSD. As informants were promised anonymity, information that might identify them has been omitted from quotes and from the papers in general. The industry in which they work has been included, but not the name of their employer. While providing not a 100 percent guarantee for anonymity, I have gone to great lengths in an effort to secure anonymity. All survey repondents have been presented with approved information on the project before answering the first survey question. In accordance with NSD recommendations, they gave their consent by answering / participating. The data were stored according to NSD guidelines.

4.0. The dissertation articles

Article nr. 1:

"Trust and shout: HRM as facilitator for active strategy support" (Dahle).
The paper has been revised once (major revision) and is currently under review for the second time in an international journal.

Article nr. 2:

"When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice" (Wæraas & Dahle, 2020).
This paper was published in European Management Journal.

Article nr. 3:

"Silence from the brands: Message control, brand ambassadorship, and the public interest" (Dahle and Wæraas, 2020).
This paper was published in International Journal of Organizational Theory and Behavior.

Article nr. 4:

"Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM approach and LMX in internal branding" (Dahle and Urstad).
The paper has been revised twice (1) major revision, 2) minor revision), and is under review for the second time in The International Journal of Human Resource Management.

Article nr. 1:

Trust and shout: HRM as facilitator for active strategy support

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Keywords: Strategy support, strategy realization, strategy implementation, HRM, HRM systems

Abstract: Numerous studies report that more than half of strategies fail, but few scholars and practitioners alike seem to acknowledge that this has something to do with the HRM approach chosen by organizations or employee support of strategy. The present article presents a review of facilitators for active strategy support among employees. Spanning 20 years of research, 12 core facilitators are uncovered. The review highlights how the facilitators relate to HRM approach. Some facilitators gravitate towards control-commitment continuum in HRM, but the most prevalent of the facilitators gravitate towards the commitment side. Thus, the construct of strategy support enhancing HRM (SSEHRM) is introduced as an alternative to strategic HRM.

Introduction

In modern, competitive, ever-changing markets, why do some organizations succeed in getting their employees to align with and actively support the intended strategy, defined as "a pattern in a stream of decisions" (Mintzberg, 1978) in order to achieve organizational goals? And why do others struggle to do so? For decades scholars have investigated employee support and non-support of higher-order goals (Barnard, 1968), suggesting the use of management by objective (Drucker, 1954), and proposing the balanced scorecard approach (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). More recently scholars have explored strategic commitment (Noble & Mokwa, 1999; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1989), strategic knowledge (Polanyi, 1967), sensemaking (Weick, 1995), sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), and line-of-sight (Boswell & Boudreau, 2000). In strategic human resource management (SHRM) the main rationale is that "human capital can be a source of competitive advantage" (Delery & Shaw, 2001, p. 166). Thus, HRM should contribute directly to corporate strategies and business performance. Contrary to prior, higher estimates (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Galpin, 1998; Hickson et al., 2003; Hrebiniak, 2006), Cândido and Santos (2015) estimate the rate of strategy implementation failure to be between 50 and 90 percent, indicating that more than half of all strategic efforts fail. Heracleous and Barrett (2001) find that strategic failures are often due to executives not being able to get employees to commit to a strategy and act in a strategy-supporting manner. Herein lies the focal point of the present paper.

A possible link between strategy support among employees and HRM approach has received scant attention in the literature, but several studies explore links between strategy support and organizational factors which, in the HRM literature, are estimated to correspond with certain HRM approaches. An example is the literature on strategy implementation, as reviewed by Li et al. (2008). In their review of 60 articles, they identify factors that affect strategy implementation, including ‘hard’ factors like organizational structure and administrative systems, and ‘soft’ 'people issues' like "the people or executors of the strategy, the communication activities (...) as well as implementation tactics, the consensus about and commitment to the strategy" (Li et al., 2008, p. 31). Minarro-Viseras et al. (2005) find that people issues are crucial for successful strategy implementation, as "success (...) is very much dependent on the human side of a project" (Minarro-Viseras et al., 2005, p. 8).

The work by Minarro-Viseras et al. (2005) and Li et al. (2008) illustrate two shortcomings in the strategy implementation literature, which this review will overcome.

Firstly, HRM receives surprisingly little attention in extant strategy implementation research. Secondly, the literature, as exemplified by Minarro-Viseras et al. (2005, p. 8), is rich on studies showing that people factors affect strategy implementation, but not on what shapes such factors. Hitt et al. (2017) call for more research into these aspects by asking "how can human capital resources be most effectively deployed to facilitate strategy implementation?". Beer et al. (2015) follow suit by stating that "getting customers and employees to act as if they were owners is a superhighway to profitability" (Beer et al., 2015, p. 433). They call for research into "how firms that intend to treat their owners, employees, customers, and their communities as stakeholders should manage their HRM" (Beer et al., 2015, p. 443). The present review seeks to answer these calls for research by answering two guiding questions:

1) What are the primary intra-organizational facilitators for active employee strategy support?
2) How do these facilitators conform to the control-commitment continuum?

This review provides a systematization of facilitators for employee strategy support in light of core HRM theory, as a systematic effort giving answers to the puzzling question of why some strategies fail. To do this, an extensive literature search and analysis in widely used literature databases has been conducted. Two theoretical constructs are introduced: The first is *active strategy support*, which involves employee behaviour which directly contributes to strategy realization, in contrast to simply knowing and understanding the strategy. It is defined as behaviour or commitment to behaviour that actively contributes to strategic initiatives made by management, in order to turn strategic initiatives into reality. The second construct is *strategy support enhancing HRM (SSEHRM)*, which is about an HRM approach that facilitates employee strategy support. It is defined as HRM which facilitates employee behaviour that actively and directly contributes to strategy realization. The most prominent facilitators in the reviewed articles gravitate towards commitment-oriented HRM, providing evidence for the use of commitment-based HRM to achieve active strategy support among employees. However, the review also identity facilitators that gravitate towards control-oriented HRM, indicating that not only commitment-oriented HRM can have this effect.

Active strategy support

As the focus lies on support among employees, strategy is defined in line with the literature on the so-called *strategy-as-practice*, where strategy is seen as an activity. It "is not only an attribute of firms, but also an activity undertaken by people" (Carter et al., 2008, p. 86; Jarzabkowski, 2003, 2004). This invites employees and their behaviour into the equation, contrary to a top-down approach where strategy is a task for executives.Thus, employee support is key. In the strategy support literature one concept relates to direct employee support in the form of employee behaviour, namely 'strategically aligned behaviour' (SAB) (Gagnon & Michael, 2003; Van Riel et al., 2009), alternatively 'strategically aligned actions', 'strategy-supportive actions' or 'strategy-supportive behaviour' (Gagnon et al., 2008). I follow Gagnon and Michael (2003) who define this kind of behaviour as "on-the-job actions that are aligned with the strategy" (Gagnon & Michael, 2003, p. 26). Van Riel et al. (2009), and Colvin and Boswell (2007) argue that it is not routine employee behaviour that contributes most to strategy implementation, but instead activities like "discussing the strategy with others, coming up with initiatives that help implement it, and helping others to implement the strategy" (Van Riel et al., 2009, pp. 3-4).

Other constructs clearly presuppose employee action, for example 'strategy commitment'. A commitment to support strategy can be said to imply that future action is going to take place (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013; Jaros, 2010). As it is "related to how consistent people's behaviour is to the strategic direction of the organization", it is seen as "the first stage of an individual's role performance" (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013, p. 723), "the immediate antecedent to behaviour" (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013, p. 723), and as "an action commitment" (Jaros, 2010, p. 80). The constructs of 'strategic alignment', 'strategy alignment' and 'strategic embeddedness' can indirectly be seen as preconditions to active strategy support. According to Boswell (2006), a basic premise of strategic alignment is "line of sight among employees about what the strategy involves and how to contribute". (Boswell, 2006, p. 1489). Thus, "organizations realize strategic success through employee contributions aligned with the demands of an organization's strategic approach (Boswell, 2006, p. 1489).

Strategy support and HRM

HRM is about managing the human resources in an organization so as to achieve "maximum utilization of human assets" (Boselie et al., 2009, p. 462). As follows, business executives want and expect employees to move in the desired direction. Thus, a fully

strategy-supportive staff means high, if not necessarily maximum, utillization of the available human assets. Which HRM approach facilitates most effectively such maximum utilization, including support of strategy? Current research has to a limited extent integrated the strategy management and HRM literatures, especially research exploring HRM systems or 'bundles of practices'.

A set of theoretical frameworks have dominated HRM research over the years, namely human capital theory, the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm, the commitment / control framework, high performance work practices (HPWP), and the ability, motivation, and opportunity model (AMO), leading to some degree of conceptual and methodological ambiguity and conflicting assumptions. Beer et al. (2015) proposed a revival for the multistakeholder perspective of the "Harvard model" of HRM outlined more than 30 years ago, as "the employee perspective, including social partners such as trade unions and works councils, was often neglected" (Beer et al., 2015, p. 431). Thus, the findings are analyzed in light of the commitment / control framework HRM (Arthur, 1994; MacDuffie, 1995; Walton, 1985). Inherent is the construct of organizational commitment and its affective component, which according to Allen and Meyer (1990) denote an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Commitment-based HRM should establish psychological bonds between organization and employee so that the employee is committed to act and behave in accordance with organizational goals (Arthur, 1994; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2016; Walton, 1985). As outlined in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the bond consists of a two-way commitment (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2004; Eisenberger et al., 1990) based on the principle of reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), outlining a reciprocal relationship between employer and employee based on mutual gratifications. When an organization is committed to employees by treating them well, employees "feel an obligation to repay the organization through positive attitudes and appropriate behaviours" (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010, p. 140).

The literature is contradictory about which bundles of practices constitute a commitment-based HRM appoach, but within the core theoretical frame based on mutual psychological bonds and reciprocity certain HR practices can be said to correspond better with high-commitment HRM than other HRM approaches. Lepak and Snell (2002) developed a high-commitment HRM scale which reflects a set of HR practices that together represents this HRM approach. Boon and Kalshoven (2014) followed suit, stating that "HR practices such as continous training, high job security, empowerment, job rotation, a focus on learning and development, developmental feedback, variable pay and an extensive

benefits package" (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014, p. 405) correspond well with commitment-based HRM.

Table 1: The commitment-control continuum based on Lepak and Snell (2002).

HRM dimension	**Commitment**		**Control**
Job security	High level	< ---------->	Low level
Spatial job scope	Job variety	< ---------->	Little job variety
Temporal training scope	Continous	< ---------->	Ad hoc
Spatial training scope	On the job	< ---------->	Before recruitment
Training efforts	Comprehensive	< ---------->	Scarce
Feedback	Multi-peer	< ---------->	Leader only
Compensation incentives	Encourage ideas	< ---------->	Do-as you-are-told
Temporal compensation scope	Long term performance	< ---------->	Short term performance
Benefits	Extensive	< ---------->	Few
Empowerment	High level	< ---------->	Low level
Employee participation	High	< ---------->	Low
Supervision	Indirect	< ---------->	Direct
Recruitment goal	Strategic contribution	< ---------->	No strategic contribution
Promotion	From within	< ---------->	External recruitment

The commitment HRM theoretical framework commonly makes a distinction between commitment and control. Some scholars have treated the two constructs as a dichotomy, which has generated scholarly criticism. Boselie et al. (2009) criticize the framework for carrying an implicit assumption that organizations and employees have different interests, while Guest (1997) asserts that the framework is normative and theoretically weak. Gill (2002) posits that the distinction between commitment and control is at times more theoretical than bounded in reality. Collins and Kehoe (2017) and Hauff et al. (2014) show that many organizations use both control- and commitment-based HR practices. Similarly, a hybrid approach is found to work well and lead to high organizational performance (Hauff et al., 2014; Su et al., 2018). Thus, the identified facilitators will not be assessed according to a dichotomy between commitment and control, but along a *continuum* between commitment and control (Hauff et al., 2014; Walton, 1985), where "commitment and control can be seen as two extreme sides on a continuum and HRM dimensions will differ with respect to their location on this continuum, i.e. their degree of commitment-orientation" (Verheul, 2007, p. 7). Inspired by Verheul (2007), the HR dimensions identified by Lepak and Snell (2002) are developed so each practice reflects a continuum between the two extremes. This is shown in Table 1.

Methodology

Literature search and inclusion criteria

A systematic narrative literature review in academic databases was conducted following the guidelines of Tranfield et al. (2003) and Moher et al. (2009), including planning, conducting, and reporting stages. A systematic review, in contrast to a traditional, non-systematic review, improves the validity and generalizability of the results by providing a replicable set of steps and rules leading to "methodological rigour" (Tranfield et al., 2003, p. 220).

Initial inclusion criteria were empirical English-language papers published between 2000 and 2019, spanning 20 years of research. The search was primarily conducted in the full article texts of peer-reviewed academic journals, using the databases Web of Science Social Science Index (SSCI), Scopus, OCLC Firstsearch, and Google Scholar. The keywords used were "strategically aligned behaviour", "strategically aligned actions", "strategic commitment", "strategy commitment", "strategic alignment", "strategy

alignment", "strategy realization", "strategy-supportive actions", "strategy-supportive behaviour", "strategic business alignment" "aligning employees", "strategic embeddedness", and "strategy success" combined with the keywords "HRM", "leadership","leadership style", "executive style", "transactional leadership", "transformational leadership", "antecedents", "employee", and "employees", encompassing British and American English variants of one keyword, namely *behaviour / behavior*.

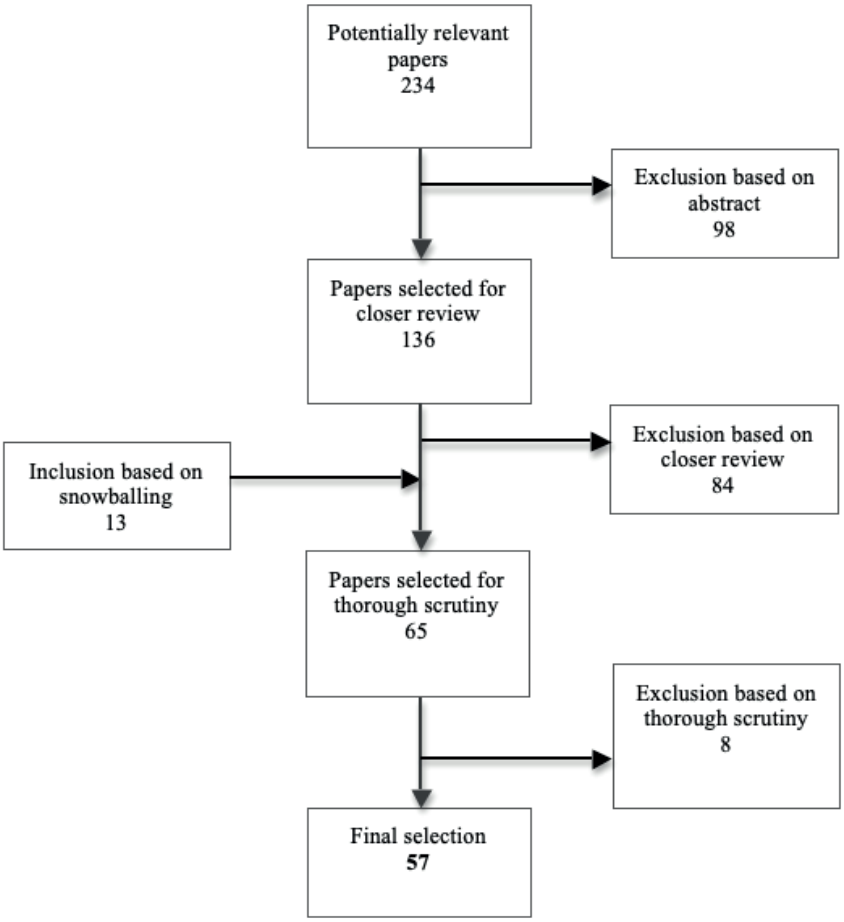

Figure 1: Literature review and paper selection process.

The search process, as illustrated in Figure 1, resulted in 234 identified articles. According to the Prisma guidelines for reporting reviews (Moher et al., 2009), the titles and

abstracts of these articles were screened and read. As a result, 98 non-relevant articles were removed based on exclusion criteria like absence of employee focus, lack of strategy support as outcome variable, macro level approach, and non-empirical design. In the next step the introduction and discussion sections of the remaining 136 articles were read, leading to exclusion of further 84 articles. Then a snowballing approach was used as the reference lists of the remaining articles were studied to identify additional articles, adding 13 articles. The 65 identified articles were assessed closely, resulting in exlusion of another eight articles. The final review included 57 articles.

Study coding

The 57 identified articles were coded along five dimensions: 1) Use of theory, which is particularly relevant as the theoretical perspective commonly gives direction to analysis of data and provides "collective insights through theoretical synthesis" (Tranfield et al., 2003, p. 220). 2) Use of method, to see if some methods are under-utilized or more frequently used than other methods. 3) Sample characteristics, to uncover whether sampling is skewed. 4) Facilitators for employee strategy support. 5) The facilitators' relation to the control-commitment continuum presented in Table 1. The coding was done using a thematic coding approach according to established procedures for qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2014; Schreier, 2012), identifying themes leading to an understanding of "the meaning of qualitative material" (Schreier, 2012, p. 1). The software program QDA Miner was used throughout. For coding of facilitators, first-order codes were assigned to identified facilitators, as an initial step, followed by a preliminary grouping of codes into fewer, broader codes. Then, these codes were reduced to second-order categories through a process of axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The process of reducing the broader set of codes into categories is illustrated in Figure 2.

Literature review and analysis

In line with Tranfield et al. (2003), this review is presented as a two-stage report, with one descriptive part covering distribution and other descriptive facts, and one thematic part covering review and analysis along the five mentioned dimensions.

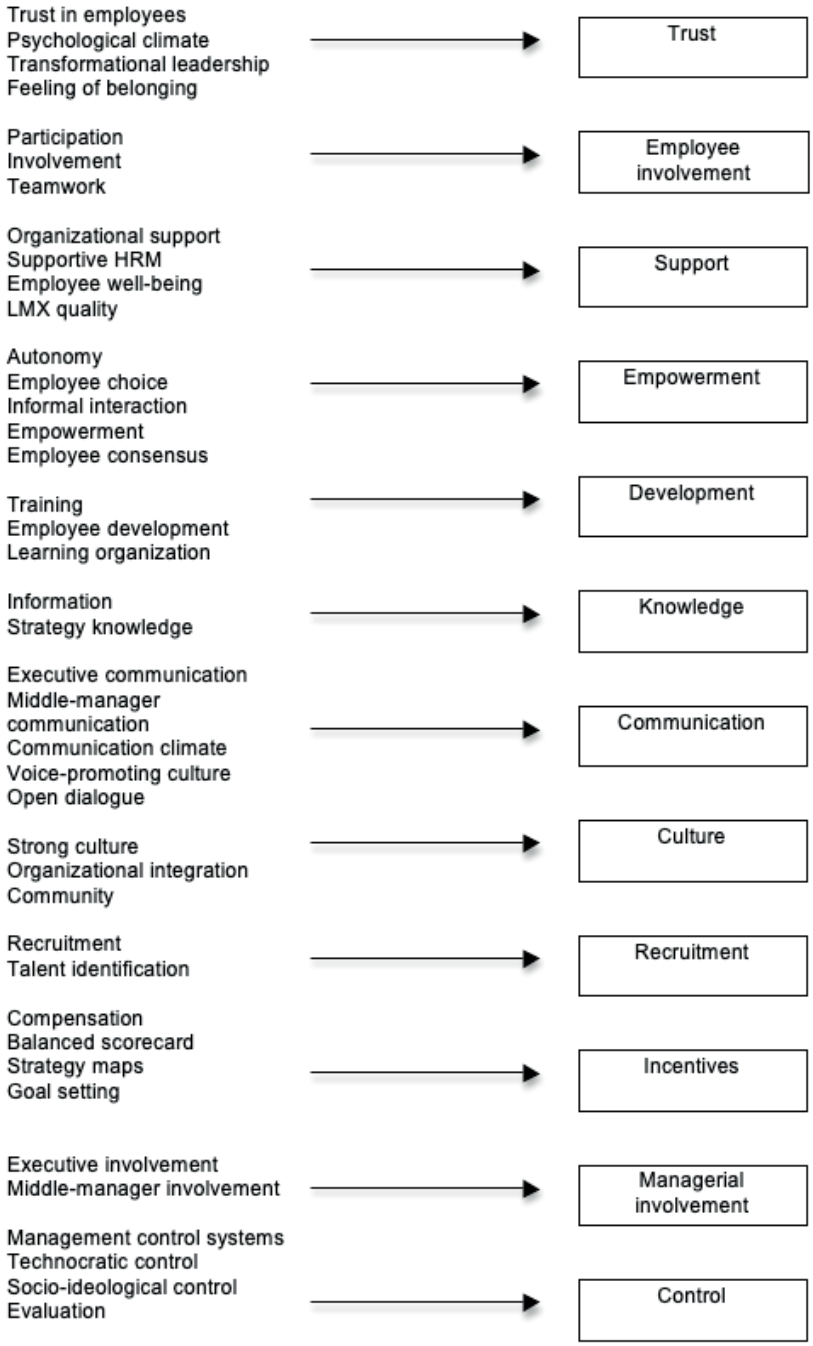

Figure 2: Coding of facilitators: From first-order codes to second-order categories.

The identified articles, presented in a feature map in Table 2, cover research among more than 100.000 employees and managers in more than 4000 organizations in North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. The articles have been published in 54 academic journals and three report / working papers series.

Distribution

The identified articles have mainly been published in management, human resource management, business and leadership journals, but some were published in psychology, organization, and marketing journals. Most were found in Journal of Management Studies (3 articles), The Leadership Quarterly (3), and Journal of Business Research (3). 14 of the articles date from the period between 2000 and 2005, 22 articles were published between 2006 and 2012, while 21 articles were published between 2013 and 2019. A peak in scholarly interest seems to have taken place between 2005 and 2009, as 19 of the articles were published in this period.

Table 2: Feature map with a summary of research findings: Research design, theory and facilitators for employee strategy support.

Report	*Evidence*	*Data*	*Standpoint*	*Results*
Paper	**Design and methods**	**Sample**	**Theory**	**Key findings: Facilitators**
Facilitating acceptance of organizational change: The importance of self-determination (Gagné et al., 2000) - **Journal of Applied Social Psychology**	Survey, longitudinal design, multiple regression analysis.	159 employees from two departments in a large Canadian telecom-munications company.	Self-determination theory.	Autonomy, employee choice, information.
Improving knowledge of strategic goals and the impact of organizational commitment (Enriquez et al., 2001) - **Health Marketing Quarterly**	Survey, longitudinal pre/post-test design, descriptive statistics.	Stratified random sample of a large US health maintenance organization, in	Organizational commitment, communication.	Communication, knowledge of goals, personal involvement in achieving a goal.

		total 281 employees.		
Communicating and controlling strategy: An empirical study of the effectiveness of the balanced scorecard (Malina & Selto, 2001) - **Journal of Management Accounting Research**	Semi-structured interviews, archival data.	Managers and administrators in a large US manufacturing company.	The balanced scorecard strategy map model, communication theory.	Balanced scorecard, strategy maps.
The strategic implementation process: Evoking strategic consensus through communication (Rapert et al., 2002) **- Journal of Business Research**	Survey, in-depth interviews, principal component analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling.	322 CEOs of general service hospitals in the US. 30 randomly selected CEOs and marketing executives in the health care industry.	Communication theory, consensus theory.	Vertical communication.
Implementing strategies successfully (Aaltonen & Ikävalko, 2002) - **Integrated manufacturing systems.**	Interviews, content analysis.	298 managers, middle managers, and employees in 12 service organizations (private and public).	Strategic change framework.	Communication, especially by middle managers.
The Human Side of Strategy: Employee Experiences of Strategic Alignment in a Service Organization (Schneider et al., 2003) - **Organizational Dynamics**	Case study, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, content analysis.	23 focus groups with a total of 54 employees and managers at a small US consumer bank.	Alignment theory.	Goal setting and evaluations, focused recruitment, information, culture, teamwork.

Employee strategic alignment at a wood manufacturer: An exploratory analysis using lean manufacturing (Gagnon & Michael, 2003) - **Forest Products Journal**	Survey, correlation analysis, linear regression, analysis of archival data.	163 employees in a kitchen cabinet manufacturing company in the US.	Strategic alignment theory.	Strategy knowledge, partaking in strategically enhancing actions, trust.
Distinguishing organizational from strategy commitment: Linking officer's commitment to community policing to job behaviors and satisfaction (Ford et al., 2003) - **Justice Quarterly**	Survey, confirmatory factor analysis, multiple regression analysis.	432 police officers in 11 police departments in Michigan, US.	Organizational commitment theory.	Managerial support.
The impact of marketing / HR interactions on marketing strategy implementation (Chimhanzi, 2004) - **European Journal of Marketing**	Survey, multiple regression analysis.	Marketing managers in 230 UK service organizations.	Interdepartmental dynamics theory, connectedness theory.	Interpersonal communication.
Transformational leadership and the dissemination of organizational goals: A case study of a telecommunication firm (Berson & Avolio, 2004) - **The Leadership Quarterly**	Case study, survey, semi-structured interviews, correlation analysis, hierarchical linear modeling, confirmatory factor analysis.	1744 employees and managers, 37 managers, all in a large Israeli telecom-munication organization.	Transformational leadership theory.	Transfor-mational leadership, effective communication.

The Influence of employee communication on strategic business alignment (Van Riel et al., 2005) - **ERIM Report series**	Survey, partial least squares regression (PLS).	A stratified random sample of 2407 employees in two multinational companies (manufacturing, services).	Strategic business alignment.	Communication climate, management communication, strategy communication.
How corporate communication influences strategy implementation, reputation and the corporate brand: An exploratory qualitative study (Forman & Argenti, 2005) - **Corporate Reputation Review**	Qualitative field study, interviews, observation, document analysis,	Executives in the companies Dell, Accenture, FedEx, Johnson & Johnson, and Sears.	Branding theory.	CEO communication, internal communication.
From intended strategies to unintended outcomes: The impact of change recipient sensemaking (Balogun & Johnson, 2005) - **Organization Studies**	Longitudinal embedded case study, diaries, telephone interviews, review meetings, focus groups, documents, first- and second-order analysis.	26 middle managers in the core business unit in a recently privatized utility.	Sensemaking theory.	Informal interaction, communication, information technology used in com-munication,
The engagement of employees in the strategy process and firm performance: The role of strategic goals	Survey, multiple regression analysis, path analysis.	Top executives in 335 US tech companies.	Multi-level strategy theory.	Empowerment, employee participation through multi-

and environment (Tegarden et al., 2005) - **Journal of Business Strategies.**				level strategy processes.
Towards strategy implementation success: An empirical study of the role of senior-level leaders in the Nevada gaming industry (Schaap, 2006) - **UNLV Gaming Research & Review Journal**	Survey, correlation analysis,	120 senior managers in casinos in Nevada, US.	Implementation evalutation typology, strategy implementation theory.	Senior management involvement, inspirational leadership style, employee strategy knowledge and understanding.
Strategic alignment and middle-level managers' motivation in a balanced scorecard setting (Decoene & Bruggeman, 2006) - **International Journal of Operations & Production Management**	Case study, semi-structured interviews, background and policy data from documents.	6 randomly chosen middle-managers in a manufacturing company.	Balanced scorecard framework, agency theory, expectancy theory.	Involvement by executives, empowerment of middle managers, compensation.
Aligning employees with the organization's strategic objectives: out of 'line of sight', out of mind (Boswell, 2006) - **The International Journal of Human Resource Management**	Survey, multiple regression analysis, demographic, compensation and turnover data from company records.	661 managers and employees in a large US healthcare organization.	Strategic alignment theory, line of sight, role theory, agency theory.	Information, line of sight.
How top management teams use management accounting systems to implement strategy	Survey, partial least squares regression,	884 top managers in 218 general hospitals in Spain.	Upper echelon theory.	Contemporary management accounting systems,

(Naranjo-Gil et al., 2016) - **Journal of Management Accounting Research**	correlation analysis.			especially enabling use of control systems.
The role of management control systems in strategy implementation: The case of a Slovenian company (Peljhan, 2007) - **Economic and Business Review**	Case study, interviews with top and middle managers, observation, participation, document studies.	A large Slovenian steel manufacturing company.	Contingency theory, Simon's levers of control framework.	Management control systems: Administrative control, interactive control, and beliefs and boundary systems.
Strategic change implementation and performance loss in the front lines (Ye et al., 2007) - **Journal of Marketing**	Survey, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, multigroup analysis.	843 frontline registered or licenced nurses in five US nonprofit health care service organizations.	Alienation theory, goal-setting theory.	Employee participation.
Stimulating Strategically Aligned Behaviour among Employees (Van Riel et al., 2009) - **Journal of Management Studies**	Survey, structural equation modeling, semi-structured interviews in pre-study, document analysis.	2499 middle- and higher level managers in three companies, two multinationals (logistics, insurance, electronics manufacturing).	Alignment theory, self-efficacy theory.	Motivating, informing, providing rationale, open communication climate.
Employee Alignment with Strategic Change: A Study of Strategy-supportive Behavior among Blue-collar Employees (Gagnon et	Survey, longitudinal, two points in time, structural equation modeling.	99 and 555 low-level employees in a manufac-turing company (kitchen cabinets).	Commitment theory.	Knowledge of the strategy, organizational trust, actual goal supportive behaviour.

al., 2008) - **Journal of Managerial Issues**				
Creating a Strategically Aligned Workforce (Van Riel, 2008) - **Corporate Reputation Review**	Interviews with executives and survey (the strategic alignment monitor).	Executives and employees in the companies Philips, TNT, and Vale.	Strategic alignment theory.	Supportive job conditions, (indirect) supervisor and senior management engagement, consistency in behaviour and internal messaging.
Implementation activities and organizational sensemaking (Stensaker et al., 2008) - **The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science**	Longitudinal (3 steps, 4 years), embedded case study, semistructured interviews, observations, archival data.	84 managers and employees in three business units in a large Norwegian oil company.	Sensemaking and sensegiving theory.	Participation, communication, sensemaking.
Role expectations and middle manager strategic agency (Mantere, 2008) - **Journal of Management Studies**	Semi-structured interviews, narrative analysis	301 middle managers and employees in 12 service organizations in Northern Europe.	Role theory, agency theory.	Role expectations imposed by top managers.
Key success factors for strategy implementation in Latin America (Brenes et al., 2008) - **Journal of Business Research**	Survey, descriptive statistics.	Executives in 81 different companies throughout Latin America.	Little or no theory.	Support from board and stockholders, CEO leadership, strategy control.
Want to, need to, ought to: Employee commitment to	Survey, confirmatory and exploratory	191 employees in a transportation services	Organizational commitment theory, leader-	Fit with vision, LMX quality, role autonomy.

organizational change (Turner Parish et al., 2008) - **Journal of Organizational Change Management**	factor analysis, structural equation modeling.	department at a US university.	member exchange theory.	
How leadership matters: The effects of leaders' alignment on strategy implementation (O'Reilly et al., 2010) - **The Leadership Quarterly**	Survey, mixed determinant intervention (a new strategy), principal components analysis, hierarchical linear modeling.	280 doctors in 40 medical departments at a large US hospital.	Strategic alignment theory.	Leadership strategy support on different hierarchical levels.
Antecedents for achievement of alignment in organizations (Beehr et al., 2009) - **Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology**	Survey, confirmatory factor anaysis, multiple regression analysis, hierarchical linear modeling.	A sample of 7359 employees in 329 facilities of a large US manufacturing company involved in quality programs.	Structural alignment theory.	Managerial effectiveness, goal communication, employee enhancement (development).
The impact of the strategy maps on balanced scorecard performance (Lucianetti, 2010) - **International Journal of Business Performance Management**	Survey, descriptive statistics.	Managers in 91 Italian organizations, of which half were manufacturing firms.	The balanced scorecard strategy map model.	Balanced scorecard, strategy maps.
Change-supportive employee behavior: Antecedents and the moderating role of time (Kim et al., 2011)	Longitudinal (2 steps), survey, multi-group structural equation modeling, path	72 employees in a midsize hospital in the US.	Change-supportive behaviour theory, planned behaviour theory.	Formal involvement.

- **Journal of Management**	analysis, panel regression analysis, confirmatory factor analysis.			
How middle-managers group-focus emotions and social identities influence strategy implementation (Huy, 2011) - **Strategic Management Journal**	Interviews, observation, archival data, cognitive appraisal analysis.	200 employees, middle-managers and executives in a large Canadian IT services company.	Group-focus theory, social identity theory.	Group focus emotions, social identities, feeling of belonging, support.
Factors affecting strategy commitment to community-oriented policing (COP) among South Korean police officers (Lee & Lee, 2011) - **Policing: An international Journal of Police Strategies & Management**	Survey, principal component analysis, multiple regression analysis.	146 + 80 randomly selected South Korean police officers.	Strategy commitment.	Supportive climate among the officers, communitive ownership.
A follower-centric approach to the vision integration process (Kohles et al., 2012) - **The Leadership Quarterly**	Survey, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, cross-sectional w/ collected PA ratings.	340 employees in a health maintenance organization in the US.	Leader-follower communication theory, vision integration theory.	Communication.
Embedding strategy (Galunic & Hermreck, 2012) - **Insead Working Papers**	Survey, XT-regression for panel data.	61039 employees on different levels of a large global media corporation.	Alignment theory.	CEO actions, communication, resource utilization.

The role of personnel commitment to strategy implementation and organizational learning within the relationship between strategic planning and company performance (Kohtamäki et al., 2012) - **International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research**	Survey, multivariate imputations via chained equations, ordered logistic regression, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling.	Executives in 160 Finnish IT-companies.	Strategy commitment theory.	Participation.
A middle management perspective on strategy implementation (Salih & Doll, 2013) - **International Journal of Business and Management**	Semi-structured interviews by email.	12 middle managers in US organizations.	The strategy-as-practice perspective.	Participative management style, internal communication, middle management contribution.
Talent or not? Employee reactons to talent identification (Björkman et al., 2013) - **Human Resource Management**	Survey, multiple regression analysis, analysis of covariance (MANCOVA).	769 managers and professionals in nine Nordic multinational companies.	Social exchange theory.	Talent identification.
Branded service encounters: Strategically aligned employee behaviour with the brand positioning (Sirianni et al., 2013) - **Journal of Marketing**	Pretests w/ simulation, experiments, survey, principal components analysis, variance analysis, ANOVA, MANOVA, linear regression	In total 555 randomly selected students, 308 non-students recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk online panel.	Brand positioning theory, employee-brand alignment theory.	Information, conceptual fluency, employee authenticity.

	analysis, bootstrapping.			
The moderating effect of organizational change cynicism in middle-manager strategy commitment (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013) - **The International Journal of Human Resource Management**	Survey, principal component analysis, multiple regression analysis.	Random sample of middle-level managers in 128 high tech firms in the UK.	Strategy commitment, procedural justice theory.	Senior management support of strategy, employee participation.
Enhancing work-related attitudes and work engagement: A quasi-experimental study of the impact of an organizational intervention (Biggs et al., 2014) - **International Journal of Stress Management**	Longitudinal design, survey pre and post intervention, leadership-development intervention, action learning workshops, quasi-experiment, ANOVA, multiple regression analysis.	368 employees in two groups within an Australian police service organization.	Job demands-resources theory.	Training, leadership program on transformational leadership, information.
Interpersonal success factors for strategy implementation: A case study using group model building (Scott et al., 2015) - **Journal of the Operational Research Society**	Case study, workshop, systems dynamic techniques, survey, multiple regression analysis.	52 employees in a large government agency in New Zealand.	Theory of planned behaviour.	Communication quality, insight.

Strategic alignment in decentralized organizations – The case of Svenska Handelsbanken (Cäker & Siverbo, 2014) - **Scandinavian Journal of Management**	Case study, semi-structured interviews, content analysis, document analysis (annual reports).	21 central, regional and branch managers in the Swedish bank Handelsbanken.	Socio-ideological and technocratic control theory.	Both technocratic and socio-ideological control, communication.
Middle-level practitioner's role and empowerment in strategy process and implementation (Kärnä, 2014) - **Haaga-Helia working papers.**	Multiple case studies, semi-structured interviews, survey.	32 middle managers, experts, officers and assistants in ten Finnish organizations.	Strategy-as-practice theory.	Empowerment, employee participation, communication, open organizational culture, open dialogue.
Exploring strategic planning outcomes: The influential role of top versus middle management participation (Schaefer & Guenther, 2016) - **Journal of Management Control**	Survey, multilevel non-response analysis, Mann-Whitney U test, exploratory factor analysis, structural equation modeling.	A sample of 164 top- and middle managers in 164 German firms.	Upper echelon theory, role theory, the locus of planning concept, corporate entrepreneurship, strategic renewal.	Successful strategy implementation, effective strategic planning, participation by middle and/or top management.
Materializing strategy: The role of comprehensiveness and management controls in strategy formation in volatile environments (Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015) - **British Journal of Management.**	Survey, principal component analysis, correlation analysis.	97 middle managers in high tech organizations in the UK.	Strategy formation theory (Mintzberg) and strategy-as-practice theory.	Output and professional controls (by management), comprehensive-ness.

From customer-oriented strategy to organizational financial performance: The role of human resource management and customer-linking capability (Lin et al., 2016) - **British Journal of Management**	Two-step structural equation modeling, confirmatory factor analysis, bootstrapping, marker variable technique.	Marketing managers in 349 Chinese companies and 465 Hungarian companies, belonging to different sectors.	Organizational capabilities theory.	Supportive HRM.
Do we see eye to eye? The relationship between internal communication and between-group strategic consensus: A case analysis (Desmidt & George, 2016) - **Management Communication Quarterly**	Survey, within-case analysis, principal component analysis, independent samples tests, multiple regression analysis.	17 top managers and 457 nurses in a Flemish hospital.	Internal communication theory, organizational information and organizational integration theory.	Communication, vertical information, organizational integration.
Strategic planning and implementation success in public service organizations: Evidence from Canada (Elbanna et al., 2016) - **Public Management Review**	Survey, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, multiple regression analysis, hierarchical moderated regression.	191 senior public administrators in 180 organizations in Canada.	Resource dependence theory.	Formal strategic planning, managerial involvement.
Rethinking 'top-down' and bottom-up' roles of top and middle managers in organizational change:	Survey, generalized estimating equations.	1795 managers, frontline supervisors, and consultants in 468	Top-down and bottom-up approach theory.	Middle-manager initiatives.

Implications for employee support (Heyden et al., 2017) - **Journal of Management Studies**		Dutch organizations.		
Fostering employees' proactive strategic engagement: Individual and contextual antecedents (Strobel et al., 2017) - **Human Resource Management Journal**	Longitudinal (2 steps), survey, cornfirmatory factory analysis, multiple regression analysis.	388 employees in different industries, recruited through a course at a German business school.	Future focus theory, regulatory focus theory.	High social support, not decision making autonomy.
Factors affecting strategy implementation: A case study of pharmaceutical companies in the Middle East (Obeidat et al., 2017) - **Review of International Business and Strategy)**	Survey, multiple regression analysis, ANOVA.	221 managers and project leaders in 13 pharmaceutical companies in Jordan.	Little or no theory.	Resource availability, operational planning, communication, control and feedback.
Strategic human resource development alignment from the employee's perspective: Initial development and proposition testing of a measure (Herd et al., 2018) - **Performance Improvement Quarterly**	Survey, confirmatory factor analysis, exploratory factor analysis, principal component analysis, hierarchical regression analysis.	2062 employees in a large US healthcare organization.	Strategic alignment theory.	Investment in employee development, learning organizaton culture promoting voice, psychologial climate.
Conseptualizing and measuring the 'strategy execution' construct (de	Semi-structured interviews, content analysis,	Top executives and middle managers (77 %	Strategy execution theory.	Coordination, communication, control.

Oliveira et al., 2019) - **Journal of Business Research**	survey, exploratory factor analysis, partial least squares structural equation modeling.	of the sample) and employees in 276 clinical laboratories in Brazil.		
Manufacuring strategy process: The role of shop-floor communication (Alcaide-Muñoz et al., 2018) - **Management Decision**	Survey, ordinary least squares regression analysis.	Employees and managers at plants with more than 100 employees, from ten countries.	Communication theory, knowledge-based theory.	Instructive communication, feedback as moderators between strategic planning and strategy embeddedness.
Transformational leadership, high-performance work system consensus, and customer satisfaction (Weller et al., 2019) - **Journal of Management.**	Survey, unit-level panel regression.	15.059 employees in 318 organizations in a German DIY retail franchise system, and 260.037 customer responses.	Human resources system strength theory.	Transforma-tional leadership, employee consensus.
Antecedents of behavior supporting bottom-up operations strategy formation (Scholz et al., 2019) - **working paper**.	Online survey on the crowdsourcing platform Prolific Academic, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling.	Pretest with 21 respondents, survey with 209 respondents on different hierarchical levels.	The motivation - opportunity - ability (MOA) framework.	Top-down initiatives, bottom-up participation, employee autonomy, structured idea management processes.

Use of theory

In line with Li et al. (2008), choice of theory is important because "different theoretical bases empasize different issues" (Li et al., 2008, p. 33) regarding the theme and research field in question. To analyze this, it is necessary to examine "the underlying theoretical bases of the studies reviewed" (Li et al., 2008, p. 33). Three streams of theory seem to be more commonly used than others, namely versions of *strategy theory* (Aaltonen & Ikävalko, 2002; de Oliveira et al., 2019; Kärnä, 2015; Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015), variations of *organizational commitment theory* (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013; Enriquez et al., 2001; Ford et al., 2003; Gagnon et al., 2008; Kohtamäki et al., 2012; Lee & Lee, 2011; Turner Parish et al., 2008), and alterations of *alignment theory* (Beehr et al., 2009; Boswell, 2006; Gagnon & Michael, 2003; Galunic & Hermreck, 2012; Herd et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2010; Schneider et al., 2003; Van Riel et al., 2009).

Organizational commitment theory and alignment theory share similar features. Organizational commitment is about a strategy-enhancing "psychological bond between an individual and an organization" (Ford et al., 2003, p. 162) built by affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Strategy alignment is about "employee contributions aligned with the demands of an organization's strategic approach" (Boswell, 2006, p. 1489). Thus, both theories establish a strategy-enhancing attachment between employee and organization. Enriquez et al. (2001) show empirically that strategic awareness leads to commitment, while others find that commitment leads to alignment (Gagnon et al., 2008; Turner Parish et al., 2008). At the core of commitment theory is the principle of reciprocity, an interdependency-grounded rule based on employee repayment of perceived benefits provided by the organization, where employees' repayment currency is commitment to organizational goals and strategic initiatives. This serves as the theoretical foundation for understanding what the facilitators for commitment are.

The principle of reciprocity is central in two of the other theoretical streams used in the identified articles, namely *leader-member exchange theory* (Turner Parish et al., 2008), and *social exchange theory* (Björkman et al., 2013). Reciprocity stems from social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which argues that "when corporations invest in their employees, they are likely to reciprocate these corporate investments in positive ways" (Björkman et al., 2013, p. 196). Leader-member exchange theory offers a related understanding focused on the employee-manager relationship, suggesting that "leaders

influence organization members by developing social exchanges" (Turner Parish et al., 2008, p. 36), leading to strategy support.

Table 3: The most frequently used methods of analysis.	
Method	**Frequency**
Multiple regression analysis	16
Confirmatory factor analysis	13
Structural equation modeling	12
Document analysis	10
Principal component analysis	7
Content analysis, exploratory factor analysis	5

The present review identifies other theories used to foster an understanding of the findings, including *expectancy theory,* (Boswell, 2006; Decoene & Bruggeman, 2006), *agency theory* (Mantere, 2008), *leader-follower communication theory* (Kohles et al., 2012), *communication theory* (Van Riel et al., 2005), *self-determination theory* (Gagné et al., 2000), *job demands-resources theory* (Biggs et al., 2014), and *sensemaking theory* (Stensaker et al., 2008). Theory related to control is absent from most articles. Exceptions are Cäker and Siverbo (2014), Peljhan (2007), Malina and Selto (2001), and Lucianetti (2010), as they use technocratic and socio-ideological control theory, Simon's levers of control framework, and the balanced scorecard strategy maps model. However, control is not contrasted by commitment in any of these studies.

Use of methods

In 38 of the 57 articles the data are analyzed with quantitative methods. Qualitative methods have been used in 12 articles, while seven articles benefit from a multi-method approach. The review imparts a clear and distinct preference for quantitative methods. Exemplified, the preferred source of data is the survey, which was used alone or in tandem with other data sources in 45 articles. Other sources of data was less frequent, with interviews, documents, and case studies used in 17, ten, and nine articles. As follows, statistical techniques dominate the list of chosen methods (see Table 3). Multiple regression analysis was most frequently used, namely in 16 articles, while structural equation modeling was used in 12 articles.

Confirmatory factor analysis was utilized in 13 articles, while principal component analysis was used in seven articles.

Sectors

Sector-wise, the top three industries covered by the articles are health services (12 articles), manufacturing (11), and informations and communications technology (ICT) (9), together covered in more than 60 percent of the reviewed papers. Next are public and private sector services (5, 4). The covered sectors are shown in Figure 3. Much research seem to have been done in rather robotized industrial and manufacturing companies offering low-skilled jobs, and among employees with no educational degrees or shorter degrees like bachelor's degrees, and less among employees with longer degrees like master's degrees and professional education. Absent are also large industries which employ millions of people worldwide, for example tourism, construction, and transportation.

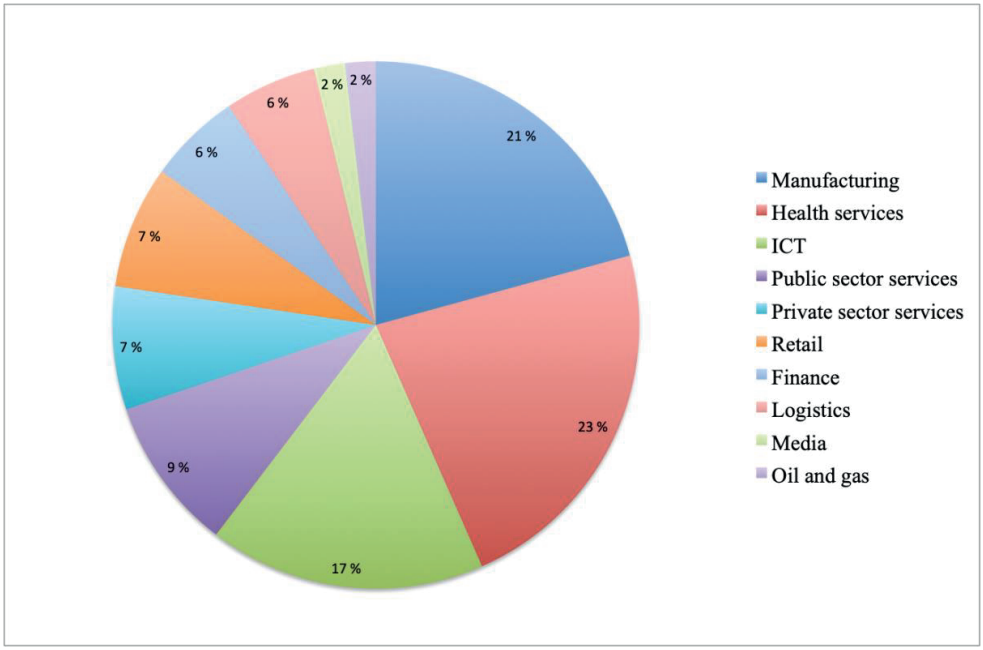

Figure 3: Sectors and industries covered by number of identified articles.

Facilitators for active strategy support

In the 57 identified articles 81 facilitators for active strategy support were found. Several articles identified only one facilitator, many identified two or three, while a few identified four to six facilitators. The facilitators were first grouped into 32 categories, and then categorized into 12 broad classes, covering a range of facilitators[2]. Among these, one class of facilitators (from now on labelled 'facilitators') is much more frequent than the others, namely *communication.* It is identified in 23 of the papers. The facilitator *knowledge* is second most frequent on the list, as it is identified in 15 papers. Next on the list is *employee involvement, support, managerial involvement*, and *control*, successively, which are all identified in more than ten papers each. The frequency of the identified facilitators is shown in Figure 4.

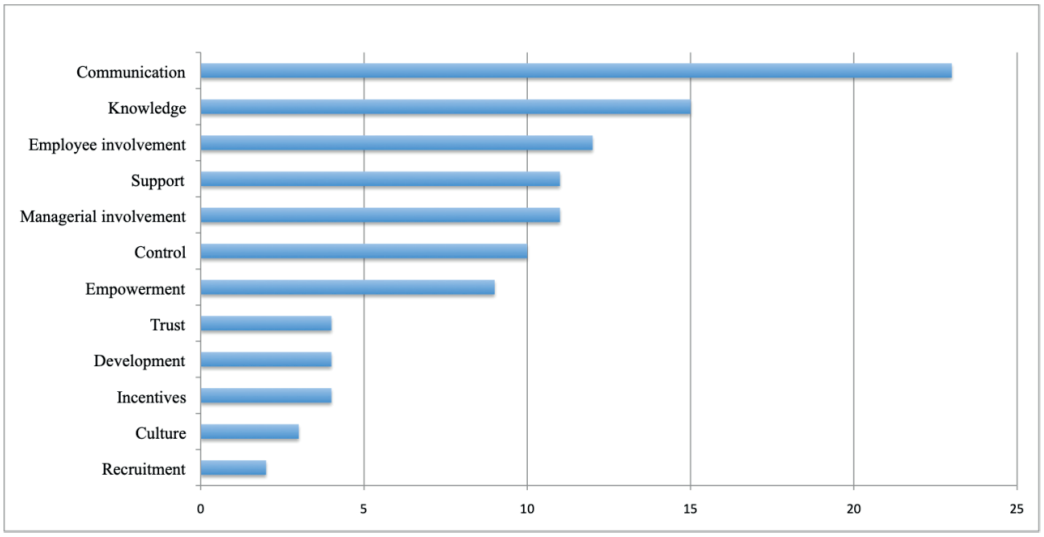

Figure 4: Frequency of facilitators for active strategy support among employees.

Communication

[2] *A small number of categories did not fit into the 12 classes of facilitators.*

Communication, incorporating communication climate, is the most prominent facilitator in the identified articles. In around 40 percent of the articles (23 out of 57) communication is found to be a facilitator. Van Riel et al. (2005) find that communication about strategic initiatives and the communication climate stimulate active strategy support, while Kohles et al. (2012, p. 480) reveal that "two-way vision communication" leads to vision or strategy support among employees. Kärnä (2014) uncover that "communication on all organization levels (...) was seen as essential in the strategy process", as was "an open and encouraging organizational culture" as it "was said to make it easier to take part in the strategic discussion" (Kärnä, 2014, pp. 20-21). Balogun and Johnson (2005) add that informal communication on both the vertical and horizontal level is necessary for success. Cäker and Siverbo (2014) disclose that socio-ideological and technocratic control facilitate communication of strategic prioritites.

Knowledge

Knowledge, including information, is identified as a facilitator in 15 of the reviewed articles. Gagnon and Michael (2003) find that "employees with increased knowledge of a strategy tend to exhibit increased levels of commitment" (Gagnon & Michael, 2003, p. 24). A study from Desmidt and George (2016, p. 97) "indicate that both the perceived quality of organizational information and integration are associated with higher levels of between-group strategic consensus". Boswell (2006) argue that "understanding how to contribute is probably of greater importance to employee attachment to the organization than simply understanding the organization's strategic goals" (Boswell, 2006, p. 1504). She shows that this, termed 'line of sight', is a facilitator for active strategy support. Similar results are found by Sirianni et al. (2013), Gagné et al. (2000) and Van Riel et al. (2009).

Employee involvement

12 articles show that employee involvement, including employee participation, is found to facilitate active strategy support. Tegarden et al. (2005) "provide evidence of a tie between engaging employees in the goal setting process and achieving the goals", and, interestingly, "evidence that the engagement of employees in strategy processes can be related to financial performance" (Tegarden et al., 2005, p. 91). Gagnon and Michael (2003) find that more active

strategy support is achieved when employees "engage in strategically engaged actions" (Gagnon & Michael, 2003, p. 24). Enriquez et al. (2001, p. 131) demonstrate that "employee and physician involvement in achieving an organization's strategic goals is critical". Ye et al. (2007) uncover that without involvement organizations "risk enhanced levels of counteracting effects that will likely undermine the performance payoffs of strategic change initiatives" (Ye et al., 2007, p. 169). Empowerment and control are also found to facilitate active strategy support. Ten articles identify control as a facilitator, and, relatedly, four articles identify incentives as a facilitator. This indicates that commitment is not the only way to achieve strategy support.

Support

In 11 of the reviewed articles support, encompassing organizational support, employee well-being, and quality of the employee-manager relationship, is found to be an important facilitator. Ford et al. (2003) find that "managerial support had a direct effect on strategy commitment" (Ford et al., 2003, p. 175). Strobel et al. (2017) who are interested in social support from supervisors or coworkers, find "high levels of social support to strengthen the mediated relationship between future focus and proactive strategic scanning" (Strobel et al., 2017, p. 125). Weller et al. (2019, p. 19), present data which "support the role of transformational leadership in consensus building", and underline that "consensus helps align employee attitudes, and that a compression in attitudes facilitates strategy execution" (Weller et al., 2019, p. 1).

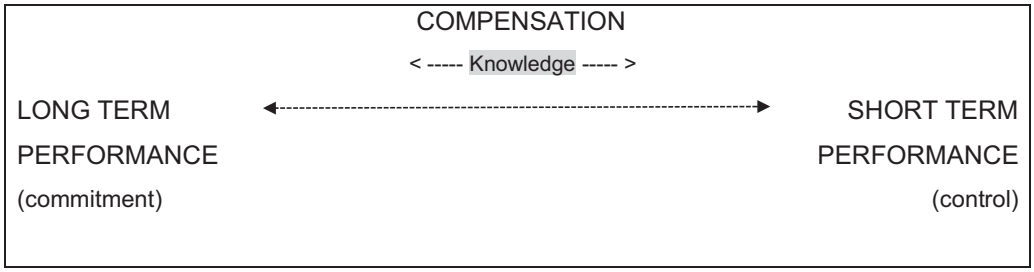

Figure 5: The knowledge facilitator on the commitment-control continuum relating to the temporal compensation HR dimension.

Managerial involvement

Involvement by managers is found to be a facilitator in 11 of the reviewed articles. Decoene and Bruggeman (2006, p. 429) analyze their data in a balanced scorecard context, and find that successful "strategic alignment calls for the active involvement of manufacturing executives in the BSC design and implementation process". O'Reilly et al. (2010) find "significant effects of leadership" on strategy alignment, and that "strategic change (...) was related to the joint evaluations of leaders across hierarchical levels" (O'Reilly et al., 2010, p. 111). Schaefer and Guenther (2016) highlight that "top and middle management participation in the strategy process tends to be equally important for improving specific organizational outcomes, i.e strategic implementation success" (Schaefer & Guenther, 2016, p. 208).

Control

Ten papers identify control as a facilitator. Focusing on strategy implementation, Brenes et al. (2008, p. 596) find five crucial dimensions, of which "detailed control and follow-up are important". de Oliveira et al. (2019, p. 336) uncover several dimensions, including "control and feedback", meaning "monitoring of results achieved over time vis-a-vis goals". Thomas and Ambrosini (2015, p. S107) find that "output and professional controls have a positive impact" (Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015, p. S107) on strategy implementation. Other scholars identify control through the balanced scorecard and other management control systems (Lucianetti, 2010; Naranjo-Gil et al., 2016; Peljhan, 2007). Malina and Selto (2001, p. 47) even point to "causal relations between effective management control, motivation, strategic alignment, and beneficial effects of the balanced scorecard". Others find that a more indirect form of control has a facilitating effect (Mantere, 2008; Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015). Calling it socio-ideological control, Cäker and Siverbo (2014, p. 149) show "the essential role of socio-ideological controls in ensuring strategic alignment".

Assessment of the set of papers

To achieve a more saturated analysis, a closer assessment of the papers identifying each class of facilitators was carried out. With a comparative approach and focus on a possible bias in sample, method, and type of organization, the assessment yielded interesting differences. The investigaton revealed that managers make up the sample in all of the papers identifying

control as a facilitator, and, additionally, make up the sample in ten of the 11 papers identifying managerial involvement as a facilitator[3].

As shown in Figure 6, the ratio is 5 and 5,5 to 1, respectively, in favour of managers as informants. Thus, it is mainly managers and executives who, as informants and respondents, point to managerial involvement and control as facilitators, indicating a bias towards managers in the sample. Additionally, these papers mainly report research from the private sector, indicating a private sector bias, as it is mainly managers and executives in private sector companies who point to involvement and control as facilitators. The composition of papers regarding use of method and geographical research setting is more mixed among these papers, although few of them, interestingly, stem from research in the Angloamerican sphere.

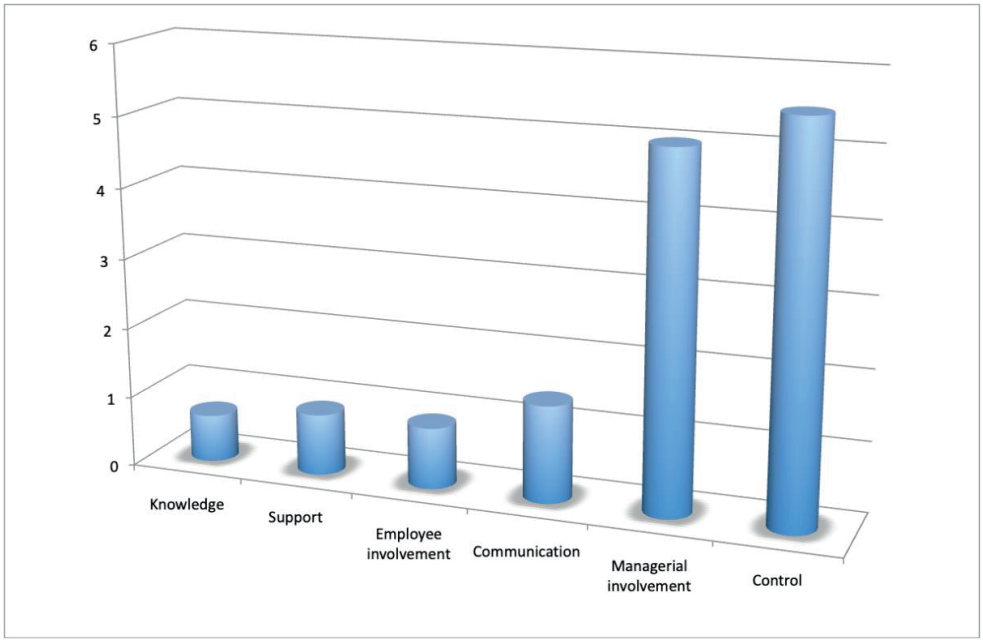

Figure 6: The ratio between managers (1 >) and employees (< 1) as informants / respondents in the papers identifying the six most frequent facilitators.

The set of papers identifying employee involvement and support are more evenly distributed geographically and especially hierarchically, as the employee / manager ratio is close to 1. However, there is a preference for quantitative methods in these papers, and most

[3] *For both set of papers, the sample consists of both managers and regular employees in one paper.*

of them also stem from the private sector, signalling a certain quantitative and private sector bias. Analogously, most of the papers identifying knowledge and communicaton as facilitators stem from the private sector and the research is analyzed mainly with quantitative methods, suggesting a similar bias as for the papers identifying employee involvement and support. The employee / manager distribution and the geographical setting is relatively even.

Summed up: All three sets of papers seem to have a private sector bias, and to a certain extent a quantitative bias, with the exception of papers identifying control as a facilitator. With the research question of the present paper in mind, the main difference between the three sets of papers is the manager / employee ratio in sampling. The prominent bias towards managers applies only to the papers identifying control and managerial involvement and control as facilitators. Such a bias might reduce the validity of these results, while there is no such bias affecting the validity of the research identifying involvement, support, knowledge, and communication as facilitators.

Facilitators and HRM approach

Assessing the identified facilitators in accordance with the HRM practices presented in Table 1, it is clear that the most prevalent facilitators gravitate towards commitment-oriented HR practices, while some facilitators gravitate towards control-oriented practices. Generally, the facilitators can be grouped into three classes: One class gravitating towards the commitment side, one gravitating towards the control side, and one that may gravitate towards both sides. The two first classes may gravitate towards both sides, as well, but gravitate more to one side than the other.

Communication, by far the most prevalent facilitator, can be said to gravitate mostly towards the commitment side of the continuum. It applies to both the employee participation and empowerment dimensions: It is difficult to let employees participate and be empowered if leaders do not communicate with them properly. Communication may correspond with the compensation incentives dimension as well, as the commitment side of the dimension involves ideas from employees, which again depends on a good communication climate.

The knowledge facilitator, which encompasses information, can be said to correspond with the same dimensions, as both participation and empowerment and their link to communication provide information and knowledge about priorities and strategies in the organization. Similarly, both job variety and continous training can provide employees with deeper knowledge about strategic priorities. However, it may also correspond with the control

side of the feedback dimension, as feedback from the leader only can be said to provide the employee with clear and concise knowledge of strategic priorities and how the employee contributes to them. Relatedly, it may correspond with the control side of the compensation dimensions, as knowledge about goals and short term strategic efforts may nurture short term performance and a willingness to perform as instructed. Thus, knowledge gravitates towards both sides of the continuum.

The employee involvement facilitator gravitates for the most part towards the commitment side of the continuum. Employee involvement corresponds with many of the same HRM dimensions as the support facilitator. It corresponds with the commitment side of the HRM dimension employee participation, as participation can be viewed as a form of involvement. Several of the identified articles (Enriquez et al., 2001; Gagnon & Michael, 2003; Ye et al., 2007) show that involving employees in the strategy process enhances their support of the strategy. Employee involvement can also be said to indirectly correspond with the dimension *empowerment.* Empowering employees through autonomy and decision-making power can foster a feeling of involvement, for example in strategy processes. In addition, the compensation incentives dimension can be said to include involvement, as the commitment side of the dimension is about rewarding new ideas from employees.

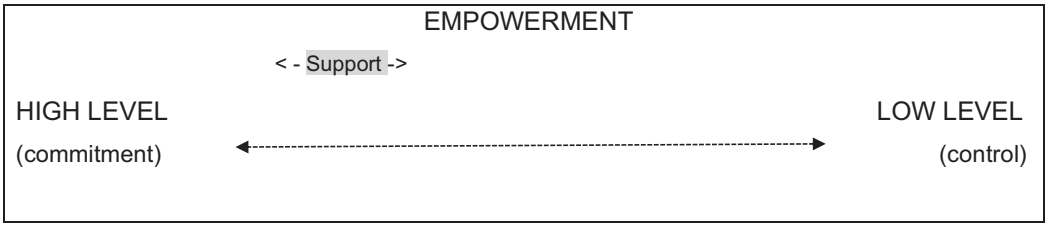

Figure 7: The support facilitator on the commitment-control continuum relating to the empowerment HR dimension.

The support facilitator gravitates mostly to the commitment side. It corresponds indirectly with several of the HRM dimensions, as the commitment side of supervision, employee participation, empowerment, job security, and training reflect organizational support. Direct supervision often implies that leaders monitor and control the work carried out by employees, which probably will be perceived as non-supportive by many employees. Indirect supervision, on the other hand, will probably be perceived as more supportive than direct supervision. Empowerment and participation may be perceived by employees as

supportive in their own right. Providing proper long-term training can also be seen as a form of organizational support, as it increases employees' scope for for work excellence, mastery, and perhaps promotion. Finally, job security is obviously a kind of support of employees.

Managerial involvement, on the other hand, gravitates towards the control side of the continuum. Some articles identify "CEO actions" (Galunic & Hermreck, 2012) and "management controls" (Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015) as facilitators. It can be argued that executive involvement includes an element of control, as being involved may imply overseeing the strategy process. This is not a far cry from having control with the process. Managers can be involved at the same time as employees participate and are empowered, but managerial involvement can nevertheless be seen in tandem with direct supervision, low level of empowerment, and low employee participation. The same applies to compensation incentives, where the control side entails incentives for following leader instructions, which undoubtedly presupposes managerial involvement.

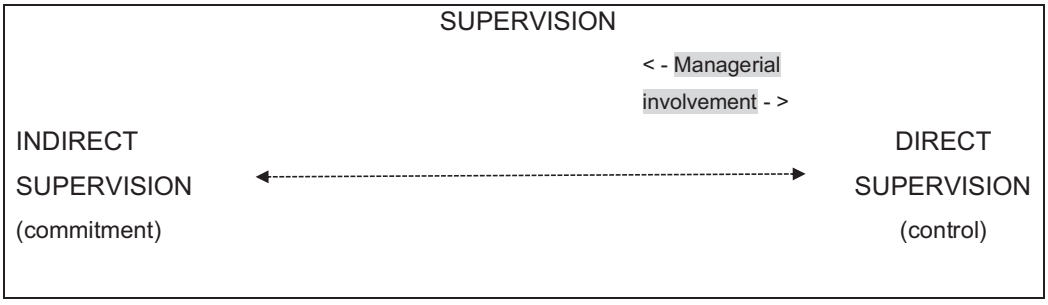

Figure 8: The managerial involvement facilitator on the commitment-control continuum relating to the supervision HR dimension.

Much like the managerial involvement facilitator, the control facilitator maps onto the control dimension of several of the HRM dimensions, for example direct supervision, low employee participation, low empowerment, short-term performance compensation, do-as-you-are-told incentives for compensation, and leader-only performance feedback. These are HR practices which, it can be argued, can heighten the level of control.

Apart from these six facilitators, other facilitators correspond with the commitment-control continuum in various ways. The empowerment facilitator naturally corresponds with the commitment side of the empowerment dimension, while the development facilitator gravitates towards the commitment side of the training dimensions, as employee training may

lead to employee development. The incentives facilitator gravitates towards the compensation incentives dimension, but it can correspond with different positions on the control-commitment continuum as compensation can have both a control and a commitment side.

Discussion

Practical implications

In sum, the reviewed papers identify far more facilitators gravitating towards the commitment side of the continuum than facilitators gravitating towards the other side. Apart from communication and knowledge, facilitators like support and employee involvement are the most frequent. In total, support, employee involvement, empowerment and trust, are identified 50 times[4] in the papers. By comparison, control-gravitating facilitators like control, managerial involvement and incentives are identified 22 times[4]. Additionally, the bias towards managers in the samples may reduce the validy in the research identifying control and managerial involvement as facilitators, something which does not seem to be the case for the research identifying support and employee involvement as facilitators. Hence, while the analysis represents a multi-dimensional view, facilitators gravitating towards the commitment side of the continuum seem to dominate the body of facilitators identified in the reviewed papers. The implication for practitioners is that they should introduce a more commitment-oriented HRM approach in order to get employees to actively support strategy. The implications of such a high-commitment HR approach will probably be that a psychological bond between employee and organization is established (Arthur, 1994; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2016), leading to mutual gains, as "paying attention to all stakeholders will benefit all stakeholders" (Beer et al., 2015, p. 432).

Nonetheless, the present paper reveals a mixed set of facilitators which gravitate differently towards either side of the commitment-control continuum. I see this as a reflection of the reality in many organizations, where HR approach is seldom either control- or commitment-oriented, but is more often a mix, take on a hybrid form or have shifting contingency-based characteristics. This can corroborate findings showing that HR practices corresponding with both sides of the continuum may facilitate active strategy support in employees. A mono-dimensional view does not seem fruitful, as it is not a dichotomous

[4] *Some papers identify more than one facilitator included in these classes of facilitators.*

question of either / or. Hence, reality calls for a multi-dimensional view, which is provided by the present review. In light of this, it is not surprising that both communication and knowledge, as the two most frequent facilitators, can be said to gravitate towards both sides of the continuum. It is not surprising that control-gravitating facilitators are identified, but a pertinent question is whether they should complement commitment-gravitating facilitators in order to drum up strategy support. While the present findings, including the sheer prominence of commitment-gravitating facilitators, indicate this, the result could be an HRM system with low internal fit (Verburg et al., 2007). In such a system the different HR practices, or facilitators, are inconsistent and do not work in the same direction (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2016), for example towards a high-commitment approach, and thus, employee strategy support. Therefore, practitioners should tread carefully if they want to introduce control-gravitating facilitators into an HRM system with a majority of commitment-gravitating facilitators.

Theoretical contributions

The current review contributes to research on strategy realization by identifying HR practices which facilitate active strategy support by employees, and, thus, gives a rare overview of the relationship between strategy support and HRM approach. This link has received little attention in empirical research and theorizing on strategic human resource management (SHRM) (Lado & Wilson, 1994; Schuler & Jackson, 1987; Wright & McMahan, 1992), as it evolved from the late 1980s, through the 1990s and into the new millennium. As one HRM subfield, "strategic HRM covers the overall HR strategies adopted by business units and companies and tries to measure their impacts on performance" (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009, p. 64). To acknowledge that employees have a central role in strategy realization and that it is "very much dependent on the human side of a project" (Minarro-Viseras et al., 2005, p. 8), I introduce and draw on the construct of strategy support enhancing HRM (SSEHRM). This construct is tied to strategic HRM, but encompasses a people dimension which is little present in strategic HRM, as employee support of strategy is seen as key to successful strategy realization. Akin to this, the construct of active strategy support ties the element of 'employee action' to how the real strategic potential in HRM can be unleashed. I assert that these two constructs reflect modern challenges relating to strategy realization in a better way than the construct of strategic HRM. Thus, as SSEHRM is based on empirical research and rooted in modern day knowledge about how HRM can lead to strategic benefits in organizations, it represents a move forward from conventional strategic HRM.

The current study can be seen in relation to branding and reputation management research. Branding efforts can be seen as strategy efforts, as branding is often strategic in nature. To achieve employee commitment to branding strategies, the "brand's values need to be anchored in their minds and hearts", leading to "brand supporting behaviour" (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2010, p. 182) and, consequently, employees as brand ambassadors (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), which has similarities to efforts for achieving active strategy support.

The findings relate to research on employee voice, as well, as several of the identified facilitators involve scope for voice. Employee voice, defined as "the discretionary or formal expression of ideas, opinions, suggestions, or alternative approaches directed to a specific target inside or outside of the organization with the intent to change an objectionable state of affairs and to improve the current functioning of the organization, group, or individual" (Bashshur & Oc, 2015, p. 1531), is a core dimension in the most frequent facilitator, namely communication. A good communication climate is unimaginable if employee voice is very restricted. Knowledge may involve managerial information about strategy, but it may also imply that employees are seeking knowledge from managers, which does not correspond with a restricted communication climate. Similarly, real involvement of employees without scope for voice is unlikely. If voice is restricted, the level of organizational support, trust, and empowerment is expectedly low, and the level of control is expectedly high.

Limitations and future research directions

Coupling facilitators with HRM approach is not without challenges, as single facilitators commonly are part of HRM systems. If a facilitator, e.g. empowerment, is interpreted as gravitating towards the commitment-side of the control-commitment continuum, it will nevertheless be part of a HRM system which can include control-oriented practices, e.g. performance appraisal systems. The facilitating qualities of empowerment may thus be offset by the non-facilitating qualities of the performance appraisal systems. Notwithstanding, all of the articles identified *single factors*, not systems, as facilitators.

The present review omits research on organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Organ, 1988) and psycholocial contract (Rousseau, 1989). As contextual behaviour is a core concept both in OCB, psychological contract research, and several of the constructs deemed relevant for the review, the two constructs are related to the relevant constructs. Omitting them can be seen as a limitation, but at the same time the strategy element is absent from the most widely used definitions of OCB and psychological contract. Omitting articles on

organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) may be viewed as a limitation, as well, but the literature has similar shortcomings; the strategy element is generally lacking. Correspondingly, articles on strategy awareness, strategic orientation, strategic fit, fit with vision, and vision integration are not included in the review. This may be a limitation, as these streams of research explore the strategy element, but the exclusion criteria is lack of action - this research does not fully explore *active* strategy support.

On a different note, a possible limitation is that the choice, assessment, rating, and analysis of the papers included in the review is carried out by one person (the author) only. Using multiple raters could have enhanced the analysis and provided more reliable data. Relatedly, in several of the identified articles the authors point to self-reported data and employee *perceptions* as possible shortcomings (Björkman et al., 2013; Decoene & Bruggeman, 2006; Heyden et al., 2017; Kohles et al., 2012; Lucianetti, 2010; Scott et al., 2015; Ye et al., 2007). Common method bias, leading to inflated correlations, is mentioned as a possible limitation by several authors (Berson & Avolio, 2004; Björkman et al., 2013; Boswell, 2006; de Oliveira et al., 2019; Van Riel et al., 2009). Another possible limitation is that research on potential mediators and moderators between HRM approach and strategy support was not included. A different kind of limitation may be that the present review includes both qualitative and quantitative studies, eliminating the possibility of conducting a quantitative meta-analysis. On the other hand, including qualitative studies may bring forth results that quantitative methods cannot bring to the table. As the review reveals, there is a preference for quantitative methods in the literature. Introducing more qualitative methods might serve the discipline well.

The current review identifies almost no studies where theory regarding HRM approach is being used to understand the data. Commitment theory is used in several articles, but in most cases commitment theory is not seen in relation to control theory. A logical next step for researchers will be to analyze facilitators based on a theoretical perspective that stimulates an HRM-infused understanding of what it is that creates and enhances active strategy support. It would also be fruitful to see what kind of HRM systems the facilitators are part of, a perspective which might lead to a more multidimensional analysis. Relatedly, it could be interesting to investigate employees' perceptions of and experiences with the facilitators that gravitate towards the commitment-side of the continuum, to see if the commitment characteristics are rooted in the day-to-day life of organizations. These suggestions mirror the call for research from Beer et al. (2015), who argue for research on HRM acknowledging multiple stakeholders, including employees on different levels of an organization.

Correspondingly, it would be fruitful to examine closer employee perceptions of the facilitators that gravitate towards the control-side, so as to get more in-depth insight into how they facilitate active strategy support.

Conclusion

The present paper provides answers to two guiding questions, which were based on calls for research (Beer et al., 2015; Hitt et al., 2017). First, the by far most frequent intra-organizational facilitator for active strategy support among employees is communication, followed by knowledge and employee involvement, and next on the list, support, managerial involvement, and control.

Second, both communication and knowledge can be said to gravitate towards both sides of the control-commitment continuum, while employee involvement and support gravitate mostly towards the commitment side. Managerial involvement and control, on the hand, are analyzed as control-gravitating facilitators. While the most prevalent facilitators gravitate towards commitment, the review identified both control- and commitment-gravitating facilitators. This indicates that both can create employee strategy support, but practitioners should take care as they risk designing an HRM system with bad internal fit.

The paper is among the first to draw lines between strategy support and HRM approach. Thus, since the identified facilitators have strong links with an organization's HRM approach, a core contribution is the introduction of the construct strategy support enhancing HRM (SSEHRM) as a more people-oriented alternative to conventional strategic HRM.

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Article nr. 2

European Management Journal 38 (2020) 277–287

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

European Management Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/emj

When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 10 August 2018
Received in revised form
5 August 2019
Accepted 27 August 2019
Available online 28 August 2019

Keywords:
Internal reputation management
HRM
Employee branding
Internal branding
People management
Employee voice

ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between internal reputation management, HRM, and employee voice. Drawing on qualitative data from 25 medium-size and large Norwegian organizations, we find that organizations pursue a desired reputation through a single, official corporate voice by discouraging prohibitive employee voice through technocratic control and coercive HRM practices. The emphasis on technocratic control and coercive HRM occurs despite the widely held belief in reputation and branding literatures that employees should be committed corporate ambassadors who enthusiastically promote their organization's desired reputation and deeply believe in the images they convey to internal and external stakeholders. The findings contribute to studies on reputation management by linking internal reputation management, HRM, and employee voice, pointing out "people management" aspects of reputation management and highlighting important organizational and employee-based consequences.

1. Introduction

Much of the current knowledge on reputation management concerns the strategic design of communication. Scholars have pointed to the need to present consistent, unique, and attractive images of organizations in order to generate the desired impressions in the minds of external constituencies (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). A growing number of contributions have also addressed the internal aspects of reputation management, arguing that employees have an important role in delivering and "living" the organization's brand (Ind, 2001). Not only is reputation built from "the inside-out" (Ind & Bjerke, 2007; Martin & Hetrick, 2006; Sartain, 2005), it also ideally involves instilling reputation-supporting behaviour in employees by transforming them into "corporate ambassadors" (Alsop, 2004; Dreher, 2014) or "brand champions" (Ind, 2004; Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009). Reputation management in the modern "reputation economy" (Hearn, 2010, p. 10), then, is not just about the external handling of reputation through the strategic design of official corporate communication, it also involves an important internal dimension whereby employees' communication is strategically managed.

Scholars have paid scant empirical attention to the "people management" dimension of reputation management as it relates to employees' communication about their organization. Our understanding of how human resource management (HRM) aligns employees' communication with the desired reputation remains underdeveloped, and it is particularly unclear how HRM serves to regulate employees' urge to sometimes speak about their organization in negative ways internally and externally. Employees' prohibitive voice – i.e. "expressions of individuals' concern about existing or impending practices, incidents, or behaviors" (Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012, p. 72) – represents a significant risk for reputation-sensitive organizations because of its potentially negative effects on reputation (Opitz, Chaudhri, & Wang, 2018). HRM can be expected to play an important role in reducing this risk. Our guiding question for this research, therefore, is: *What is the role of HRM in reputation management, and what are the implications of reputation-oriented HRM for employee voice?*

By addressing the management of employees' communication about their organization (their "voice") under strong managerial concern for reputation, this paper builds on and joins a broader debate on the organizational and employee-based consequences of internal reputation management and branding (Edwards, 2005; Harquail, 2007; Kärreman & Rylander, 2008; Müller, 2017, 2018; Mumby, 2016). We respond to recent calls by Mumby (2016) and Müller (2017) for more critical research into these issues by adding

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2019.08.010

insights into the role of HRM in reputation management and its implications for employee voice. Employee voice has been defined as "the discretionary or formal expression of ideas, opinions, suggestions, or alternative approaches directed to a specific target inside or outside of the organization with the intent to change an objectionable state of affairs and to improve the current functioning of the organization, group, or individual" (Bashshur & Oc, 2015, p. 1531). Because reputation management regulates voice, and HRM is "the management of work and people towards desired ends" (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007, p. 1), the combination of the two is a potentially powerful way of exercising voice control in organizations, socio-ideologically as well as technocratically (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2004; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Kärreman & Rylander, 2008).

Our findings contribute to internal organizational reputation and internal branding research in several ways. First, at the most basic level, we illustrate the significance of reputation management for contemporary organizations by showing how reputation acts as a strong internal organizing principle guiding strategies, practices, and control systems. Second, by identifying coercive reputation-centred HRM practices restricting prohibitive employee voice, we advance understanding of the "people management" aspects of reputation management and the perceived influence of such systems on employees. These aspects are important because the way in which organizations approach the regulation of employee voice through HRM practices could significantly shape employees' willingness to engage in reputation-building behaviour and ultimately act as "corporate ambassadors". Thus, knowledge about how HRM influences employees' reputation-building behaviour and communication is crucial for our understanding of the conditions under which employees become brand ambassadors rather than brand saboteurs.

We make these contributions, first, by outlining the theoretical background for the study, second, describing the methodological approaches we followed in carrying out the research, and third, presenting the empirical findings. We close our study by discussing the contributions of our study to literatures on internal reputation management and discussing some directions for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. A traditional view on reputation management

Most definitions of corporate reputation management emphasize the role of organizational leaders and spokespersons in influencing the perceptions of an organization held by external stakeholders (Berens, 2016, p. 403; Elsbach, 2012, p. 466). The focus tends to be on verbal communication as a means to shape, maintain, and repair perceptions of organizations' activities and character. Because "reputation only concerns external stakeholders … without the direct inclusion of employees" (Schultz, Hatch, & Adams, 2012, p. 426), the activities, experiences, and resistance of ordinary employees have traditionally not been addressed in reputation management studies.

According to a traditional way of understanding reputation management, an important goal for reputation-sensitive organizations is to speak with "one single voice" (Argenti & Forman, 2002) or at least achieve a strong level of internal "orchestration" (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007) or integration of communication activities under the same corporate umbrella (Kitchen & Schultz, 2001). Multiple, inconsistent voices are regarded as a problem to be addressed by controlling employees and standardising internal and external communication. Because employees may act against the interest of their organization as brand saboteurs (Ind, 2001; Wallace & de Chernatony, 2007, 2008), the logical response is to introduce some degree of censorship and perhaps even appoint a "communications czar" controlling all external communication (Schultz & Kitchen, 2004). When internal reputation management is carried out this way in practice, the role of employees has little to do with corporate ambassadorship; rather, it is reduced to not saying anything at all to anyone, anywhere, and at any time that might negatively impact reputation.

From this line of reasoning, giving voice to employees represents a risk because it is difficult to predict what employees might say. Prohibitive voice is a particular problem because it involves expressing concerns that could portray the organization in a negative light. From top management's perspective, it is in the organization's best interest to impose control-based systems to such an extent that prohibitive communication is suppressed or avoided and never finds its way to newspapers, radio, TV stations, or online social media. But even with such systems in place, top management can seldom feel absolutely certain that employees will not do or say something that jeopardises the organization's desired reputation. This fear may trigger even stricter and more rigid regimes of control restricting employees' opportunities to speak up.

2.2. Employees' voice in contemporary reputation management

Recently, studies have taken an increasing interest in how employees' voice and behaviour influence organizational reputation. Building on the notion that employee voice can and should be regulated in a way that promotes the organization's desired reputation, these studies address the contribution of employees in building, confirming, and protecting an organization's reputation or brand every time they describe their organization on social media or online review sites (Dreher, 2014; Könsgen, Schaarschmidt, Ivens, & Munzel, 2018; Rokka, Karlsson, & Tienari, 2014; Schaarschmidt & Walsh, 2018; Walsh, Schaarschmidt, & von Kortzfleisch, 2016) or come into contact with external stakeholders in their day-to-day activities (Cravens & Oliver, 2006; Davies, Chun, Roper, & Silva, 2003; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Helm, 2011; Martin & Hetrick, 2006). Instead of *preventing* employees from communicating, these literatures typically want to *include* employees in reputation-building communication, many of them recommending that employees serve as "corporate ambassadors" (Alsop, 2004) or "brand champions" (Ind, 2004) in their interaction with external stakeholders. Accordingly, various initiatives referred to as internal branding (Bergstrom, Blumenthal, & Crothers, 2002; King & Grace, 2008), employee branding (Edwards, 2005; Miles & Mangold, 2004, 2007), and internal reputation management (Helm, 2011; Men, 2014) aim to align employees' communication and behaviour with the organization's desired reputation, ultimately instilling "brand citizenship behaviour" (Burmann, Zeplin, & Riley, 2009) or "reputation-related social media competence" (Walsh et al., 2016) in employees.[1]

These initiatives tend to be treated as largely similar processes. Aurand, Gorchels, and Bishop (2005, p. 164) define internal branding and employee branding as efforts that "establish systems/processes and consequent employee behaviours that are consistent with the external branding efforts". Helm, Liehrs-Gobbers, and Storck (2011, p. 658) define internal reputation management as "all activities or behaviours employees exhibit in order to contribute to the formation of corporate reputation". In both these literatures, a basic premise is typically that reputation- and brand-enhancing employee communication works best if the employees "deeply

[1] Other related concepts include behavioural branding (Henkel et al., 2007; Kaufmann, Loureiro, & Manarioti, 2016; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015) and internal marketing (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Varey & Lewis, 1999).

believe" in the images they transmit to customers (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2010, p. 184). Internal reputation management, therefore, involves persuading employees about the value of what they are doing by selling the organization's vision, values, and desired reputation to employees so that they, in turn, may do the same to customers as committed and dedicated corporate ambassadors (Miles & Mangold, 2004; Mitchell, 2002).

Scholars are fairly optimistic with respect to the prospect of achieving such a level of dedication from employees. Although critical researchers have raised important concerns about employees becoming artefacts of a brand (Harquail, 2006) or branded robots (Edwards, 2005; Müller, 2017, 2018; Mumby, 2016), proponents argue enthusiastically that such strategic processes may "enchant employees", give "deeper meaning" to employees' work (Sartain, 2005, p. 90), and lead to "reduced turnover, increased employee satisfaction and performance, enhanced service quality, and a higher level of customer retention" (Miles & Mangold, 2004, p. 70). Successful reputation management through the transformation of employees into ambassadors, therefore, removes the need for strict control of employee voice because dedicated ambassadors who "deeply believe" in the images they communicate are less likely to voice negative concerns about their own organization.

Existing literatures on employee voice in reputation management have added valuable knowledge but also opened up new research avenues. Whereas previous empirical studies have examined the role of internal policies, procedures, and competence assessments in controlling voice (Rokka et al., 2014; Walsh et al., 2016), few have explicitly linked these observations with human resource management practices and examined their implications for employee voice. Table 1 reviews a sample of studies on internal reputation management and internal branding, showing that none of them consider HRM practices and employee voice at the same time. As columns 2 and 3 indicate, existing studies have either examined the relationship between internal reputation management and HRM, or between internal reputation management and employee voice. This limitation highlights the need for a more dedicated combined empirical focus on the dynamics of HRM, internal reputation management, and employee voice. Moreover, empirical research on reputation management addressing voice tends to restrict its focus to employee expressions in social media. How employees articulate concerns about their organizations internally and in other external arenas than social media, and how their voice is regulated through HRM measures, are thus far largely unexplored questions in reputation management studies.

2.3. Reputation management and HRM

Organizational control systems can be technocratic or socio-ideological, or a combination of both (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2004; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004). Technocratic systems concern the visible dimensions of employee activities and the technical rewarding and punishing of communication and behaviour, regulated through direct supervision and formal guidelines, policies, and directives. Socio-ideological control is subtler, occurring through values, ideologies, priorities, and philosophies, directed at employees' experiences, understandings, and beliefs.

Reputation-centred HRM systems emphasizing a high degree of technocratic control involve efforts to instruct and direct employees into behaving in accordance with the organization's desired reputation. Such control is aided by incentives, performance reviews, policies, and sanctions so that employees who do not "believe" in the organization's mission or desired reputation will still display reputation-supporting behaviour. The more emphasis is placed on attempts to coerce employees' effort and compliance (Adler & Borys, 1996), the more these practices can be classified as low commitment, control-based, or coercive HRM (Legge, 2005; Storey, 1989; Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern, & Stiles, 1997; Watson, 2004). This view is consistent with the traditional view on reputation management outlined above.

HRM systems integrating socio-ideological control aim to create a high-commitment culture by recruiting employees who "believe" in the organization's desired reputation or making existing employees believe, so that an emotional bond with the organization is formed (Kunda, 1992). Such systems seek compliance with the desired reputation through, for example, training programs encouraging specific ways of thinking, but could also target employees' conscience (Costas & Kärreman, 2013). A goal is to make empowered employees exert self-control and self-direction. This approach is consistent with enabling or high commitment HRM (Kuvaas, Dysvik, & Buch, 2014; Legge, 2005; Storey, 1989; Truss et al., 1997), although for employees, socio-ideological control might be just as difficult to relate to as technocratic control, if not more (Kunda, 1992).

Table 1
Summary of reviewed empirical internal reputation management and internal branding research[a].

Authors and year	HRM	Employee voice	Data	Findings or key arguments relating to HRM and/or employee voice
Aurand et al. (2005)	X		201 survey participants	Employees are more positive to the brand and more likely to display brand citizenship behaviour when HR department is involved.
Burmann et al. (2009)	x		18 interviews, 1372 survey participants	Brand-centred HRM is positively related to brand commitment.
Chiang et al. (2012)	X		1588 survey participants	Brand-centred HRM is positively related to brand psychological ownership and brand citizenship behaviours.
Gotsi and Wilson (2001)	X		Semi-structured interviews with directors from seven consulting firms	HR practices should to be aligned with brand values in order to promote brand ambassadorship.
Punjaisri and Wilson (2007)	x		50 in-depth interviews, 699 survey participants	Training positively influences employees' brand attitudes.
Rokka et al. (2014)		x	25 interviews with 19 managers in three companies	Reputation management in the context of social media involves a series of balancing acts (e.g. employee participation versus restriction).
Schaarschmidt and Walsh (2018)		x	321 and 255 participants in two surveys	Moderate levels of social media advocacy increases the effect of employees' awareness of impact on reputation on community norm adherence
Walsh et al. (2016)		X	30 in-depth interviews, 4 surveys with 360, 314, 168, and 72 participants respectively	Develops and validates a scale for measuring employees' reputation-related social media competence.

[a] Notes: "X" denotes strong focus, "x" denotes that the focus is present. Articles are selected based on searches in Google Scholar for various combinations of "Human resource management", "internal reputation management", and "employee voice", supplemented by additional relevant articles cited by the retrieved sources.

A number of contributions address the role of HRM in managing reputation and corporate brands (Aurand et al., 2005; Chiang, Chang, & Han, 2012; Friedman, 2009; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Mahnert & Torres, 2007; Martin, Beaumont, Doig, & Pate, 2005; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2010). Besides emphasizing the significance of appropriate recruiting, training, rewarding, and remuneration, many scholars point to the need for a high commitment HRM approach to developing employees' reputation- and brand-building behaviour and, ultimately, corporate ambassadorship. Measures include reinforcing employees' psychological contracts with their employer (Miles & Mangold, 2004, 2014), empowering the staff (Henkel, Tomczak, Heitmann, & Herrmann, 2007), showing commitment and trusting employees (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2010), improving employees' job satisfaction (Friedman, 2009; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015), relying on transformational leadership behaviour (Morhart et al., 2009), making sure employees feel supported and appreciated (Cravens & Oliver, 2006), and letting employees find their own way of communicating the organizational brand to customers (Henkel et al., 2007).

Despite this scholarly focus, current research has thus far not significantly examined the organizational- and employee-based implications of reputation-oriented HRM practices. Such a focus could benefit our understanding not only of the effects of reputation management on contemporary organizations but also generate new insights into employee control systems in general, the "people management" aspects of reputation management in particular, and the impact of such systems on employees, including their voice opportunities. In the following we describe how we proceeded to generate such insights.

3. Data and method

3.1. Data sources and collection

The study is based on data from 25 organizations. The organizations were chosen because they are well known in Norway, have a high media profile, and all are large or medium-size organizations. 12 of them are public sector organizations, five are partly public sector organizations, and eight are private sector organizations. Industries represented in the sample are oil and gas, airline, automotive parts and repair, employee unions, education, security and law enforcement, health care, social security, IT, certification services, TV production, and mail and parcel delivery. The average number of employees is 4,000, ranging from 50 to 22,000.

The data come from two sources (Table 2). The first source includes a total of 25 strategy documents from each organization (codes of conduct, communication strategies, or HRM policies) describing internal reputation management procedures, corporate communication policies, and HRM strategies. The second data source is 30 semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2018) with employees and leaders from the 25 organizations. 20 of the 30 interviewees were lower ranking employees and the rest held senior or top management positions. The informants were recruited partly using purposive sampling (Silverman, 2013), partly by the snowballing method (Noy, 2008). Eight informants had voiced critical remarks about their employer either internally or externally at least once, three of whom had been dismissed partly because of the presumed reputation loss of their communication.

The same interview guide was used for all the interviews, but with different types of probing depending on informant group. Managers were encouraged to describe control systems in practice with respect to reputation management and how they dealt with reputation-supporting employee communication through HRM. Employees were encouraged to speak about their experiences of their organization's reputation management and HRM practices and to give examples of how these practices influence their communication. We perceived the informants as willing to speak about the questions we asked, and we did not experience any "branded" communication during the interviews.

3.2. Data analysis

Content analysis is a frequently used method to explore and make inferences based on observed statements (Holsti, 1969). We used thematic coding (Kuckartz, 2014), a type of content analysis that is especially well suited for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To do so, we relied on the qualitative software analysis programme QDA Miner.

Although thematic coding is often based on grounded theory (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012), our approach is a combination of deductive and inductive analysis (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). We follow Kuckartz' (2014) recommendation that initial coding should begin with core concepts from the research question or relevant literature. Thus, we looked for statements in the data relating to the three overarching topics HRM, voice, and reputation. In accordance with the approach used by Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013), one author identified the meaningful units of analysis in the text and coded all the data using these main categories in the first phase of the coding process.

The second coding process was data-driven, exploring the three predefined codes further. The first coder created 53 subcategories based on the concepts used by the informants and then summarized the subcategories into 11 general subcodes. This category system mapped onto the main categories in the following way: HRM orientation (coercive approach, hybrid approach, enabling approach); voice (restricted voice regime, partly restricted voice regime, partly unrestricted voice regime, unrestricted voice regime); and reputation (prominent reputation focus, reputation focus with instrumental drivers, reputation focus with contextual drivers, limited reputation focus). After reviewing and going back and forth between quotes, codes, and emerging patterns in the data, we named the three overarching themes "reputation as organizing principle", "restricted voice", and "'hard' HRM", respectively (see emergent data structure in Fig. 1). As a test of coding reliability, the second coder recoded a randomly chosen segment sample on the basis of this coding scheme corresponding to 10 per cent of all segments, without knowing the first coder's coding. Intercoder agreement was 78.9 per cent (Kappa = .75). When remaining differences in coding were resolved, the first coder deployed the final category system on the full set of data.

Table 2
Data sources.

Source	Time span	Quantity
Documents regarding reputation orientation and reputation management in 25 organizations.	2013 –2017	25 strategy documents and plans, codes of conduct guidelines, communication policy plans, HRM policy documents.
Interviews with employees and leaders.	2014 –2017	30 in-depth interviews with 30 informants (of which 20 are employees and 10 are leaders) from 25 organizations lasting 45–120 min

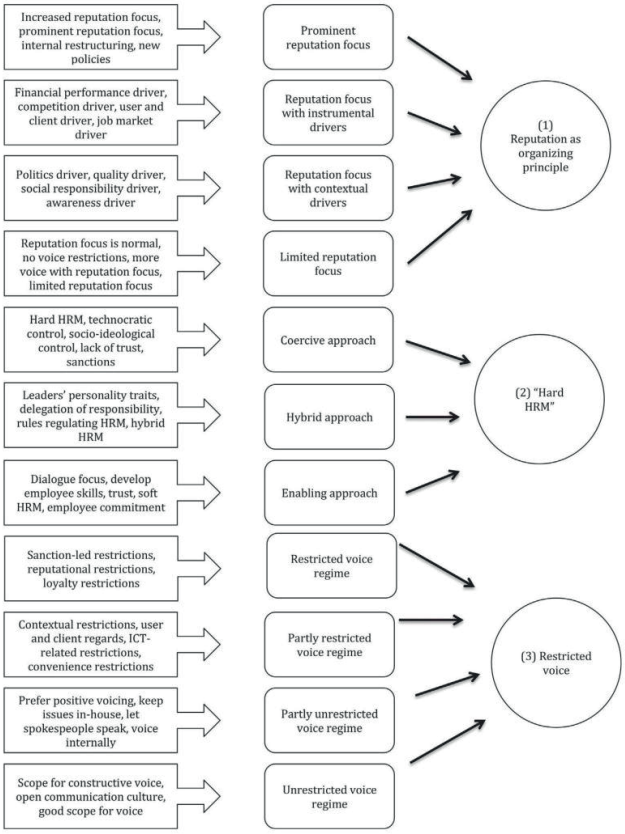

Fig. 1. Emerging data structure.

4. Findings

4.1. Reputation as organizing principle

The first observation to be made from the study concerns the fundamental perceived significance of a favourable reputation. Our informants told us how the strong concern for reputation has changed the "rules of the game" by serving as an internal organizing principle. How members think their organization is perceived by external stakeholders influences how they think, act, decide, and ultimately organize and coordinate organizational activities and processes, including HRM strategies and practices. For example, informants said that the concern for reputation, not surprisingly, makes their organization seek positive media coverage, use the press actively, and maintain profiles on social media. They also described how competition has become a "natural order" underlying all major aspects of their activities. A high school teacher told us that competition between the schools in his city has become a fundamental premise, making a favourable reputation a necessary part of the – in his words – "untouchable" competitive system:

> Competition is the natural order, and you can't be against it because opposing it restricts competitive ability. And reputation – you are dependent on reputation in this competition. Without competition, the school loses pupils (teacher, high school).

A doctor at a large public hospital told a similar story about the hospital sector, which since 1997 has been publicly funded according to how effective they are, measured by the number of patients, consultations, and procedures they treat and carry out:

> A market thinking lies beneath it all, where reputation is crucial. In a system with free choice of hospitals, as we have here,

patients will choose hospitals with a good reputation, and in addition, with short waiting lists (employee, public hospital).

Executives described how organizational policies and structures have been changed or designed out of concern for reputation. Besides reputation-oriented HRM (which we will examine below), one example is the introduction of corporate compliance programmes. An executive told us that his company was forced to establish its own corporate compliance board in charge of supervising all internal rules and procedures as a result of a merger with a German company:

> A very strange setting for us, but for the Germans, not having this was unimaginable, it was completely natural, (…) it was about the company's external reputation (executive, certification company).

Employees noted how the strong concern for reputation affected their own behaviour as well through self-imposed restrictions. Two informants said; "if you act in ways that damage the corporation's reputation, business will be affected", and "you know that you are more exposed than before, and then you must think twice before you express yourself". Others pointed out how acting in accordance with the organization's desired reputation has become a matter of "being loyal" to the organization. Because not being loyal could represent a problem with respect to future job opportunities or promotions, some employees told us they would refrain from participating in public debates because they were scared of saying something that could hurt the organization's reputation:

> You cannot do it, because references from your leaders are all-important for your job opportunities, so people will try to not ruin their chances. They understand the rules of the game (former public service employee).

Overall, for our informants, the significance of a favourable reputation is felt in different ways. For employees, a favourable reputation has become a constraining factor regarding what they allow themselves to do and say. For executives, a favourable reputation is at the same time an objective to be achieved and a concern guiding the design of organizational policies and structures. Thus, the new "rules of the game" serve as an organizing principle affecting strategies, actions, thinking, and decisions. Table 3 demonstrates a selection of quotes illustrating this point, as well as quotes pertaining to the two other overarching themes.

4.2. Restricted voice regimes

Most of the informants described a strong managerial conviction that organizational reputation management is more effective when the organization speaks with one single voice rather than multiple voices. With a few exceptions, leaders declared in a straightforward language that employees should take care not to harm the organization's reputation. They told us there should be, and in fact are, clear limitations on what employees can voice, how they voice, and where they voice it, in a few instances also in the private sphere and even after the employee has quit her job. This view is formalized in written guidelines specifying who is authorized to talk to the media and post information about the organization in social media. Examples include a statement taken from a state-owned corporation's codes of conduct handbook saying that "only authorized persons may talk to the media, members of the investment community or make statements on [the company's] behalf on social media". The personnel handbook of a large employee union stated that "employees shall stay silent about everything they get to know through their work (…) this requirement is valid even after the employment contract has been terminated".

Executives confirmed these policies during our interviews with them by highlighting the need for employees to follow institutional procedures and articulate any concern in-house. One public service executive stated that "you have to voice your concerns through official channels", another said that "here we do not jabber externally about [internal matters]" and that any disagreement should be solved by "discuss[ing] it internally".

However, not all organizations encouraged unrestricted use of voice internally. A high school headmaster offered an example of internal voice restrictions imposed on the entire municipal school system:

> This week we received an e-mail from the high school bureaucrats in the town hall, with an invitation to the annual appraisal conversation. Interestingly, the mail outlines very detailed instructions for the conversation, what we can say, how we ought to behave, and even things we should rehearse before the conversation. This, presented to seasoned educators who have had long careers in high schools, is a clear signal that we can say only certain things, that there are other things we cannot say or talk about, and that freedom of expression is limited. (high school headmaster).

As for employees, they clearly saw voice restrictions as a means to preserve their organization's official single voice for reputation management purposes. One employee who had alerted top management about unacceptable practices in her organization said:

> My impression was that the organization's reputation became the main focus. The reputation was to be saved no matter what. I noticed this in my communication with top management. "We just don't follow your story", was the mantra every time. They insisted on maintaining an alternative version of the truth, a version that was more in accordance with the values they wanted to fulfil. (…) Employees were not allowed to make statements. This was the domain of the professional communicators (employee, public service).

A former employee in a private company had found himself in a similar situation. He told us he felt like a "brand liability" to the organization; that he had "damaged the company's reputation" because of managers' reactions to something he had said in a newspaper interview that was not considered consistent with the organization's desired reputation. Another employee expressed a similar view:

> There was a clear link between reputation orientation and what you could say as an employee. They are dead scared of bad publicity, and I think they felt an uncertainty towards me, that they feared that I would ask the same critical questions in external settings, for example when meeting with dealers, and thus damage the reputation (former employee, state-owned enterprise).

One particularly critical employee we interviewed had been fired partly because of his public criticism of his company's strategies. He stated the following concerning the requirement to subject to a single official voice:

Table 3
Themes and illustrative quotes.

I. Emerging theme: Reputation as organizing principle
"Our new partners wanted a stricter regulation of employee voice than we had at the time. To achieve this, they introduced a new compliance board and two ombudsmen, one for internal matters and one for external matters" (executive, certification company) (example 'internal restructuring')
"In the competitive situation both Telenor and my corporation are in, reputation is crucial. If you act in ways so that the corporation's reputation is damaged, it will affect business". (employee, state-owned corporation) (example 'financial performance driver')
"Reputation is Alfa and Omega, I would say, and here in this part of the city it's what people in the area say and think about that matters, not least in a system with free choice of schools". (headmaster 2, public high school) (example 'user and client driver')
"I live by the saying: Never hide a darkness. I don't think reputation orientation will limit the scope for voice, given that we can discuss matters openly it will rather lead to better scope for voice, to less voice restrictions". (executive, association for local authorities) (example 'more voice with reputation focus')
II. Emerging theme: 'Hard' HRM
"They implement everything from HRM, sick leave, recruitment and quality assurance in the same way as they would carry out an armed call, and that's not the way to do it". (former police employee) (example 'coercive approach')
"The bureaucrats have a strong need for control, on a very detailed level, and we get emails almost daily with detailed instructions on how to do our job". (headmaster 1, public high school) (example 'technocratic control')
"Employees are increasingly being ordered to have attitudes that oppose their own values". (former employee, automotive parts company) (example 'socio-ideological control')
"Gradually I was stripped of tasks and responsibilities. I was denied compensatory time and pay for extra hours (…) The last drop was when he stormed into my office, blocked the doorway, and angrily reprimanded me". (example 'sanctions')
III. Emerging theme: Voice restrictions
"The last workday before Christmas, just before the Christmas holiday, I found a letter on my mail shelf. It turned out to be a formal, written warning including a threat of being fired. So this was the Christmas present I was given by the school's administration". (former secondary school teacher) (example 'sanctions-led restrictions')
"Everything was being streamlined, everyone should have sharp creases in their trousers, march in line, and no-one should say something that the executives disliked". (former airline employee) (example 'little scope for voice')
"With an unfavourable reputation, the school loses pupils, which leads to loss of public funding, and then the school may have to close. My high school lost more than 100 pupils because of bad publicity in the press last year, and the school lost seven million kroner". (public high school teacher) (example 'user and client regards')
"Here you do not cultivate discontent and do not search for negative aspects - that's a clear message from management". (public agency employee) (example 'prefer positive voicing')

> Everything was being homogenized, everyone was supposed to have sharp creases in their trousers, march in line, and no one was supposed to say anything that the executives disliked (former pilot, airline company).

Overall, managers and employees highlighted how the strong concern for reputation leads to voice restrictions, especially restrictions on prohibitive voice, and how reputation management involves speaking with one single voice rather than multiple, inconsistent, and potentially reputation-damaging prohibitive voices. An implication seems to be that reputation management in our case organizations aims to limit reputational risk, and that a central means to this end is the restriction of prohibitive voice. In the next section we describe how the 25 organizations manage these reputation-enhancing voice restrictions through systematic control.

4.3. 'Hard' HRM practices

The strong managerial concern for reputation occurs in tandem with increased systematic organizational control over employees through low commitment HRM. This is to say; the organizations predominantly manage their human resources in a way that is meant to coercively instil reputation-oriented behaviour and communication in employees.

Our informants described the control systems as encompassing both socio-ideological and technocratic aspects. As an example of socio-ideological control, a rather critical employee in an automotive parts company stated that "employees are increasingly being ordered to have attitudes that oppose their own values" and that "they will get rid of you if you don't follow their philosophy one hundred per cent. You are supposed to be a robot and not have your own thoughts".

However, overall, technocratic control seems to be the more prevalent form of reputation-enhancing organizational control. As examples of technocratic control, employees reported being exposed to increased direct supervision, micro management, and detailed instructions concerning reputation-supporting behaviour and especially communication. One high school teacher described how "the alarm goes off" when the grades are not good enough – which is a significant reputational concern – and how managers "take action" when this happens. A public service employee observed that they had been "plagued by consultants" who had "mathematically calculated every need and demand down to the very second".

Informants saw a connection between the increased emphasis on reputation-enhancing control systems and the reduced emphasis on trust in employees. An informant described this tendency in the following way:

> This is a classic example of a transition from trust to control, from trust in employees to control of employees. Gradually and almost unnoticeably, there is less trust, it's not a revolution, but we have slowly moved in the direction of more control (employee, certification company).

Several informants were quite critical of these "people management" measures introduced to safeguard reputation. They portrayed the initiatives as unpopular and coercive HRM practices. Two particularly critical informants stated the following:

> Today, employees are not worth anything, whereas the company's reputation means everything. Those who do not fit in, are removed (former pilot, airline company).

> If someone makes critical remarks, [our managers] interpret the remarks as attacks and possibly a reputation issue. They are less concerned about improving [the organization] (employee, public service)

Most of the informants were clearly not as critical as the last two. Some of them did not report any specific voice restrictions or coercive reputation-protecting HRM measures. A few even noted an increase in the level of perceived trust. One public agency employee, for example, noted that "the HR department seems to

have more trust in employees here than before". Another informant, employed in a public hospital, observed that "the HR department here doesn't practice 'hard' HR to the same extent as [hospital X], which may be the reason why there have been fewer conflicts here lately".

Nevertheless, an important finding from the interviews is that when the official voice of the organization is distorted by an employee's use of prohibitive voice, coercive action is taken by top management. Such action is taken, according to the informants, because top management perceives the employees' voice as inconsistent with the organization's official voice and desired reputation, and therefore not "loyal" to the organization's policies and strategies. Eight of the ten executives stated that they or their organization have taken direct corrective action, either in the form of oral reprimands or formal sanctions, towards employees who have spoken up about their work or their employer. As one manager stated, "employees who do not fulfil their loyalty obligations will face sanctions". Another manager said:

> In my former job we were strict, we executed control over managers and what they could express publicly. We stressed the importance of duty and loyalty, and we followed up employees who expressed themselves in ways that could, well, harm the hospital, and yes, we issued a formal warning (executive, public hospital).

Instances prompting such responses from top management included voicing concerns in media interviews, social media posts, newspaper commentaries, internal memos, direct communication with managers and colleagues, as well as a published book, where employees had drawn attention to specific organizational incidents or realities, or criticized top management for specific decisions, policies, a lack of decisions or policies, or other issues. For example, one manager told us he had fired a person who had damaged the organization's reputation on Facebook.

> Someone posted something on Facebook (…) it was very negative for the company, and then the senior manager came to me and asked me to find out who had posted the message and then fire the person (manager, certification company).

Such actions were clearly understood by employees as sanctions for what they had said. According to the eight informants who had voiced some form of concern either internally or externally, or both, the sanctions against them included written warnings, restrictions in the employee's possibility to communicate with colleagues and external stakeholders, more direct supervision, threats of internal transfer to a different department, threats of suspension, and in a few cases dismissal. One informant found his freedom to move around restricted:

> I was told I couldn't speak to my colleagues unless it was approved by the HR director. And I had to report back [to him] when I wanted to leave the office (employee, law enforcement agency).

The sanctioned employees expressed high frustration when describing the actions taken against them. Descriptions included terms such as "extreme control", "vendetta", "provocative and threatening", "abuse of power", "outright harassment", "treated like a criminal", and "HR as armed call". One informant stated the following:

> When [my boss] realized I wasn't a pushover, he chose to reorganize. And then, a terrifying HR process began (…) encompassing everything ranging from micro-managing, ignoring, and confronting me, to flat out bullying me (employee, IT company).

A few employees reported being affected emotionally and mentally as a result of the sanctions against them. Insomnia, not being able to work, and feelings of being treated as a criminal or leper, were among the problems mentioned. Expressions used to describe their thoughts include "survival mode", "mental breakdown", "everything was dark and difficult", and "suicidal thoughts".

Overall, the informants highlight prohibitive voice as a contested and challenging issue to deal with not only for employees but also for top management. The findings demonstrate how top management's concern for reputation leads to voice restrictions through coercive HRM because multiple, negative employee voices are assumed by top management to jeopardise their organization's single, reputation-building voice. In these reputation-oriented organizations, employees are clearly not considered (and do not consider themselves) corporate ambassadors. Socio-ideological control does not seem to be a sufficient means of appropriately regulating employees' voices. Instead, both proactive and reactive measures of technocratic control are being used through a low commitment, coercive HRM approach.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Theoretical contributions

We contribute to literatures on organizational reputation management and branding by highlighting organizational and employee-related implications of internal reputation management. Most basically, the findings point to the general impact of reputation management on organizations by showing the strong perceived importance of a favourable reputation across many different types of organizations. Rather than exploring the impact of organizational reputation management on reputation (Doorley & Garcia, 2011; van Riel & Fombrun, 2007), or the impact of reputation on organizations (Fombrun, 2012, pp. 94–113; Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, & Sever, 2005) – two core foci of a number of studies – our study draws attention to how reputation management affects organizations. Moreover, whereas previous studies have examined the impact of perceived organizational reputation on employees' tendency to promote the organization's reputation through their behaviour and voice (Schaarschmidt, 2016), our study shows the implications of reputation-oriented human resource management practices for employees' voice. Specifically, the findings highlight an important "people management" dimension of reputation management in the sense that HRM practices are designed to enhance reputation by preventing prohibitive aspects of employee voice. We illustrate the general links between our focal variables in Fig. 2.

The case organizations presented limited evidence of high commitment HRM emphasized by reputation management and branding literatures as crucial for the transformation of employees into appropriate corporate ambassadors. In contrast to rather optimistic perspectives attributing to managers the ability to trust employees' behaviour and communication to contribute positively towards reputation, our study seems to demonstrate a dominant perception of employees as potential "brand saboteurs" (Wallace & de Chernatony, 2007, 2008) rather than potential "ambassadors" (Alsop, 2004) or "champions" (Ind, 2001). Rather than trust in employees, commitment-instilling employee branding, and little concern about prohibitive voice, in these highly visible and reputation-oriented organizations we found more emphasis on one

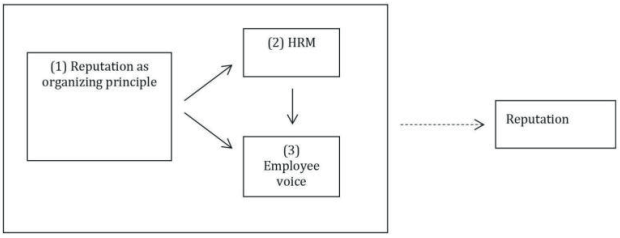

Fig. 2. Illustration of internal reputation management.

single official voice, high concern about prohibitive voice, low trust in employees in matters related to reputation, and coercive, low commitment HRM practices designed to support the desired reputation.

These findings seem consistent with the traditional view on reputation management outlined earlier stating that organizations need to present one single voice to their external constituents if they want to build a favourable reputation. From this perspective, prohibitive voice is a problem and a reputation risk and, therefore, should be controlled through HRM measures involving proactive as well as reactive technocratic control. Proactive measures include detailed rules and policies specifying what employees are allowed to say, when they may say it, and to whom. Reactive measures include applying punitive sanctions of various types after rules and policies are violated, or the "loyalty" of an employee is called into question when he or she has uttered critical and potentially reputation-damaging remarks about the employer.

The gap between the need for high commitment-oriented HRM practices established in previous literatures and the predominantly low commitment HRM measures recounted by our informants in this study is a strong indication of the perceived importance of a favourable reputation. Although the current reputation economy constantly challenges organizations to build and protect their reputation (Hearn, 2010, p. 10), and internal reputation management and branding literatures typically highlight the contribution of high commitment HRM practices towards this end (e.g. Cravens & Oliver, 2006; Friedman, 2009; Morhart et al., 2009), implementing such HRM systems may be more challenging than envisioned by these literatures. The findings suggest that managers worry too much about the reputational risk of employees' prohibitive voice to design reputation-oriented HRM systems that really promote corporate ambassadorship. They raise the question of whether previous research may have overstated the prevalence and feasibility of high commitment, reputation-oriented HRM systems, and under-represented their challenges for visible organizations in competitive settings where managers worry significantly about reputational loss.

The findings also have implications for our conceptualization of internal branding, employee branding, and internal reputation management. Our study underlines the need to distinguish between internal reputation management on the one hand, and on the other, internal branding and employee branding. Internal reputation management, we suggest, is based on the assumptions that employees' communication should be minimized and controlled, thereby allowing for an official single voice to dominate, and that employees should not be trusted to contribute to the organization's desired reputation. Conversely, theories of employee branding and internal branding are typically based on the assumptions that empowered employees' active communication is essential for how the organization is perceived, and that employees can be trusted to contribute to the organization's desired reputation – albeit perhaps after some level of socio-ideological influence. This distinction is important because it differentiates between similar concepts used to denote related processes, thereby helping future research in classifying and analysing observations of internal reputation management and branding processes as well as their organizational and employee-related effects and implications.

Our study also offers an opportunity to reflect on the impact of reputation management on contemporary work life in a more general sense. For example, the finding that coercive HRM entails employee dissatisfaction resonates with other studies revealing that either purely enabling, trust-based HRM (Arthur, 1994; Walton, 1985) or a hybrid trust-based form of HRM with control-oriented elements leads to higher motivation and more intrinsic motivation, increased job satisfaction, and lower turnover intention (Baron, 1999; Delery & Doty, 1996; Hauff, Alewell, & Hansen, 2014). According to social exchange theory, if employees perceive a commitment from their employer to fulfil important employee needs, an obligation in employees to reciprocate is instilled in them (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kuvaas, 2006; Kuvaas, Buch, Weibel, Dysvik, & Nerstad, 2017; Purcell, 1999), whereas purely coercive, control-oriented HRM does not seem to have this effect (Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005; Jensen, Patel, & Messersmith, 2013; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012).

Another work-life implication of our findings concerns the Nordic context in which the study was undertaken. A characteristic of "the Nordic model" is a strong emphasis on democracy at the workplace, high trust in employees, employee participation, involvement, and scope for employee voice (Hilson, 2008). It typically incorporates structural opportunities for prohibitive voice at the workplace, thereby reducing the importance of voicing concerns in social media or other channels outside of the workplace. In this light, the prevalence of coercive HRM in our study seems somewhat surprising. The findings raise the possibility that strong concern for reputation could change fundamental work life arrangements over time. If so, future "voicers" may continue to face difficulties being heard because their voice may not be consistent with the desired reputation of their organization. Changing organization from the bottom-up, then, which employee voice is all about by definition (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Liang et al., 2012), might be problematic under high concerns for reputation.

5.2. Managerial implications

The findings from this study raise an important practical question concerning the transformation of employees into dedicated corporate ambassadors. The revealed emphasis on HRM practices

aimed at reducing the role of prohibitive employee voice in reputation management makes it difficult to see how employees could possibly perceive themselves and play the role as corporate ambassadors over time. Ultimately, reputation management practices such as the ones described in our study could end up hurting the self-esteem of employees, as implied by our findings, rather than producing committed and "enchanted employees" who experience "deeper meaning" (Sartain, 2005, p. 90) in their work.

As such, the findings illustrate important challenges of managing employees under strong concern for reputation. They point to the need for managers to carefully design HRM systems that do not jeopardise employees' likelihood of behaving in accordance with the desired reputation to the organization. Clearly, HRM could play a crucial role in reputation management, but managers should be aware of the possibility that HRM could both promote and diminish reputation depending on the mix of coercive, low commitment HRM and enabling, high commitment HRM. Too much emphasis on coercive HRM measures with respect to employee voice is likely to reduce employee commitment to behave in accordance with the desired reputation. In other words, if employees are treated as potential brand saboteurs, they might behave as brand saboteurs. If they are treated as ambassadors, they might behave as ambassadors.

5.3. Limitations and future research

A limitation associated with our study is the variation in organizational context. The 30 informants represent 25 organizations with different sizes, purposes, sector affiliations, and overall leadership philosophies and strategies. Although we were able to identify patterns across this variation, future research could group case organizations into different categories according to their HRM systems and examine if reputation management practices and employee voice opportunities vary systematically with these differences. Doing so could provide a test of a hypothesis emerging from our findings that the more concerned organizations are about their reputation, the more likely they are to attempt to prevent prohibitive voice through coercive, low commitment HRM.

This hypothesis, we acknowledge, stands in contrast to dominant literatures on employee branding and internal branding, which implicitly or explicitly state that highly committed employees have (or should have) an increasingly central role the more reputation- or brand-oriented their employer is. This inconsistency points to a need for future research to devote more attention to the role of employees in internal reputation management and branding processes. Of particular interest is the potential tension between, on the one hand, the need to control employees' prohibitive voice as a means of ensuring a single official voice, and on the other, the need to empower employees to ensure efficient reputation-building communication. The question of how organizations experience this tension, and which strategies they pursue to balance these conflicting requirements, should be of great interest for future research into the organizational, managerial, and employee-related aspects of reputation management.

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Article nr. 3

Dahle, D.Y. and Wæraas, A. (2020): "Silence from the brands: message control, brand ambassadorship, and the public interest". *International Journal of Organization Theory & Behavior*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 259 – 280. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOTB-05-2019-0060

Silence from the brands: Message control, brand ambassadorship, and the public interest

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Keywords: Public sector branding, internal branding, internal reputation management, employee voice, public interest

Abstract

Purpose– Internal aspects of public sector branding have received limited attention in existing research. The purpose is to examine, firstly, how public managers experience and handle the tension between empowering employees to be dedicated brand ambassadors while at the same time regulating their voice, and, secondly, to outline some implications of aligning employee voice with the organization's brand, especially for the public interest.

Design/methodology/approach– The study is based on two sources of data. The first includes official admission statistics for the high schools for 2018 / 2019 in Oslo, Norway - a city which has introduced a competitive secondary education market. The schools fall into three admission levels based on points necessary for entry. The second source is semi-structured interviews with principals in 15 high schools on different admission levels.

Findings– Most of the principals were concerned about how marketization of the high schools leads to a skewed distribution of students and an increasing divide between "good" and "bad" schools, but signalled market adaptation through their handling of employee voice. Due to reputation and branding concerns in the competition for students and funding, voice restrictions, not brand ambassadorship, was the preferred strategy to ensure brand alignment. The consequence of this strategy, we argue, is public silence at the expense of the public interest.

Research limitations/implications– Not interviewing teachers or middle managers may be seen as a limitation, but principals were chosen as they are the main decision makers and strategists in high schools. Using a qualitative research design may be a limitation, but this design was chosen as it seems appropriate in order to uncover the school executives' perceptions, experiences, and thoughts.

Practical implications–"Selling" the brand to employees and enabling them to further "sell" it to external stakeholders is an enticing ideal but perhaps less possible to implement in reality for public sector organizations facing strong market mechanisms because the concern for the brand image takes precedence. Public sector managers should exercise care when managing employee voice so as to not negatively influence employees' commitment to the brand. They should also be aware of the implications of voice restrictions for the

public interest. Public silence may cause a less informed public with limited possibilities to make informed school choices and knowing how money is spent.

Originality/value – The present study is among the first to explore internal aspects of public sector branding. Researching the position of employee voice in brand alignment strategies is a novel contribution. The study is unique in its focus on the implications of branding for the public interest.

Introduction

Existing studies on public sector branding provide insights into how public organizations apply branding principles at the policy, service, and organizational levels to influence political events, attract resources, obtain political influence, and acquire competitive advantage (Eshuis and Klijn, 2012, Evans and Hastings, 2008, Karens et al., 2016, Leijerholt et al., 2019, Whelan et al., 2010). Internal aspects of branding, however, have not been significantly researched in the context of public sector organizations. Ideally, corporate branding is the "systematic effort to develop and present the organization as one unified brand" (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 64), meaning that members have a pivotal role in delivering the brand to external stakeholders through their behaviour and communication. In order for this to happen, branding begins "from within" (Judson et al., 2006) or from "the inside-out" (Ind and Bjerke, 2007, Sartain, 2005), involving the "selling" of the brand to employees so that they, in turn, are enabled to "sell" it to external stakeholders. Through the internal branding process, employees are assumed to become motivated brand champions (Ind, 2007) or brand ambassadors (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001) who "deeply believe" in the images they communicate to external stakeholders (Vallaster and De Chernatony, 2010, p. 184).

Achieving this level of dedication from employees is particularly challenging for public sector organizations that suffer from a problematic brand image and are under constant critical media scrutiny. In such cases, employees may be less likely to act as brand ambassadors and more inclined to voice concerns and criticism about their employer. Managers could respond to this challenge by intensifying their efforts to transform employees into dedicated brand ambassadors (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001), or they could impose voice restrictions and message control, specifying what employees are allowed to say in different circumstances (Wæraas and Dahle, 2019). Both strategies, however, have their drawbacks: Transforming employees into brand ambassadors requires some level of normative control that could make employees feel empowered but also affect their personal identities and blur the boundaries between their work and private lives (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009, Müller, 2017). Similarly, emphasizing strict message control implies aligning all official external communication with the brand, but could make employees feel untrusted and reduce their commitment to the brand (Wæraas and Dahle, 2019). In addition, both strategies could have implications for the public interest: Because they aim at aligning any

communication with the desired brand, they could result in less transparency and a less informed public (Byrkjeflot, 2015, Christensen et al., 2008).

Responding to calls for more research into the internal aspects of public sector branding (Leijerholt et al., 2019), the objective of this research is to examine two important issues relating to branding in a public sector context:

1. How managers in public sector organizations experience and handle the tension between empowering employees as dedicated brand ambassadors while at the same time regulating their voice.
2. The potential implications for the public interest of aligning employee voice with the organization's desired brand.

This paper pursues this objective by investigating Norwegian high school principals' approaches to the regulation of employee voice when the desired brand is at stake. It contributes to research on public sector branding in the following ways. First, internal branding is a topic of significant scholarly interest because it involves the complex management of people, not the technical operationalization of brand objectives or visible brand symbols such as slogans, logos, and designs. By investigating how branding affects public sector employees' voice, this study engages with an aspect of public sector branding that is typically hidden from external observers. Branding is an ambiguous concept for public sector organizations because it entails a form of strategic differentiation that challenges the need for similarity and legitimacy in a public sector context (Sataøen and Wæraas, 2015, Wæraas and Sataøen, 2015). The lack of visible externally oriented differentiation, however, should not lead us to overlook the internal aspects of branding, which could be rampant. In fact, research into the internal aspects of branding might be even more important for public sector branding than for the private sector because considerable branding efforts may only be visible internally due to the lack of external strategic differentiation.

Second, by linking internal branding strategies and employee voice, the paper contributes with knowledge on the implications of public sector branding for the public interest. Defined here as "the outcomes best serving the long-run survival and well-being or a social collective construed as a "public"" (Bozeman, 2007, p. 12), the public interest is of significant importance for public sector organizations because these organizations are, by their mission, expected to produce precisely such outcomes. The public interest plays an

even more important role for the Norwegian public sector compared to most other countries because of the relative size of the sector and its involvement in many policy areas to combat inequalities (Aasen, 2003, Arnesen and Lundahl, 2006). In the field of education this involvement is quite prominent, as the Norwegian education system "has promoted social inclusion by securing equal access to education for all, comprehensive public schools and an emphasis on democratic values, community and equality" (Helgøy and Homme, 2016, pp. 52-53). These outcomes are in stark contrast to the instrumental and economical outcomes of generating competitive advantage typically promoted through branding (Aaker, 1991). At the same time, however, the chosen empirical context is highly competitive because of recent reforms involving a system of free choice of high school in which funding is directly related to the number of admitted students. In such a context it is not clear whether internal branding will involve restricting or enabling employee voice, nor is it clear how it could affect the public interest.

Employee voice is the “expression of ideas, opinions, suggestions, or alternative approaches directed to a specific target inside or outside of the organization with the intent to change an objectionable state of affairs and to improve the current functioning of the organization, group, or individual” (Bashshur and Oc, 2015, p. 1531). This definition corresponds to Hirschman’s (1970) understanding of voice as an effort to change and improve the status quo. Defined this way, employee voice could contribute to democratic gains for society because employees’ voice increases transparency and the amount of information available to citizens and policy makers. Existing research, however, has said very little about how public managers handle employee voice as part of the internal branding process, and has paid limited attention to the implications of public sector branding for the public interest. In our analysis of the link between employee voice and the public interest, we introduce the construct of 'public silence'. This construct is a reconceptualization of employee silence. Whereas the often-cited definition of employee silence by Dyne et al. (2003) includes the withholding of communication about *work-related improvements,* we include the withholding of *communication about harmful work practices and communication directed towards external stakeholders* in our understanding of public silence. Thus, public silence is viewed as a way of withholding communication of both promotive and prohibitive character from external stakeholders.

The present study begins with a theoretical presentation of the relationship between internal branding and employee voice in a public sector context. After a presentation of

research methods, the paper describes the empirical findings, followed by a discussion of how the findings contribute to insights into branding in the public sector.

Theoretical observations

The branding of public sector organizations

Although scholars have examined marketing activities in the context of public sector organizations since the 1990s (Butler and Collins, 1995, Kearsey and Varey, 1998, Walsh, 1994), public sector branding research is still in its infancy. The concepts of brand and branding in a public sector context, therefore, necessitate some conceptual clarification. By *public sector brands* we mean public organizations, public services, or public policies that among stakeholders are associated with unique and attractive values, meanings, and characteristics. *Public sector branding* concerns the process of systematically creating such associations in the minds of stakeholders.

In this paper, we focus primarily on the branding of public organizations rather than their services or policies. This process has similarities with corporate-level marketing (Balmer and Greyser, 2006), although we see organizational branding as a more fundamental activity than marketing in that it typically involves establishing a platform or brand "essence" stating the desired values and characteristics on which all external communication is based. Moreover, whereas marketing is more about creating awareness among potential customers, branding communicates and shapes meanings, identities, and values.

Organizational branding has both an external and an internal dimension (cf. Leijerholt et al., 2018). The external dimension involves visual images, verbal messages, and establishing and measuring emotional bonds with stakeholders. The internal dimension, which is our focus in this paper, concerns the development and management of employees' commitment to the desired brand (Miles and Mangold, 2004). An important purpose of internal branding is to make employee behaviours consistent with external branding efforts (Aurand et al., 2005, p. 164). Thus, going far beyond creating recognizable and differentiated symbols and names, internal branding seeks to mobilize employees as brand ambassadors who internalize the desired meanings of the organizational brand and "deeply believe" in the image they convey to customers (Vallaster and De Chernatony, 2010, p. 184). Accordingly, internal branding can be defined as the process of "branding employees as a means to communicate the brand to customers" (Müller, 2017, p. 898).

Besides noting that employees play an important role in delivering the desired brand, existing studies have not significantly examined the process of turning employees into brand ambassadors in public sector contexts (Leijerholt et al., 2018). Contributions to public sector branding cover a wide range topics, including issues such as the visual aspects of branding (Moldenæs, 2016, Tschirhart, 2008), the pros and cons of branding (Gromark and Melin, 2013, Wæraas, 2008), branding of policies in governance processes (Eshuis and Edwards, 2013, Eshuis and Klijn, 2012), and the effects of branding on critical stakeholder groups (Karens et al., 2016, Teodoro and An, 2018), to mention a few. The studied empirical contexts vary from health care (Sataøen and Wæraas, 2015, Whelan et al., 2010), the cultural sector (Baumgarth, 2009), municipalities, city, and local government branding (Källström, 2016, Wæraas et al., 2015), to public universities and colleges (Fay and Zavattaro, 2016, Sataøen, 2015).

The branding of public secondary schools is an even more neglected area. Few studies offer a dedicated focus on school branding, although a number of contributions describe external marketing and branding techniques such as visual designs and the production of publicity materials (Gewirtz et al., 1995, Lubienski, 2007). A study of branding in New York City's high schools found that external branding initiatives have an effect on enrolment (DiMartino and Jessen, 2016). A study of a re-branding initiative of urban elementary schools in Philadelphia in the U.S. showed the challenges of trying to remove the effects of race, class, and geography on students' educational experiences (Cucchiara, 2008).

Internal branding, employee voice, and the public interest

Due to a number of New Public Management (NPM) reforms in the public sectors of the Western world over the last decades, public organizations face stronger pressures of defining and expressing their identities. Increased levels of customer and user orientation, competition, performance, benchmarking, and transparency have increased public organizations' concern for their brand image. Many reforms involving the "construction" of organizations through the breaking up of large, monolithic public entities and turning these into empowered organizational actors in their own right (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, 2000) have fostered a need to define, cultivate, and communicate unique identities to the general public (Wæraas, 2018). As a result, a growing interest in branding among public sector organizations has been reported (Gromark and Melin, 2013, Karens et al., 2016, Whelan et al., 2010).

Branding scholars have argued that branding not only has benefits for the "branded" organization (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2002), but also for the general public. Scholars assume that branding and reputation management enable trust by creating transparency and authenticity (Fombrun et al., 2004, Fombrun and Rindova, 2000). Because the *raison d'être* of public organizations is to benefit and protect the public interest, the branding of public organizations should ultimately contribute to the well-being of the general public by informing the general public and contributing to important social change and economic growth (Canel and Luoma-aho, 2018, Evans and Hastings, 2008, Temporal, 2015, Whelan et al., 2010). Scholars have argued that the visibility and transparency that come with branding generate democratic gains for society because visibility and transparency make public entities easier to trust, interact with, evaluate, and criticize (Gromark and Melin, 2013, Ind, 2003, Ind, 2009, Karens et al., 2016, Zavattaro, 2015) and because citizens receive access to information they can use to participate in political processes and debates, and evaluate and hold accountable political appointees and their institutions (cf. Florini, 2007, Piotrowski, 2008).

Moreover, transparency is not only promoted through official corporate communication, but also through employee voice. If employees publicly disclose matters of general interest, employee voice could contribute to greater transparency and a broader basis for democratic participation because it increases the availability of information about important public entities to the general public. Ultimately, through their voice employees could put matters on the national agenda that could lead to important cultural and social change (as evidenced by, for example, whistleblowing initiatives and the recent "me too"-campaign). Doing so could occur through promotive voice; the expression of ways to improve existing work practices, or prohibitive voice, which is the expression of concern about harmful work practices (Liang et al., 2012).

In practice, however, the role of employee voice in internal branding is not clear. The definition of internal branding presented earlier implies that a primary purpose is to help organizations ensure an appropriate alignment between the official single voice of the organization concerning its brand and the voice of employees. How public managers ensure such alignment is thus far uncharted waters in the research on public sector branding. Will public managers tolerate employee voice that benefits the public interest if the message transmitted by employees is not consistent with the official organizational brand? If public managers encourage promotive and prohibitive employee voice, then how are employees'

voices aligned with the organization's overall branding efforts? These questions suggest a need to examine the alignment of employee voice with public sector brands in practice.

Aligning employee voice with brands

The alignment of employee voice with official branding strategies could arise from two overarching approaches, alone or in combination. The first is to transform employees into brand ambassadors. In general, the literature on internal branding and reputation management speaks rather enthusiastically about the benefits of selling the brand to employees through training programs, empowerment, reinforcing employees' psychological contracts with their employer, showing commitment, and improving employees' job satisfaction (Cravens and Oliver, 2006, Henkel et al., 2007, Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2015, Miles and Mangold, 2004, Morhart et al., 2009, Vallaster and De Chernatony, 2010). Despite the emphasis on normative control that potentially could interfere with employees' identities and values (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009) and potentially turn employees into "branded robots" (Müller, 2017, p. 45), advocates argue that internal branding could "enchant employees", give "deeper meaning" to employees' work, and result in "an emotional connection that compels commitment" (Sartain, 2005, p. 90). This is assumed to significantly increase the likelihood of promotive voice, and, conversely, reduce the likelihood of prohibitive voice being a liability to the brand. However, managers can never feel absolutely certain that employees have become successfully "branded", which could lead to calls for more control over employees' participation in branding.

Accordingly, the other way to align employee voice with the organization's brand is to introduce restrictive measures specifying what employees are allowed to say and not say. This approach is based on the assumption that employees cannot be trusted to 'correctly' communicate the brand to external stakeholders and, therefore, that their voice should be regulated in a direct manner through technocratic control (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004). As several scholars have recognized, employees may act against the interest of their organization as brand saboteurs (Ind, 2007, Wallace and de Chernatony, 2007, Wallace and de Chernatony, 2008). To counteract such brand-damaging sabotage and avoid instances of prohibitive voice, organizations could introduce censorship and message control in order to induce "total corporate commitment…from all levels of personnel" (Balmer, 2001, p. 281). They could appoint a "communications czar", e.g. a corporate communications or corporate compliance director controlling all external communication (Schultz and Kitchen, 2004),

and they could introduce low-commitment, coercive human resource management practices engendering on-brand behaviour and communication (Wæraas and Dahle, 2019).

In the case of the public secondary education market studied here, restricting employee voice through message control means less opportunities for students and parents to make an informed choice of school. If this turns out to be the case, the branding of public organizations is more about preserving the organizational self-interest through cultivation of instrumental goals rather than promoting the public interest through cultivation of values related to democracy, community, and equality.

Research context and methods

The Oslo secondary school market

The empirical focus in the paper is on public high schools in the municipality of Oslo, Norway. Despite inquisitive attention from local and national media, the municipal administration seeks to build the “Oslo school” (Norwegian: "Osloskolen") as an overarching municipal school brand (Malkenes, 2017). The name "Osloskolen" has been consistently used by the school administration and politicians both in internal and external communication in oral and written form. The name has also been used actively as a sign of school quality when schools in Oslo have achieved favourable results in national school rankings.

In addition, each school builds and protects its own brand due to the introduction of a competitive secondary education market involving free choice of high school. Contrary to the US and the UK, the number of private schools is fairly low. Traditionally, Norway has restricted the number of private providers of education and has not introduced a voucher-based system (Imsen et al., 2017), so "even though the number of private schools has risen, the private school market is still strongly regulated" (Haugen, 2019, p. 2). As the Oslo schools are publicly funded, budgets are limited and do not allow for external branding activities at a grand scale. In general, external branding activities are kept at a low to medium level.

Based on the schools’ web pages and social media profiles, we note that the focus on external branding seems to apply to schools at different admission levels, as both popular and unpopular schools demonstrate branding initiatives. There are both similarities and differences with respect to the schools’ external branding. All of the schools have slogans, 13 of the 15 schools have their own logos, and most of them use values presumed to be

positive, for example "cooperation", "care", "safety", "friendliness", "diversity", and "flexible". More importantly, they have chosen an angle meant to brand them as schools with unique characteristics. For example, one school brands itself as a school with "ambitions" and a "school of the future", related to its cooperation and colocation with a prestigious research institution. Another school brands itself as a "creative school" with a curriculum strong on music, dance, art, design, and architecture. In another school, sports is important for the brand, as evidenced by the slogans "The Talent Factory" and "Our talent is to nurture talents. What is yours?". A vocational school declares that it is "Oslo's major effort within vocational education" and educates "tomorrow's best vocational workers". One particular school possesses an established brand built over time, related to its profile as a "commerce school" and its "special place in the history of Oslo's schools" since 1875. Finally, a popular school ties its celebrated and well-known principal to its brand, stating that "**[**the principal's name**]** wants education to be something more - it should be an experience".

Education in Norway has traditionally been regulated by the central government, but "local autonomy is an important element" as "state-level regulatory inputs were implemented at the local level", although "within state legal frameworks" (Helgøy and Homme, 2016, p. 53). Today's deregulated system follows a neoliberal approach to education (Haugen, 2019, Hovdenak and Stray, 2015) promoted by actors such as OECD. Performance in this system is regulated by test-based accountability, and directly linked with financing through *per capita funding* where money follows the pupil. Neighbouring Sweden deregulated their school system after introducing NPM ideas in the early 90s, and thus embraced this approach to a greater extent than Norway, resulting in a complete marketization of the school system (Dovemark, 2017, Dovemark and Lundström, 2017, Harling and Dahlstedt, 2017, Lundström et al., 2017, Mellén, 2017). In contrast, free choice of schools has not been introduced as a nationwide policy in Norway, but has been established as an *option* for local authorities (Imsen et al., 2017). Municipal authorities in the Norwegian capital have embraced this option fully. The schools' own branding efforts are the focal point of the current study.

The system puts principals under continuous pressure to maintain and strengthen their school's brand, as they are well aware of how negative word of mouth and media coverage can generate fewer student admission applications, fewer well qualified students, and higher staff turnover, leading to reduced performance and ultimately to reduced

funding. Any negative information about the school could set this negative spiral in motion and potentially lead to the school's demise.

One effect of allowing students to choose which high school to attend is significant variation across the schools concerning admission grades[5], creating a situation where "attracting the 'right' students and avoid getting the 'wrong' ones" is crucial (Haugen, 2019). In Sweden similar findings appear, as "students are now regarded as customers and commodities rather than aspiring democratic citizens" (Dovemark, 2017, p. 67). In Oslo, whereas some schools receive many applications from strong students and therefore require high grade point averages, others are forced to maintain lower grade point averages and higher acceptance rates. It follows that the schools can be ranked according to the grade point average they require for admission.

In this study, grade point average is used as a proxy for brand image. A high grade point average is indicative of positively perceived characteristics, values, and meanings of a school among stakeholders, and thus of a strong brand image, because it entails a high number of strong student applications. Conversely, a low grade point average (or no grade point average at all) suggests a weaker brand image because the school is unable to attract the same number of highly qualified students.

Data collection

This study is based on two sources of data: The first source includes semi-structured interviews with principals in 15 public high schools in Oslo, representing two thirds of the high schools in the city. The second data source includes detailed official admission statistics for 2018 / 2019 provided by the Oslo municipal administration. Schools (and informants) are chosen by purposive sampling (Silverman, 2013), so as to reflect different levels of grades necessary for admission based on statistics for the high school Specialization in General Studies, which all the schools offer. Three admission grade levels are identified: Level 1) 10 to 29,9 admission points, level 2) 30 to 44,9 points, and level 3) 45 to 60 admission points. Five schools fall into the lowest admission grades category (level 1) and may be viewed as marginalized, five fall into the middle category (level 2), and five fall into the highest category (level 3) and may be viewed as privileged. The unionization

[5] *In Norway, neither the municipal administration nor the schools set the grades necessary for admission. Instead the admission is based on grades alone, meaning that 100 places go to the 100 pupils with the highest grades, and, as such, the grade of the last admitted pupil constitutes the necessary grade point level needed for admission.*

level among teachers was similar in schools in the three groups, which was not surprising as the unionization level is as high as 87 percent among secondary school teachers[6] (Utdanningsforbundet, 2006) and 79 percent within the education sector in general (Nergaard, 2018).

Principals were chosen as informants in order to hear the school leaders' voice, which has been somewhat absent from public debate about secondary schools in Oslo. School leaders have the last word in establishing practices for teachers' use of voice and are the ones ultimately responsible for managing their school's brand.

The same interview guide was used for all the interviews. Informants were encouraged to talk about their perception of and experiences with employee voice conditions in their respective schools, and voice conditions for both teachers and for themselves as school leaders, in relation to their school's brand image (not the overall brand of the "Oslo school"). All the informants were willing to speak freely about these matters, and branding concerns did not seem to affect their communication.

Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was the main method of analysis in the study. Content analysis is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278), and is an often-used method to explore and make inferences based on recorded statements from interviewees (Holsti, 1969). In order to properly identify, analyze, and report patterns within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), thematic coding was utilized (Kuckartz, 2014) with the help of the software analysis programme QDA Miner. We utilized a combination of inductive and deductive analysis. First, in order to hear the interviewees' tales openly and without predefined categories in mind, an inductive approach was adopted (Flick, 2018). This included applying descriptive codes to the data in a first round of coding. In total around 50 codes were identified. In the second round of coding the codes were summarized into subcategories, from which four emerging themes came to view, namely 'employee voice', 'internal branding', 'market logic', and 'public interest'. Figure 1 shows how the category system mapped onto the themes. After reviewing and considering quotes from interviews, codes, subcategories, and themes, the four overarching themes were renamed "market as organizing framework", "brand

[6] *Based on statistics from 2004. However, the unionization level has remained high in the public sector (including public schools) while it has decreased in the private sector.*

alignment through internal branding", "brand alignment through voice restrictions", and "public silence".

Coding reliability was tested by letting the second author recode a sample of about 10 percent of all segments. The recoding process was done based on the developed coding scheme, and carried out without knowledge of the first author's coding. In accordance with the procedure described by Campbell et al. (2013), the first and second author then resolved coding discrepancies, as the first author changed five of his codes and the second author changed 13 of his codes. Intercoder agreement was 92 percent (Kappa = .91). The final category system was deployed on the full set of data.

Findings

Market as organizing framework.

All of the informants described how market principles govern the intake of pupils through free choice of schools and lead to "a new set of rules" for high schools in Oslo. They laid out how this is linked to funding mechanisms and per capita funding. One dimension of response was found to be significant in order to uncover how the informants spoke about this, namely market position.

How privileged or marginalized the schools are in terms of admission grade levels seemed to influence the choice of brand alignment strategy, and it seemed to influence how the informants spoke about the consequences of the market-based school system. A few informants emphasized what they saw as positive consequences of the market logic, using statements like "it keeps us sharp" and "a drive towards performance". Others expressed a more pragmatic approach, stating that "you can like it or not, this is the way that the application system works here" and "I cannot do anything about it, and if I wanted to, I would have to get another job than school headmaster".

However, informants from all three levels of schools were generally more concerned about the negative consequences of the market principles. A principal at a high school currently in the lowest admission grades category (level 1) spoke about how the market principles seem to cause an accumulation of vulnerable pupils in some schools. Another principal pointed out that it is the element of competition between schools, a core feature of the school market logic in Oslo, which leads to the accumulation of problem-ridden pupils in some schools.

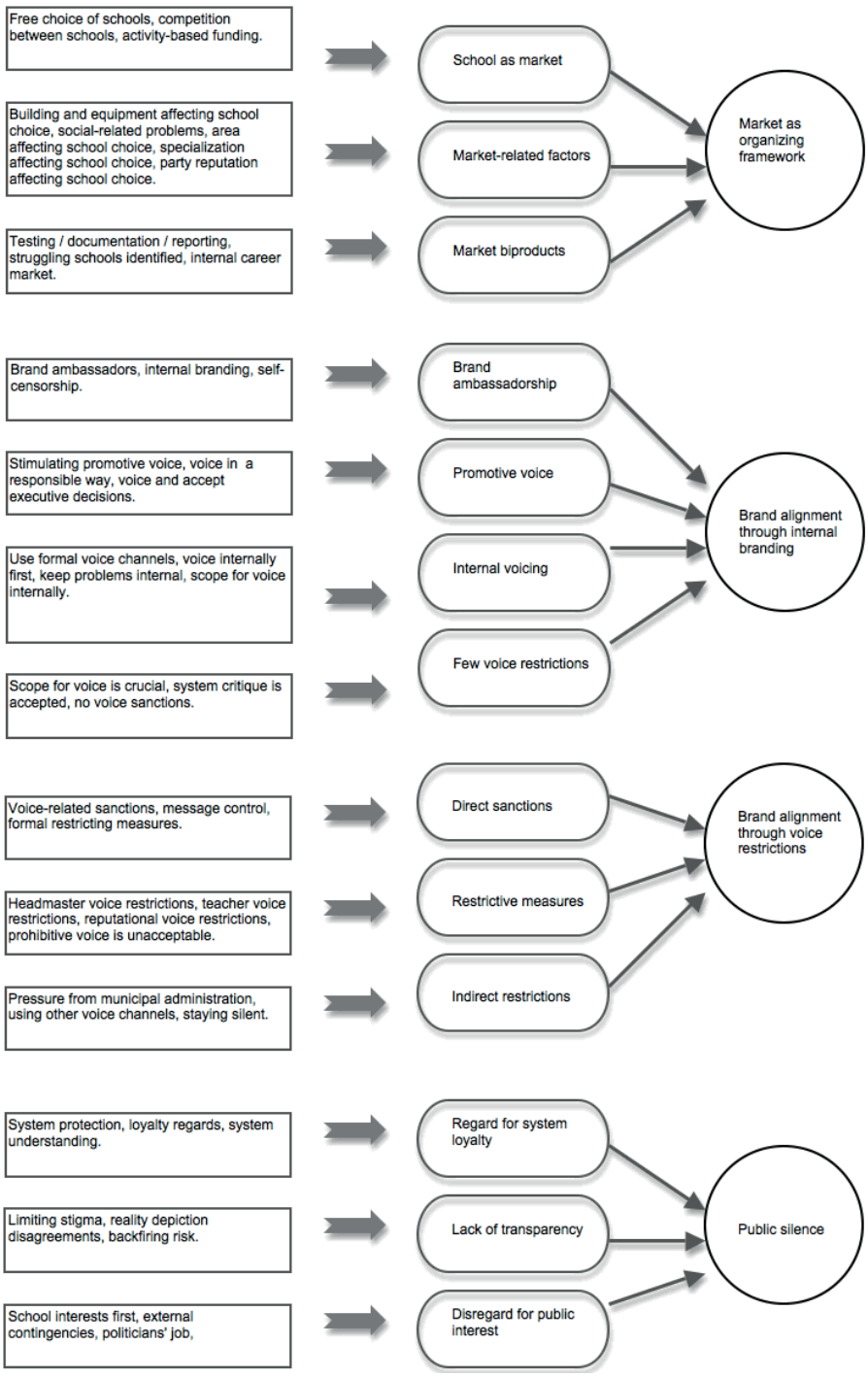

***Figure 1**: Emerging data structure.*

> Free choice of schools simply doesn't make sense, but the politicians won't even discuss it. My job is to help young people go as far as they can based on their resources, and now we have a system that prevents them from achieving that (principal, school at level 2).

> The competition between schools is very strong, leading to schools in unpopular areas to accept many scholarly weak pupils. I prefer the former system, where a mix of pupils came together in each school, instead of the present system where competition ruins proper learning and pedagogy (principal, school at level 1).

Other informants went a step further, describing the consequences of the market mechanisms for their schools if they do not fully succeed in being attractive enough for young applicants. As one principal said it:

> If the number of applicants is markedly reduced from one year to another, our funding will be cut, teachers become redundant, and we have to reduce our activity all over (principal, school at level 1).

All of the informants said that being known or being known for something is not sufficient; being known for something good is what counts when it comes to succeeding in the high school market. Vice versa, being known for something which is perceived to be negative is detrimental to the schools' reputation and chances for success. Some informants spoke indirectly about branding through statements about reputation building. Using the Norwegian equivalent of the word 'brand' ('merkevare'), others spoke explicitly about the school's brand. They used expressions like "it is important to build a strong school brand", " getting a good reputation is like building a brand", and "it has to do with loyalty, reputation building, and the school's brand".

Brand alignment through internal branding.

When analyzing the data, one typical discourse related to brand alignment strategies emerged. This was the discourse of trust. Some of the principals expressed a lower degree of trust in their employees than others, giving word to the necessity of controlling their employees' use of voice. A few informants expressed a higher degree of trust in their

employees, and they generally argued for turning employees into brand ambassadors as the best strategy for achieving brand alignment. One of the principals was quite frank about her tactics.

> I make sure that the teachers are aware of how we do this. I say that if we speak about the great things that goes on at this school, we receive more applications. It is a positive spiral (...) But I cannot control them even if I wanted to, it doesn't work, and you know, this is part of being a leader of highly competent people, you don't go around telling them what they should not do (principal, school at level 3).

Another principal felt that he had succeeded in turning employees into brand ambassadors, and spoke about how the staff's shared feeling of being part of a community at work manifested itself in a kind of colleague control.

> We spend quite a lot of resources on creating a feeling of community, on building a team feeling. We have established a kind of internal justice, especially for social media; if an employee writes something negative about the school, I would get to know it quickly, because people watch each other, even in social media (principal, school at level 1).

Brand alignment through voice restrictions.

Principals expressed a relatively low degree of trust in their employees regarding use of voice, and they did not see the brand ambassadorship approach as sufficient to ensure alignment between employees and corporate branding strategies. Instead, the more restrictive approach is the most prominent of the two. The predominant strategy is to impose restrictions on external messaging and use of voice. Some of the principals were surprisingly outspoken about this. One principal stated:

> I wish I could say that the teachers' scope for voice was huge, but I know that this is not the case. The rule is that if anyone would like to express something in external fora, they shall come and speak to me beforehand. I always say that they can speak up, but since we have a "checkpoint" like this, it is a way of controlling what comes out (principal, school at level 2).

While some of the informants spoke about trust as a key value, other informants gave word to a more control-oriented approach with little emphasis on trust. One principal at a privileged school signalled that employees cannot be fully trusted when it comes to voice.

> I feel that we need guidelines related to employee voice. Some have to be protected from themselves, they don't really grasp the consequences of what they are saying (principal, school at level 3).

Another principal gave word to similar thoughts and reflections, using expressions like "loose cannon" and "vendetta" about teachers who express themselves critically.

> Certain rules apply to the right to use voice, and that is the way it has to be. Some are better at understanding unwritten rules for what you can say as an employee (...) Some schools or executives do not succeed in establishing a team feeling among their employees, and then there might be someone, a loose cannon, who has an agenda, a vendetta, and chooses to voice externally (principal, school at level 1).

A few of the informants conveyed concerns about critical use of voice even in informal settings, for example among friends. One rather outspoken principal indicated that those who do that should quit their jobs.

> Some teachers at this school have spoken negatively about the school at dinner parties. I cannot understand why they do it. We have free choice of schools, and it is not difficult to get a job at another school (principal, school at level 3).

One principal spoke at length about how teachers have to find their place in the public, bureaucratical chain of command, and, thus, comply with voice restrictions imposed by municipal and school executives.

> Confidential issues are excluded from public disclosure, and employees have a duty of loyalty to their employer. This is the institutional framework for all employees, it applies to all, and this is the way it has to be. We are in a chain of command, because secondary schools are politically governed, and this chain is even tighter than in the health services (principal, school at level 2).

Externally directed voice initiatives that may harm reputation and brand - i.e. prohibitive voice initiatives - are under scrutiny and are subsequently restricted. Restrictions do not seem to take their most extreme form as in denying teachers the right to speak up, but manifest themselves through prior control of voice initiatives. Principals in the majority of schools argued frankly for a need for prior message control.

The most privileged schools laid more restrictions on employee voice than marginalized schools, as shown in table 1. In all the schools at level 3, with the highest admission grade levels, the principals argued for prior message control. Here they used words and expressions such as "come to me first", "asked about their motivation", "seek advice before going public", and, as mentioned, "protected from themselves", and "a way of controlling what comes out".

By contrast, principals at level 1 schools, with the lowest admission grade levels, did generally not express a need for prior message control. Instead they spoke about "open processes", "democratic principles", "freedom of expression", "say what you want", "throw as many bricks as you want", and "a citizen's right to speak up". Principals at the schools at the middle admission grade level (level 2) did generally not argue directly for prior control, either. Hence, only executives in the most privileged schools argued for restrictions in the form of prior message control.

Table 1: Voice restrictions in high schools at different admission levels. Number of schools (principals) at each level.

Admission level	Voice under prior control	Voice with little or no prior control
Level 3: 45 points and over	5	
Level 2: 30 - 44,9 points	1	3
Level 1:Up to 29,9 points	1	5

This finding may be surprising, as it is possible to argue that these schools' reputation is so good that they can allow themselves to be forgiving towards critical teachers who want to express their views externally. Here, though, the principals' attitudes to the municipal school administration and its strategies were key. Principals at the least privileged schools at level

1 either expressed a negative or a neutral view of the municipal school administration and its strategies, while their colleagues at the most privileged schools at level 3 generally had a positive attitude towards the administration. Principals at all the most privileged schools spoke keenly and supportively about the administration, as shown in table 2. It seems plausible that this institutional support of a system based on market principles sets up a situation where school executives implement and make use of these tactics in their own organization.

Table 2: Voice restrictions and principals' attitude towards the municipal school administration. Number of schools (principals) at each of the three admission levels.

Admission level	A positive view of the municipal school administration	A neutral view of the municipal school administration	A negative view of the municipal school administration
Level 3: 45 points and over	5		
Level 2: 30 - 44,9 points	2	2	
Level 1: Up to 29,9 points		2	4

Several of the principals at the most privileged schools gave clues as to why they impose restrictions. One principal put it like this:

> It could be that a popular school has a lot of reputation capital, so their good reputation might not be that affected by unwanted voicing. But I rather think that the opposite is true; they take a greater fall than unpopular schools if their reputation suffers. Since they have more to lose, they impose more restrictions (principal, school at level 3).

A long op-ed written by a one principal, and published in a national newspaper, came up in many of the interviews. In the op-ed the principal described his school's challenges related to violence, crime, and gang activity. One principal at a privileged school used the op-ed to justify his actions.

> I would never have gone public and written an op-ed, like my colleague did. But what did he have to lose? He is building a new identity for his school, it is almost

> like he is building a new school. Thus, he had little to lose by going public like he did. For me, the situation is different. For many of my pupils my school was their primary choice when they submitted their high school applications, so I feel that I have a lot to lose if I was to express myself publicly like that (principal, school at level 3).

These clues indicate that branding strategies, and, thus, voice restrictions imposed by school executives depend on the schools' position in the school market. As privileged schools have more to lose than marginalized schools, the level of trust in employees is lower in these schools than in marginalized schools. With level of trust as a recurring discourse, privileged schools impose stricter restrictions on employee voice than marginalized schools.

Public silence.

Public high schools arguably are meant to serve the public interest and common good not only by providing education to young people but also by reducing inequality in society, as "education is still regarded as one of the major methods of preventing unemployment, social exclusion and ill health" (Aasen, 2003, p. 285). Observing what is not said and what informants do not speak about is often quite telling. In our case, one notable dimension was lacking from the principals' tales about their schools: They said very little about serving the public interest, and they did not talk about how employee voice can contribute to greater transparency and accountability in public organizations (Florini, 2007, Piotrowski, 2008). Instead they wove a narrative, which in the present paper is termed public silence, into the conversations. Public silence means to deliberately refrain from using voice to communicate promotive or prohibitive matters to external stakeholders. Here, the informants' narrative suggests that contributing to public debate about school-related matters is not appropriate and disloyal, since they are positioned in a formal hierarchy and chain of command with the municipal school administration on top. One principal told about a recent invitation from a national TV station.

> The TV station wanted me to participate in a broadcast debate about problems in high schools in Oslo. One of the other participants was meant to be a principal at a less popular school. We both declined the invitation to participate. What was the point of us quarrelling on national TV like that? Since my political and administrative superiors have decided on this system, and I am a part of a hierarchy,

> I cannot shout out at the system again and again, as I am paid to put into practice what they have decided upon (principal, school at level 2).

Most of the principals expect their teachers to follow the same logic and prevent unwanted use of voice through prior message control, which contributes to the public silence. In addition, the market-related reputational concerns experienced by all the informants are fuelling the public silence. The principals spoke a lot about how communicating publicly about school-related problems might backfire as stakeholders such as present and future pupils and parents may connect the problems to single schools, leading to a loss of reputation, fewer applicants, and funding cuts. A principal at a rather marginalized school was frank about the matter.

> Reputation has a lot to say, it is important. The more stories there are in the press about fighting, knives, police presence in the school yard, and the percentage of pupils with an immigrant background, the worse reputation a school gets (principal, school at level 1).

Interestingly, one of the principals reflected critically upon the public silence practiced by himself and his principal colleagues, stating that they are not practicing what they are preaching.

> We teach our pupils to think for themselves and to approach matters critically, but we, ourselves, don't do what we teach them. You could say that it is a good principle and an act of loyalty for a teacher to come and speak with me before she speaks to journalists. But then, system-related critique disappears from the agenda, and this cannot be talked about, it is weird, it is not good (principal, school at level 2).

Discussion

Branding has become an important aspect of many public sector organizations' internal and external activities. In uncovering patterns of how secondary schools deal with market pressures, this article offers insights into public sector branding in general, and in particular, the alignment of employee voice with official branding strategies. While employee voice is more or less unchartered territory in current public sector branding research, this study

shows that executives favour restrictive measures over brand ambassadorship, ultimately generating public silence. The links between the focal variables are illustrated in Figure 2.

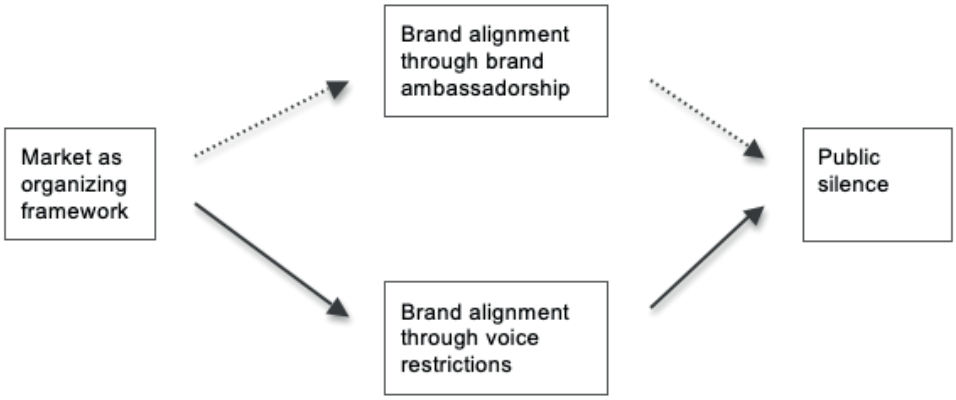

Figure 2: *Analytical model of employee alignment with official branding strategies in secondary education.*

The present paper contributes to public sector branding literatures by showing how strategic alignment with the organizational brand is created through voice restrictions. Previous research on corporate branding suggests that employees should have a crucial role as empowered and "enchanted" brand ambassadors in reputation- and brand-oriented organizations (Miles and Mangold, 2004, Sartain, 2005). By contrast, the findings from this study point to message control as a crucial means of creating brand alignment in the public sector. The findings suggest that public managers in strongly competitive settings prefer a high degree of control over the brand. Thus, while the study is consistent with literatures revealing technocratic control as a possible managerial tool (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004), it does not reflect the type of normative control demonstrated by studies of branding in other settings such as high-tech firms (Cushen, 2009) and management consulting (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008), or in branding discourse in general (Müller, 2017). Moreover, although voice control and employee empowerment in branding and reputation management represent conflicting requirements for many organizations (Wæraas and Dahle, 2019), the current study suggests that the tension is less of an act of balancing the two requirements and more of an act of message control and instruction. As such, the study

illustrates one of the many conflicting requirements resulting from the introduction of strategic communication in public sector organizations (Fredriksson and Pallas, 2016). It also provides support to previous works suggesting that transparency could lead to increased control (Byrkjeflot, 2015, Christensen et al., 2008). Increased control, for example message control, might keep teachers focused on the core content of their job and the mission of their work, leading to increased organizational performance and school quality. In this vein, school branding may not only be a sign of school quality, it may also lead to school quality. However, the voice literature indicates that a high level of voice increases motivation while a low level of voice leads to exit and withdrawal (Bashshur and Oc, 2015), showing few positive, and even negative, links between voice restrictions and school quality. Hence, internal branding has implications not only for the public interest, but also for organizational performance. The question of performance and quality is not within the research frame of the present paper, but we encourage other scholars to investigate the question of organizational performance in relation to internal branding and employee voice further.

Through these findings, the present study complements previous studies addressing silence as a way of responding to reputational threats. While the study by Maor et al. (2012) finds that public agencies remain silent in specific policy areas in which they enjoy a favourable reputation, this study shows that the tendency for public organizations to stay silent varies with overall organizational brand image. Specifically, those organizations that enjoy the most favourable brand image are the most likely to impose strict voice regulations on employees. The reason seems to be that well-reputed public organizations have more to lose than ill-reputed public organizations. This finding stands in some contrast to previous studies arguing that a strong brand or reputation provides a halo effect to the organization by protecting it during crises (Coombs and Holladay, 2006, Leuthesser et al., 1995). If this halo effect were thought to be effective in the case of the schools studied here, they could be assumed to display more tolerance for employee voice. Because this is not the case here, the findings provide strong support to the propositions by Luoma-aho (2005) and Picci (2015) stating that favourable organizational reputations in the public sector could come at a heavy price when faced with reputation-threatening incidents, and, furthermore, that public organizations might benefit from maintaining a neutral or satisficing reputation rather than aiming for an excellent one.

The findings also provide important insights into the relationship between branding and the public interest. First, on a general level, the findings suggest a profound impact of branding on public sector communication. While public sector organizations are instruments

of public policy and their communication is meant to promote democracy and the public interest (Canel and Luoma-aho, 2018, Marland, 2016), the reality highlighted in the current study is that the strong concern for brand image seems to make public sector communication more self-centred and censored when the brand is at stake.

Second, while previous research, especially on corporate branding, has argued for beneficial democratic effects of branding, this study shows that the general public could be deprived of important information that otherwise is assumed to be available in democracies and perfect markets. One factor that sets public organizations apart from private organizations is the goal of serving the general public and benefiting the public interest; a feature of a well-functioning democracy. Yet, the data suggest that tough competitive environments in public sector settings generate a tendency for top managers to hold back information of significant interest to the general public by imposing voice restrictions on their employees. In this study, public silence implies that unwanted communication in the form of prohibitive voice is being restrained. The study clearly indicates that the rationale behind the silence regarding certain matters is strategic: They choose to stay silent in order not to risk damage to the brand.

The market mechanisms set up by the municipal school administration through free choice of schools do not directly provide incentives for the schools to hold back information. Yet, in order for the most popular schools to protect their brand, the lack of transparency emerges as a side-effect. In the case of the Oslo school market, some of the democratic issues arising from this side-effect are the following: How can pupils and parents be able to choose the right schools for them, when information about possible drawbacks with the schools are held back? How can politicians make informed policy choices about local secondary education when they are not fully informed about the current situation? And how can citizens hold politicians accountable for these very decisions without being properly informed? One might argue that social media facilitate a transparency-generating flow of information, which could mitigate the democratic issues mentioned. On the other hand there is almost no tradition for non-governmental websites to provide unofficial rankings and reviews of schools in Norway, as is more customary in other Western countries. Hence, lack of transparency may be a more pressing issue in Norway than in other countries.

In a similar vein the study unveils features of the market-induced secondary school system in Oslo that could widen the gap between privileged and marginalized schools, which hardly can be seen as serving the public interest. As voice restrictions imposed on

teachers seem to be more prominent in privileged schools than in marginalized schools, negative information made available to the public regards mostly the marginalized schools. This makes marginalized schools even more marginalized as a negative spiral is set in motion: Schools receive fewer applications, are forced to lower their admission levels, deliver reduced test performance, and have their funding cut. As a result, in a secondary school system with huge between-school differences in popularity and performance, the differences may increase further, leading to a growing divide between "good" and "bad" schools.

Finally, as the market logic governing high schools in Oslo are rooted in economic principles which can be said to be partly universal in nature, a tentative generalization from the findings can be suggested: Due to the partly universal nature of the governing market framework in the current study, a similar relationship between market principles and employee voice is possible in other public organizations facing competitive pressures, for example in public hospitals, healthcare institutions, and universities. This represents possibilities for further studies and future research.

Implications for public sector branding research

The idea that brands and branding are relevant concepts for the study of management strategies and practices in the public sector is relatively new. Still, our study confirms the appropriateness of this idea on several levels. First, the study points to an ongoing awareness among public sector managers of the significance of having a strong or weak organizational brand. Although the related concept of marketing could serve as a lens to understand externally oriented attempts of public organizations to positively influence stakeholder perceptions (Butler and Collins, 1995, Kearsey and Varey, 1998, Walsh, 1994), it does not in the same way provide insights about the desired organization-level end state associated with these efforts. The concept of branding directs our attention to a unique set of specific values, characteristics, and meanings for which public organizations want to be known. In this paper we have referred to this end state as the desired brand image. Thus, when public managers restrict employees' voice opportunities, knowledge of a desired brand image rather than marketing activities is essential in order to understand both the extent and the implications of this restriction.

Second, and relatedly, the study confirms how organizational branding requires "total corporate commitment" (Balmer, 2001, p. 281) and is carried out "from within" (Judson et al., 2006) or from "the inside-out" (Ind and Bjerke, 2007, Sartain, 2005). The

findings not only demonstrate the value of distinguishing analytically and empirically between the external and internal dimension of public sector branding, as public organizations certainly involve themselves in both areas, they also highlight the importance of examining the actual processes of aligning employee behaviour and communication with the desired brand. By using branding as a conceptual lens rather than e.g. marketing, empirical research should be more sensitive to these important employee-based aspects. This in itself represents a call for further research into internal branding efforts rather than external branding efforts in the public sector, especially the role of people management in internal branding.

Third, the concept of branding is imbued with a certain amount of optimism, also with respect to what branding could achieve in the public sector (Leijerholt et al., 2018). The finding that public sector managers turn to the voice restriction approach rather than the brand ambassadorship approach, however, calls for some caution in applying branding as a conceptual lens. Our findings suggest that "selling" the brand to employees and enabling them to further "sell" it to external stakeholders is an enticing ideal, but perhaps less possible to implement in reality for public sector organizations facing strong market mechanisms because concern for the brand image takes precedence. A pressing question is whether applying voice restrictions is the common way of aligning public sector behaviour and communication with the brand at stake, and whether this type of internal branding may work despite strong market pressure. Simultaneously, other conceptual and theoretical lenses than branding may offer richer insights into the use of voice restrictions in the public sector. These questions represent possible avenues for future research.

Fourth, the more emphasis is put on internal branding in public sector organizations, the more internal branding could potentially challenge the public interest. Thus, the concept of public sector branding holds promise as a conceptual lens but should not be used uncritically and in ignorance of its possible negative consequences. As our findings suggest, the preference for voice restrictions in aligning efforts has a silencing effect on employees who otherwise may have expressed themselves in external fora. The outcome is public silence. The construct of public silence has thus far been little examined in regard to internal branding, and we encourage scholars to examine it further. Future studies of public sector branding should seek to identify when such an outcome does and does not emerge from internal branding, the conditions under which public silence emerges, as well as possible implications arising from public silence.

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Article nr. 4

Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM and LMX in internal branding

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Keywords: HRM, management, leadership, internal branding, brand support.

Abstract: Internal branding strategies, as in"selling" an organization's brand to employees so that they will "sell" it to external stakeholders, is a common way for practitioners to get employees to actively support organizational branding efforts. Scholars investigating how organizations best can facilitate such an employee brand support have largely ignored the role of HRM and leader-member exchange (LMX). Data from a survey among 411 employees at a Norwegian hospital were analyzed using multiple regression and path analysis. As hypothesized, we found that high-commitment HRM and LMX facilitate successful internal branding and three manifestations of employee brand support, namely reputation strategy embeddedness, brand-congruent behaviour, and brand development participation. Results show that organizational commitment mediates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and LMX, respectively, and the three manifestions of employee brand support. Studying HRM and LMX simultaneously, LMX moderates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness. Theoretical and practical implications and directions for future research are discussed.

1. Introduction.

HR managers face the task of getting employees to support their organization's brand. To achieve such a support, internal branding, defined as "branding employees as a means to communicate the brand to customers" (Müller, 2017, p. 898), is regarded as key. It shall turn employees into brand ambassadors (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Leijerholt et al., 2019), brand champions (Garas et al., 2018), or brand citizens (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Thus, organizations are 'selling' the brand to employees in order for them to 'sell' the brand to external stakeholders. This entails that, for practitioners, it is all-important to know what it is that facilitates successful internal branding. A major clue is that the "brand's values need to be anchored in their minds and hearts to encourage brand supporting behaviour" (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2010, p. 182), which presupposes employee commitment to the desired brand (Dahle & Wæraas, 2020; Miles & Mangold, 2004). This represents a link to HRM, commonly defined as "the management of work and people towards desired ends" (Boxall et al., 2007, p. 1), but more specifically to commitment-oriented HRM, which seeks to "shape desired employee behaviors and attitudes by forging psychological links between organiational and employee goals" (Arthur, 1994, p. 672). Despite these links, the role of HRM has received little attention in branding research. The same applies to the role of the dyadic leader-member exchange, where effective "leadership resides in the quality of the exchange relationship developed between leaders and their followers" (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015, p. 641) and affects employees' "individual performance through the impact of their relationship with leaders" (Mumtaz & Rowley, 2020). Generally, people management (Martin & Hetrick, 2006; Wæraas & Dahle, 2020), encompassing both HRM and LMX, is under-explored in current branding research.

The purpose of the paper is to explore how employee brand support is successfully achieved and whether organizations can facilitate such a support. We investigate the relationship between HRM approach, leader-member exchange and different manifestations of employee brand support, namely reputation strategy embeddedness, brand-congruent behaviour, and brand development participation, in a large university hospital in Norway. Following New Public Management-inspired reforms like the Norwegian Hospital Reform Act of 2002, Norwegian hospitals are governed by a system based on free choice of hospital and *per capita funding* where

money follows the patient, setting up a market-like situation where hospitals compete for patients (Byrkjeflot & Angell, 2011), and reputation concerns are prevalent. This drives executives to get employees to actively support and take part in the process of establishing and building a strong brand. Thus, the core research question is:

What kind of people management, incorporating HRM approach and LMX quality as perceived by employees, facilitates internal branding, and, specifically, employee brand support?

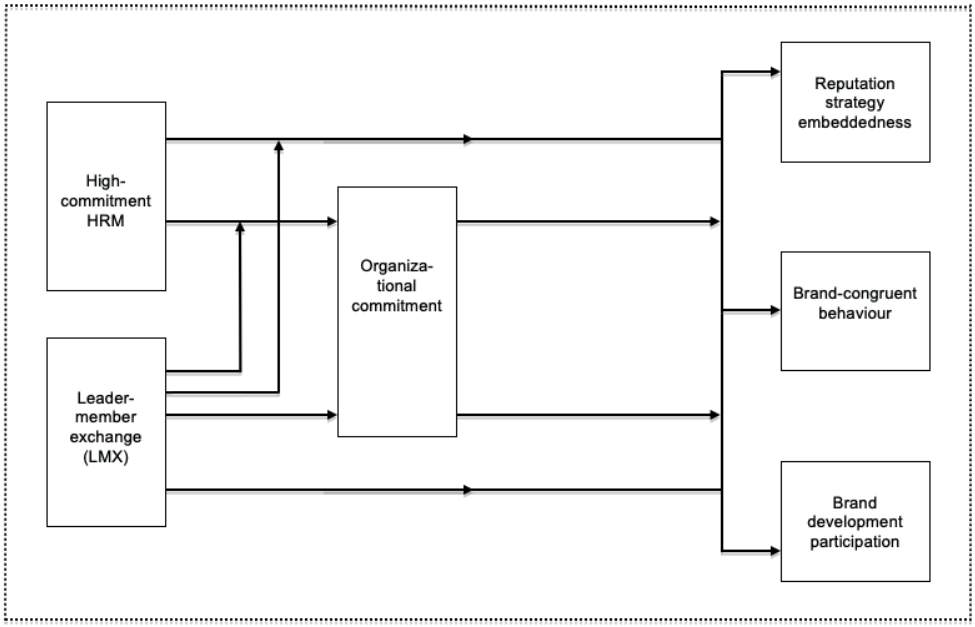

Figure 1: Conceptual model. The full model including all paths is shown in Figure 4.

The present study is a response to recent calls for more research into the internal sides to branding in organizations (Leijerholt et al., 2019; Müller, 2017; Piehler et al., 2018), specifically on "managerial instruments", namely "a detailed investigation of specific instruments of brand-oriented human resource management, leadership, internal communication, and external communication" (Piehler et al., 2018, p. 198). The conceptual model for the paper is shown in Figure 1. We contribute to existing

research in several ways. Theoretically, we first analyze the relationship between HRM, LMX and employee brand support in light of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Second, we provide insights into internal aspects of branding, an under-researched topic with gaps in the knowledge of challenges and demands of turning employees into brand ambassadors, that is, ambassadors for the organizational brand.

Empirically, we first extend existing research which highlights leadership (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2010), brand-centered HRM (Chang et al., 2012; Dhiman & Arora, 2019), brand-specific leadership (Morhart et al., 2009), and brand-oriented leadership (Terglav et al., 2016) by linking internal branding strategies with HRM approach. Second, we uncover that organizational commitment is a mediator of the relationship between HRM approach, LMX, and employee brand support. Our results indicate that the principle of reciprocation and exchange of intrinsic benefits apply to internal branding research. To offer insights into these matters, the paper is structured as follows: First we outline the theoretical background for the work, then we describe the chosen methodological approaches, and the empirical findings. At the end, we discuss our findings in light of recent literatures, and present avenues for future research.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

Employee brand support as social exchange

Some scholars view internal branding as a normative script for how to get employees to "sell" the brand (Mahnert & Torres, 2007; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015; Miles & Mangold, 2004; Miles & Mangold, 2005). Contrary to such an instrumental view, others see it as a threat to the identity of employees (Cushen, 2009; Harquail, 2006; Müller, 2017; Mumby, 2016). In the present study we take a different approach: We utillize social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) as a theoretical framework for examining the relationship between employee brand support, HRM approach, and leader-member exchange (LMX), and, as follows, see internal branding as a social exchange process. SET is commonly used as a theoretical lens in HRM and leadership research and partly in strategy research, but has rarely been used in branding research. We find

this puzzling, as SET can inform internal branding research in fulfilling ways. According to social exchange theory, being employed is seen "as the exchange of employees' effort and loyalty for the organization's provision of material and socioemotional benefits" (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003, p. 491). The Norwegian version of the Nordic model and its focus on cooperation, dialogue and trust between employer and employee (Gooderham et al., 2015) can arguably be said to facilitate positive social exchanges in the workplace. In the highly unionized public sector, which is the setting for the present study, this is probably even more pronounced.

At the core of social exchange theory is the principle of reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which outlines a reciprocal relationship between two parties, for example employer and employee, where mutual gratifications are provided. Despite being an exchange inviting individuals to "maximize their benefits" (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003, p. 491), it is primarily not about economic benefits, but an exchange involving mostly intrinsic benefits where the principle of reciprocity acts as "the starting mechanism" (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003, p. 492) towards "long-term social relations, and not "one-shot transactions" (Cook, 2000, p. 687). In the long run, employees who perceive that employers treat them with respect, communicate with them in a supportive way (Walden & Westerman, 2018), and value their contributions, will reciprocate or repay with attitudes, actions and behaviour, including organizational citizenship behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 884), that benefit the organization. This sets up a mutual, two-way commitment between the parties; the organization is committed towards its employees by fulfilling their needs, and the employee responds by being committed to the organization and acting in line with corporative policies and norms.

The core principles in social exchange theory correspond fairly well with high-commitment HRM, which should enhance employee performance by "empowering, developing and trusting workers to achieve organizational goals" (Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005, p. 6), and "aim to create a psychological bond between the employee and the organization to ensure that employees are committed to organizational goals" (Meijerink et al., 2018, p. 3). It is a two-way commitment based on "mutual investment and positive social exchange relationships between employers and employees" (Yousaf et al., 2018, p. 1665), where the organization "commits itself toward the employees by fulfilling their needs" (Ho, 2018, p. 121). This is consistent with lasting

social relations based on an exchange of intrinsic benefits, which is inherent in social exchange theory. We contend that one reciprocal behaviour in employees is employee brand support. It is at the core of branding efforts, and is very much the main goal of such efforts, as employers strive to get employees to embrace the brand ambassador role. Hence, internal branding may be seen as involving an important social exchange, and more specifically, a reciprocal exchange of intrinsic benefits.

Employee brand support in light of HRM and LMX

Scholars have operationalized employee brand support in different ways. Some view brand support as a type of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), defined as "individual behaviour that is discretionary, not recognized by the formal rewards system" (Organ, 1988, p. 4), and beyond formal job duties, and use constructs based on OCB theory. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) and Chang et al. (2012) highlight *brand citizenship behaviours* like brand consideration, brand enthusiasm, brand sportsmanship, brand endorsement, and brand advancement. Terglav et al. (2016) and Dechawatanapaisal (2018) highlight *affective brand commitment*, which is rooted in organizational commitment theory, in itself found to correlate with organizational citizenship behaviours (Meyer et al., 2002; Ng & Feldman, 2011; Zayas-Ortiz et al., 2015). *Internal employer branding* is a related form of brand support, as "internal (employees') views are, however, important to consider, given that employees act as ambassadors of the organization, and can advance the employer brand by 'living the brand' through their own behaviors" (De Stobbeleir et al., 2018, p. 2107). Others use constructs like in-role brand-building behaviour, brand-congruent behaviour, positive word of mouth, and participation in brand development (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Morhart et al., 2009).

We define employee brand support as behaviour that effectively communicates an organizations's desired brand to external stakeholders, and chose three manifestations of this type of behaviour that we see as particularly representative of employee brand support. We used brand-congruent behaviour and participation in brand development (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014), as we see them as both specific and accurate manifestations of employee brand support. We used reputation strategy embeddedness, adapted from Galunic and Hermreck (2012), so as to include

the construct of reputation, which is at the core of branding concerns (Wæraas & Dahle, 2020), and to get a more theoretically driven model with regard to social exchange theory. Reputation strategy embeddedness is defined as a condition where where employees are both familiar with and convinced by their organization's reputation strategy. Brand-congruent behaviour is defined as the degree to which an employee's personal communication and appearance is in line with the organization's brand identity. Brand development participation is defined as proactive employee behaviour that goes beyond the job description and indicates active involvement in nurturing and building the organization's brand.

In research on HRM commitment has traditionally been contrasted with control (Jackson et al., 2014). However, the distinction between commitment and control have been criticized for being normative, atheoretical (Guest, 1997) and overly simplistic (Hauff et al., 2014). Studies unveil that organizations tend to use both commitment- and control-oriented HRM practices (Collins & Kehoe, 2017), and that a hybrid approach leads to high organizational performance (Hauff et al., 2014; Su et al., 2018). Thus, while we focus on high-commitment HRM, we do not see it as dichotomous in relation to control, but view HRM approach as a continuum between total commitment and total control as extremes at each end of the continuum.

The link between high-commitment HRM and social exchange theory is mirrored in leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, which describes how the dyadic relationship between leaders and employees vary in quality between "low-quality transactional-based relationships involving little more than what is stipulated in the employment contract, to more encompassing high-quality relationships involving the exchange of resources and support based on trust, mutual liking and respect" (Kuvaas et al., 2012, p. 756). As such, successful LMX relationships may in fact entail "high-quality social exchange relationships" (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 229) based on "long-term generalized reciprocity" (Kuvaas et al., 2012, p. 756), where employees who perceive that they are treated favourably feel an obligation to return the favourable treatment with behaviour appreciated by their leaders. Again, one such reciprocal behaviour by employees may be brand support.

We start by building a case for a relationship between high-commitment HRM and employee brand support. Studies which are directly relevant are few and far between, but Burmann and Zeplin (2005), Chang et al. (2012), and Dhiman and Arora

(2019) come close as they explore brand-centered HRM, characterized "as 'commitment' types of HR, which focuses on encouraging employees to identify with organizational goals" (Chang et al., 2012, p. 633) and will make make employees "produce positive attitudes and behaviors towards the brands" (Chang et al., 2012, p. 629). They assert that it will create mental links between employee and brand and "foster brand psychological ownership" (Chang et al., 2012, p. 633). The similarities with high-commitment HRM are strong, as high-commitment HRM "shape desired employee behaviors and attitudes by forging psychological links between organizational and employee goals" (Arthur, 1994, p. 672). Others find similar positive relationships between employee brand support, brand-specific leadership (Morhart et al., 2009), and brand-oriented leadership (Terglav et al., 2016). Thus, it does not seem unlikely that there will be a relationship between HRM approach and employee brand support. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 1:* There is a positive relationship between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness.
>
> *Hypothesis 2:* There is a positive relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand-congruent behaviour.
>
> *Hypothesis 3:* There is a positive relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand development participation.

While HRM approach is measured through HRM systems and thus represents a *systemic* facilitation of employee brand support, the quality of the "dyadic relationship between a leader and a member" (Gerstner & Day, 1997, p. 827), termed leader-member exchange (LMX) (Dansereau Jr et al., 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975), can be said to represent a *relational* facilitation of employee brand support. Again, few scholars have investigated links between LMX and employee brand support. Several review papers (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Henderson et al., 2009; Ilies et al., 2007; Martin et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2016) find significant relationships between LMX and outcomes presumed relevant for brand support, for example affective and normative commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, citizenship

performance, psychological contract fulfillment, and job satisfaction. Consequently, we expect to find a positive relationship between LMX and employee brand support. Based on this, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 4:* There is a positive relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and reputation strategy embeddedness.

> *Hypothesis 5* There is a positive relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and brand-congruent behaviour.

> *Hypothesis 6:* There is a positive relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and brand development participation.

The role of organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is found to be a prominent mediator between antecedents and consequences. Few have investigated its mediating role relating to employee brand support, but scholars have shown that it mediates the relationship between HRM practices or HRM approach and outcome variables like employee engagement (Aktar & Pangil, 2018), work engagement (Choi et al., 2015), employee performance (Ribeiro, Gomes, et al., 2018), exit, voice, loyalty and neglect (Si & Li, 2012), and turnover intention (Guchait & Cho, 2010; Mathieu et al., 2016). Similar results were found with the related variable transformational leadership as independent variable instead of HRM (Kim, 2012; Lee et al., 2018; Mesu et al., 2013; Ng, 2017; Ribeiro, Yücel, et al., 2018; Sujchaphong et al., 2020). Hence, we expect organizational commitment to also mediate the relationship between HRM approach and employee brand support. Based on this, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 7a:* Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness.

> *Hypothesis 7b:* Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand-congruent behaviour.

Hypothesis 7c: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand development participation.

The mediating role of organizational commitment between LMX and outcome variables, including brand support variables, is little explored. However, it is found to mediate between LMX and organizational citizenship behaviour (Hackett & Lapierre, 2004; Ng, 2017), extra-role behaviour (Garg & Dhar, 2016; Tierney et al., 2002), employee performance (Lapointe et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2010), and turnover intention (Elanain, 2014). Conversely, review papers report significant relationships between LMX and organizational commitment (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Martin et al., 2010), and between organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour, motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mercurio, 2015; Meyer et al., 2002; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). As follows, we assume that organizational commitment will be a mediator between LMX and employee brand support. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 8a: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and reputation strategy embeddedness.

Hypothesis 8b: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and brand-congruent behaviour.

Hypothesis 8c: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and brand development participation.

LMX as moderator

Similarly, LMX is found to moderate between antecedents and a diverse set of outcome variables. A moderating effect of LMX has been found between transformational leadership and variables like task performance (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006) and value congruence (Zhang et al., 2012), and between perceived organizational support and affective commitment (Liu & Ipe, 2010), innovative work behaviour, (Agarwal, 2014),

and turnover intention (Jayasundera et al., 2016). Few studies examine LMX as a moderator between HRM approach and outcome variables, and there is a notable lack of research on interaction between high-commitment HRM and LMX. Leroy et al. (2018) show multiple ways through which research on HRM and leadership, including LMX, can be combined into a *people management* dimension. Theoretically, they argue for a stronger integration between HRM and leadership research, and call for studies examining interaction between HRM and leadership. Audenaert et al. (2017) found such an interaction, but did not use high-commitment HRM as independent variable and did not examine the moderating role of LMX. Summed up, we expect LMX to moderate the relationship between high-commitment HRM and the brand-related outcome variables included in the present study. We hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 9a:* LMX moderates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness, such that the relationship is stronger in high- rather than low-quality LMX relationships.

> *Hypothesis 9b:* LMX moderates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand-congruent behaviour, such that the relationship is stronger in high- rather than low-quality LMX relationships.

> *Hypothesis 9c:* LMX moderates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand development participation, such that the relationship is stronger in high- rather than low-quality LMX relationships.

Since we expect organizational commitment to mediate these relationships, as stipulated in hypotheses 7 – 8, it does not seem unlikely that LMX will moderate possible mediated relationships between the variables. Hence, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 10a:* The mediation effect of organizational commitment on the relationship between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness will be stronger in high-quality LMX relationships than in low-quality LMX relationships.

Hypothesis 10b: The mediation effect of organizational commitment on the relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand-congruent behaviour will be stronger in high-quality LMX relationships than in low-quality LMX relationships.

Hypothesis 10c: The mediation effect of organizational commitment on the relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand development participation will be stronger in high-quality LMX relationships than in low-quality LMX relationships.

3. Methodology

Research context, sample and procedure

To test the theoretical model and hypotheses, we collected survey data from employees at a large university hospital in Norway, organized as a state hospital trust. Due to neoliberal reforms introduced after 2000, Norwegian hospital "operate within a (quasi)market arrangement" and a "competition-based system" (Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015, pp. 447-448) where they compete for patients and, thus, funding. These changes might add to the pressure of working in hospitals, which can be characterized as a high-pressure, stressful and "highly labour-intensive environment" (Townsend & Wilkinson, 2010, p. 332) where "the demands on the sector are such that there will be continuing pressure to achieve efficiency and other performance targets, and these will be fed through managers and staff" (Townsend & Wilkinson, 2010, p. 336).

However, hospitals in Norway are not fully privatized, and, although they are cost-minimizing,"it might be wrong to characterize Norwegian hospitals as profit-maximizing organizations" (Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015, p. 447). Correspondingly, our respondents are mainly blue-collar and neither have clinical responsibilities related to people's health, nor are held responsible for common performance targets in the health sector. Hence, the present findings should be valid for a great range of public organizations, and not only those in the health sector.

In 2018 a web-based questionnaire was distributed to 2832 employees, resulting in 578 responses, which represented a response rate of 20 percent. After incomplete responses were removed, 388 responses were used in the analysis. Of these 66.2 percent were women, and 33.8 percent were men. 36.5 percent had been in the job more than 20 years, while 12.8 percent had been employed less than three years. Worth noting is that 68.9 percent had no higher education, while 27.6 had a bachelor's degree or 2-year diploma, and only 3.6 percent had a master's degree or PhD. The sample consists mainly of blue collar employees, not employees in the medical professions, explaining the low level of education. All respondents were informed that the survey had been approved by NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), except where noted. All the applied measures in the survey had all been previously validated and published, and showed satisfactory reliability and internal consistency at time of measurement. A few of the scales were adapted, resulting in slight changes from their original state. Scales that were originally worded in English were translated into Norwegian and then back to English (Brislin, 1986). Scales and items are shown in Appendix 1.

Measures.

In order to assess the usability and reliability of survey instruments, a pilot study with 80 respondents was completed first. Then, in order to validate measures and explore the factor structure, an exploratory factor analysis using principal component factoring followed by a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation was completed on the full set of data using SPSS 26.0. Finally, to test the factor structure further, another confirmatory factor analysis was performed using AMOS 26.0.

HRM approach. To measure HRM approach, an adapted version of the high-commitment HRM scale by Lepak and Snell (2002) was used. In the present study the scale is used to measure HRM approach through HRM systems or bundles of practices (Dyer & Reeves, 1995), as perceived by employees. Unlike the first order model developed by Lepak and Snell (2002), we have developed it into a second order model

where high-commitment HRM is a second order construct consisting of several first order latent factors, as indicated by a set of items. Using non-orthogonal direct oblimin rotation, CFA results showed that the factors were uncorrelated, leading us to perform the procedure again with varimax rotation (Cattell, 2012; Tabachnick et al., 2007, p. 646). Only items with eigenvalue higher than 1 and a loading of .40 or higher were considered for inclusion.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test for sampling adequacy revealed a value of .71, which Kaiser deemed as 'middling' or fairly good (Cerny & Kaiser, 1977; Kaiser, 1974), and greater than the recommended minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1974, p. 35). The Bartlett's test of sphericity showed significance at the .000-level. Items loaded on five factors which corresponded well with HR practices commonly associated with high-commitment HRM, such as "continous training, high job security, empowerment, job rotation, a focus on learning and developmental feedback, variable pay, and an extensive benefits package" (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014, p. 405; Lepak & Snell, 2002). As shown in Table 1, the factors were empowerment, training and development, recruitment, performance appraisal, and compensation. In total, the five rotated factors captured 58.31 percent of the variance. Four of the items did not load sufficiently, and three items loaded on more than one factor. These items were removed from the scale. In total the scale consisted of 13 items, and had a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .93$. The second CFA performed in AMOS confirmed that the factor structure, shown in Figure 2, was relatively solid, as 10 out of 13 factor loadings were above .70, and all factors loaded above .50.

Through the CFA we tested whether high-commitment HRM can be treated as a second order construct based on first order latent factors. This was confirmed, as the factor loadings for the second order model, also shown in Figure 2, were high. Thus, the second order factor of high-commitment HRM were based on the first order latent factors empowerment, training and development, recruitment, performance appraisal, and compensation.

Table 1: Factor loading analysis based on a principal component analysis with varimax rotation performed with SPSS for 13 items from the scale by Lepak and Snell (2002).

	Em-power-ment	Perfor-mance appra-i-sal	Com-pen-sation	Training and develop-ment	Recruit-ment
Here, employees can routinely make changes in the way that they perform their jobs.	.67				
Here, employees are empowered to make decisions.	.76				
Here, the recruitment/selection process focuses on their ability to contribute to our strategic objectives.					.70
Here, the recruitment/selection process focuses on selecting the best allround candidate, regardless of the specific job.					.80
Here, the recruitment/selection process places priority on employees' potential to learn.					.68
Here, employees have jobs that include a wide variety of tasks.				.68	
Here, training activities for employees are comprehensive.				.70	
Here, compensation/rewards for employees include an extensive benefits package.			.79		
Here, compensation/rewards for employees provide incentives for new ideas.			.73		
Here, performance appraisals for employees are based on input from multiple sources (peers, subordinates).		.74			
Here, performance appraisals for employees emphasize employee learning.		.76			
Here, performance appraisals for employees focus on their contribution to our strategic objectives.		.74			
Here, performance appraisals for employees include developmental feedback.		.67			

Leader-member exchange (LMX). The relationship between leader and employee was measured using the seven item scale by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). This scale reflects the three dimensions of respect, trust, and mutual obligation as core characteristics of a good working relationship between leader and employee. A Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' was not used, but instead a similar 5-point scale with different wording (e.g. 'none', 'small', 'moderate', 'high', 'very high') was used. A sample item is: *Regardless of the amount of formal authority your leader has, what are the chances that he/she would "bail you out" at his/her expense.* The principal component analysis (PCA) extracted only one component, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was as high as .92, and the Bartlett's test was significant (.000-level). The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of α = .93.

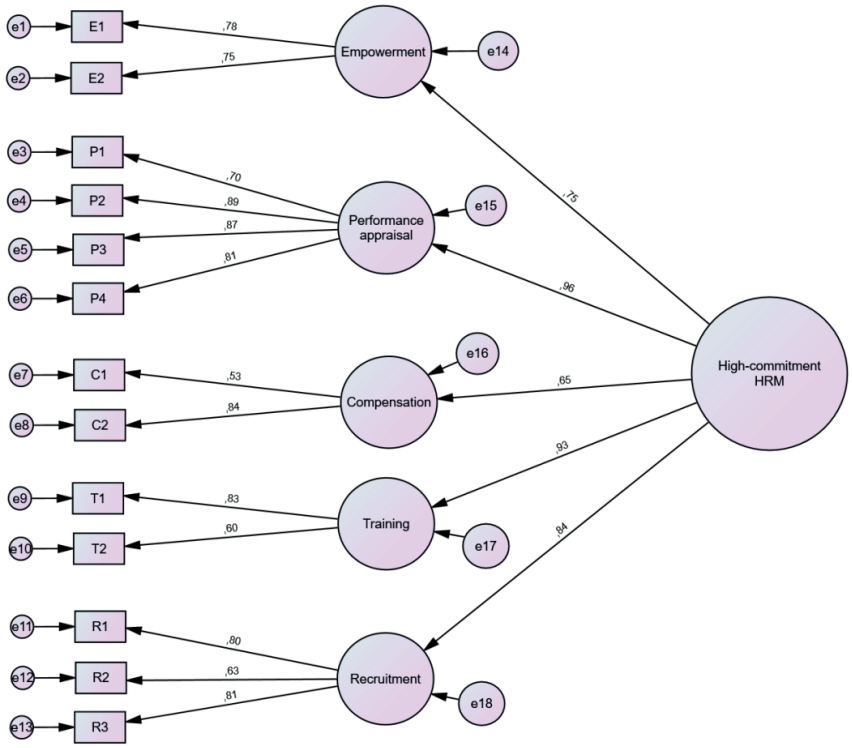

Figure 2: Factor loadings for a second order model from a confirmatory factor analysis performed with AMOS for 13 items from the scale by Lepak and Snell (2002).

Organizational commitment. Affective commitment to the organization was measured with the scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990), and adapted by Kuvaas (2006). The six item scale reflects an emotional and affective attachment to the organization such as "the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in the organization" (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 2). A sample item is: *I really feel that this organization's problems are my own*. Only one component was extracted through the PCA, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was high (.88), and significance at the .000-level was uncovered through the Bartlett's test of sphericity. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .88$.

Reputation strategy embeddedness. This was measured using the three-item strategy embeddedness scale developed by Galunic and Hermreck (2012). The wording was changed slightly to adapt the scale to strategies within reputation, and not strategies in general. The items are concerned with reputation strategy comprehension and conviction. As reputation management and internal branding implies strategic decisions made by top management, the items were reworded slightly as to fit reputation strategy purposes. A sample item is: *I am familiar with my company's strategy for handling its reputation, so that I could explain it to a new colleague.* The PCA revealed that only one component was extracted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test showed a "fairly good" value of .68, while the Bartlett's test of sphericity showed significance at the .000-level. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .80$.

Brand-congruent behaviour. A three item scale adapted by Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014) from Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) and Morhart et al. (2009) was used to measure brand-congruent behaviour. A sample item is: *I make no statements that are inconsistent with our brand communications in the media (e.g. advertising or web presence*). One component was extracted through the PCA. The Bartlett's test of sphericity proved significance at the .000-level, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .68. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .78$.

Brand development participation. Here a three item scale adapted by Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014) from Morhart et al. (2009) and (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005)

was used. The scale measures employee-initiated participation in brand development. A sample item is: *I participate in building our brand, even when I am not rewarded for doing so.* Like the previous scales, this scale reflected only one component, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .68, and The Bartlett's test of sphericity proved significance at the .000-level. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .77$.

Of the control variables gender, age, length of service, union membership, and educational level, regression analysis revealed that only age and gender had any effect on the dependent variables. Age and gender were thus included in the model, while the other control variables were not, in line with recommendations from Becker (2005). Gender was dummy-coded (female=1, male=0), while age was operationalized as provided by respondents, namely in actual numbers.

In order to test our main theoretical model and hypotheses, we used path analysis. With path analysis it is possible to test an entire model with related regression relationships (MacKinnon, 2008), and this simultaneity provides a means of estimating both direct and indirect relationships between variables (Kline, 2015; MacKinnon, 2008). In accordance with guidelines presented by Preacher et al. (2007), bootstrapping was used to confirm indirect effects. The advantages of simultaneous testing of paths came to the fore in the mediation analyses, where this approach was chosen instead of the causal steps approach by Baron and Kenny (1986), as recommended by Zhao et al. (2010) and Meule (2019). We used several good of fit-indices, based on absolute and relative indices, to evaluate whether the model fit the data; The goodness of fit index (GFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the comparative fit index (CFI) (Brown, 2015). Results revealed that model fit was acceptable: GFI = .850 (5 *df*), RMSEA = .042, CFI = .995 (Hair et al., 2010). In a second model, where we tested the hypothesized moderating effect of LMX, model fit was below acceptable (GFI = .987 (9 *df*), RMSEA = .064, CFI = .993), but this was unsurprising as inclusion of a moderator did not contribute significantly to the model (see the results section).

As the same respondents provided data for the independent and the dependent variables at one point in time, we acknowledge that common method variance might be a source of bias in the present study. To counteract this, we designed the study so as the sample size is relatively large (Katou & Budhwar, 2006), different types of measures were used (Eisenhardt & Tabrizi, 1995), a sizeable questionnaire led to an

exhaustive data-gathering process (Kintana et al., 2006), and the model was rather complex so as to avoid cognitive mapping by the respondents (Chang et al., 2010). In addition to these ex ante remedies, we conducted a common latent factor (CLF) test post ante (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) using AMOS. The CLF value (.40) was squared to get a number for the overall common method variance (.16), meaning 16 percent. Then we constrained all paths to the same regression weights, and compared the standardized regression weights in our model without the CLF and the standardized regression weights in a model with CLF (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Results revealed that the difference for all paths was below .20 and below .10 for three out of four paths, indicating little difference after adding the common latent factor. Thus, there is little common method bias in our data.

Table 2: Means, standard errors, and correlations. *Correlations = Pearson's R. **p < 0.01 level; *p < 0.05., two-tailed.*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(1) High-commitment HRM	3.02	0.85								
(2) Leader-member exchange	2.49	1.00	0.60**							
(3) Organizational commitment	2.49	1.04	0.47**	0.47**						
(4) Reputation strategy embeddedness	2.45	1.03	0.60**	0.46**	0.41**					
(5) Brand development participation	2.87	0.97	0.36**	0.34**	0.35**	0.38**				
(6) Brand-congruent behaviour	3.35	0.88	0.25**	0.23**	0.20**	0.29**	0.32**			
(7) Gender (female)	0.66	0.47	0.13*	0.03	-0.04	0.10*	0.06	0.11*		
(8) Age	4.59	1.00	0.04	0.00	0.05	0.07	-0.09	0.03	0.00	-

4. Results

Table 2 presents means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables. High-commitment HRM, leader-member exchange, and organizational commitment are all significantly related to the three dependent variables reputation strategy

embeddedness, brand-congruent behaviour, and brand development participation. The highest correlations is between high-commitment HRM and the variables reputation strategy embeddedness and leader-member exchange (Pearsons' R-value = 0.60, 0.60). The variance inflation factor (VIF) is below 2.0 in models with our three dependent variables, respectively, which is well below the threshold value of 4.0, as recommended by Hair et al. (2010) . Thus, multicollinearity is not a problem in the present study.

As shown in Table 3, standardized regression coefficients show a significant relationship between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness (β = .600, p = .000, R^2 = .358), meaning that the level of reputation strategy embeddedness in employees is higher with perceived high-commitment HRM than with low-commitment HRM. Similarly, there is a significant relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand development participation (β = .360, p = .000, R^2 = .128), which implies that the level of employee-initiated brand development participation is higher with high-commitment HRM than with low-commitment HRM. For brand-congruent behaviour the effect is lower and R^2 is low (β = .246, p = .000, R^2 = .058), but nevertheless the results are significant, indicating that high-commitment HRM is significantly related to brand-congruent behaviour as well, so as brand-congruent behaviour increases with high-commitment HRM. Thus, hypothesis 1, 2, and 3 were supported.

Table 3: Regression results.

	Reputation strategy embeddedness (H1)	Brand-congruent behaviour (H2)	Brand development participation (H3)
Constant	.741	7.742	4.894
High-commitment HRM	.600**	.246***	.360***
Adjusted R^2	.358	.058	.128
N	*388*	*388*	*388*

Relatedly, leader-member exchange is significantly related to reputation strategy embeddedness (β = .461, p = .000, R^2 = .210), telling us that the level of reputation strategy embeddedness is higher with a good than with a bad relationship between leader and employee. As shown in Table 4, there is also a positive relationship

between LMX and brand-congruent behaviour (β = .228, p = .000, R^2 = .049), and brand development participation (β = .343, p = .000, R^2 = .115), meaning that both these manifestations of brand support are stronger the better the relationship between leader and employee is. This provides support for hypothesis 4, 5, and 6.

Table 4: Regression results.			
	Reputation strategy embeddedness (H4)	Brand-congruent behaviour (H5)	Brand development participation (H6)
Constant	3.810	8.561	6.149
Leader-member exchange	.461***	.228***	.343***
Adjusted R^2	.210	.049	.115
N	*388*	*388*	*388*

Mediation.

The mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between high-commitment HRM and the three dependent variables (H7a, b, c) , and LMX and the same variables (H8a, b, c) were tested. The results, shown in Figure 3 and Table 5, supported most of these hypotheses. Indirect effects were tested with bootstrapping (95 % confidence intervals, *z* = 2000 samples) and found to be significant: High-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness (b = .08, p = 001), brand development behaviour (β = .06, p = .001), and brand-congruent behaviour (β = .07, P = .006). Following directions from Hayes (2017, p. 116) and Meule (2019, p. 2), there is, even if the path between organizational commitment and brand-congruent behaviour is not significant, still a significant indirect effect. Thus, hypothesis 7a, 7b, and 7c were supported. Similar results were found with LMX as independent variable: LMX and reputation strategy embeddedness (β = .07, p = 001), brand-congruent behaviour (β = .06, P = .009), and brand development behaviour (β = .06, p = .001). Hence, again following Hayes (2017) and Meule (2019), hypothesis 8a, 8b, and 8c were supported.

Determining effect sizes in mediation models is not straightforward, as the size of an indirect effect "is complex because it is the product of (here) two regression coefficients and does not fit conveniently into the framework of existing effect sizes"

(Preacher & Kelley, 2011, p. 95). Among several suggested measures, the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect is commonly reported in single mediator-studies (Ditlevsen et al., 2005; Fairchild & McQuillin, 2010). It is not a true measure of proportion, as the "quantity can exceed 1.0 or be negative (...), which implies that it is not a proportion" (Preacher & Kelley, 2011, p. 97). However, as this is "not a limitation per se" (Preacher & Kelley, 2011, pp. 97-98), we calculated the ratio. The results, shown in Table 5, reveal that organizational commitment mediated a modest share of the total effect of high-commitment HRM on reputation strategy embeddedness (0.16[7]). Comparably, it mediated a much higher share of the total effect of LMX and high-commitment HRM on brand-congruent behaviour (0.46[7] and 0.47[7], successively).

Table 5: Direct, indirect and total effects.

Dependent variable: Reputation strategy embeddedness					
	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Mediated effect ratio	Result
High-commitment HRM	.42***	.08***	.50***	0.16	H7a supported
Leader-member exchange	.09	.07***	.16***	0.44	H8a supported
Dependent variable: Brand-congruent behaviour					
	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Mediated effect ratio	Result
High-commitment HRM	.08	.07**	.15*	0.47	H7b supported
Leader-member exchange	.07	.06**	.13*	0.46	H8b supported
Dependent variable: Brand development participation					
	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Mediated effect ratio	Result
High-commitment HRM	.18**	.07***	.24**	0.25	H7c supported
Leader-member exchange	.14*	.06***	.20***	0.30	H8c supported

Moderation and moderated mediation.

[7] *If presented as a proportion, this would have been stated as percent of the total effect, e.g. 16 percent.*

Using the Process macro for SPSS, variables were first mean-centered to avoid high multicollinearity with the interaction term (Aiken et al., 1991; Hayes, 2017). An interaction term between high-commitment HRM and LMX was created and included in a second model, reflecting people management encompassing both HRM and LMX, and set up to test for moderation and moderated mediation. First, LMX was tested as moderator of the relationship between high-commitment HRM and the three outcome variables.

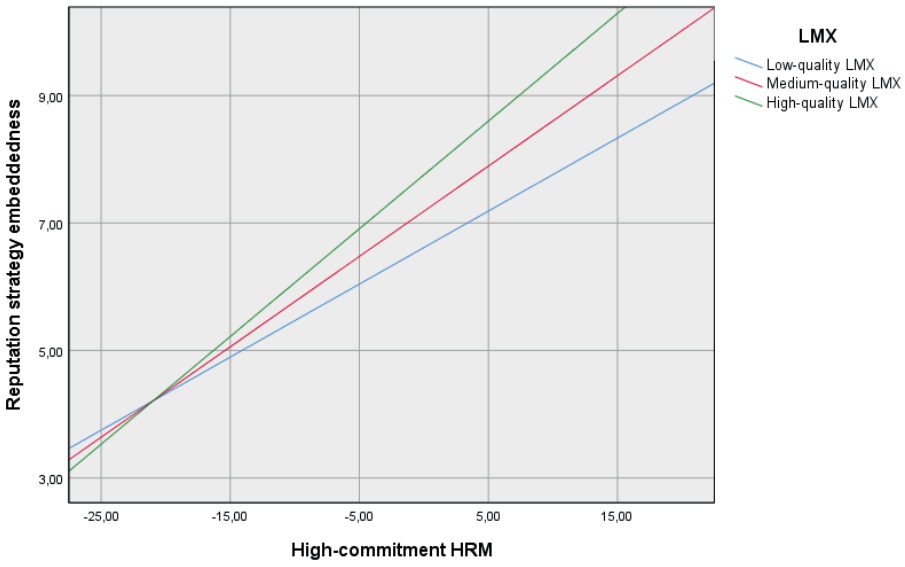

Figure 3: Slopes for the interaction effect between high-commitment HRM and LMX on reputation strategy embeddedness.

Standardized regression weights from Amos indicated a moderating effect of LMX on the relationship between HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness (.0521) and brand-congruent behaviour (.176), but not between HRM and brand development participation (-.0121). Bootstrapping results using Process showed that the moderating effect of LMX on the relationship between HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness was significant, since the the p-value is low and the confidence interval did not contain zero (.004, p = .012, [.001 , .007]). This applies to both low, medium and high quality of the LMX relationship. When plotting the slopes, as shown in Figure 3,

we see that the level of reputation strategy embeddedness not only increased with rising levels of high-commitment HRM, but also rose more and reached an overall higher level with high-quality LMX than with low-quality LMX, confirming that hypothesis 9a was supported.

Our analyses showed no significant moderation effect of leader-member exchange on the relationship between high-commitment HRM and brand-congruent behaviour. With brand-congruent behaviour as dependent variable bootstrapping analyses revealed that the interaction term between high-commitment HRM and LMX was not significant, as the confidence interval contained zero (.000, p = .699, [-.002 , .003]). Hence, hypothesis 9b was not supported. Similar were the results with brand development participation as dependent variable. Here, bootstrapping revealed that the interaction term between high-commitment HRM and LMX was negative and not significant (-.001, p = .656, [-.005 , .003]), meaning that there was no significant moderation effect. Thusly, hypothesis 9c was not supported.

The Process macro (model 7 and 8) was used to determine whether a significant conditional indirect effect (Hayes, 2017; Hernandez et al., 2016; Preacher et al., 2007), often termed moderated mediation, was present, and whether the hypotheses 10a, 10b, and 10c were supported. Results indicated that there was no significant moderated mediation, as LMX did not moderate the proposed mediated relationships between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness (Index of Moderated Mediation = .0002, BootSE = .0003 [-.0003 , .0009]), brand-congruent behaviour (Index of Moderated Mediation = .0001, BootSE = -.0002 [-.0002 , .0006]), and brand development participation (Index of Moderated Mediation = .0003, BootSE = -.0003 [-.0004 , .0011]). As the lower bound of the confidence interval is very close to zero, results should be treated with some care. Yet, we conclude that hypotheses 10a, 10b, and 10c were not supported.

In sum, the results indicate that studying HRM and leadership together through examining LMX as a moderator between high-commitment HRM and out three outcome variables contributes little to our model, as model fit was below acceptable and only one of six moderation-related hypotheses were supported. Thus, Figure 4 depicts the first of our two models, not including LMX as a moderator, as this model fits the data best.

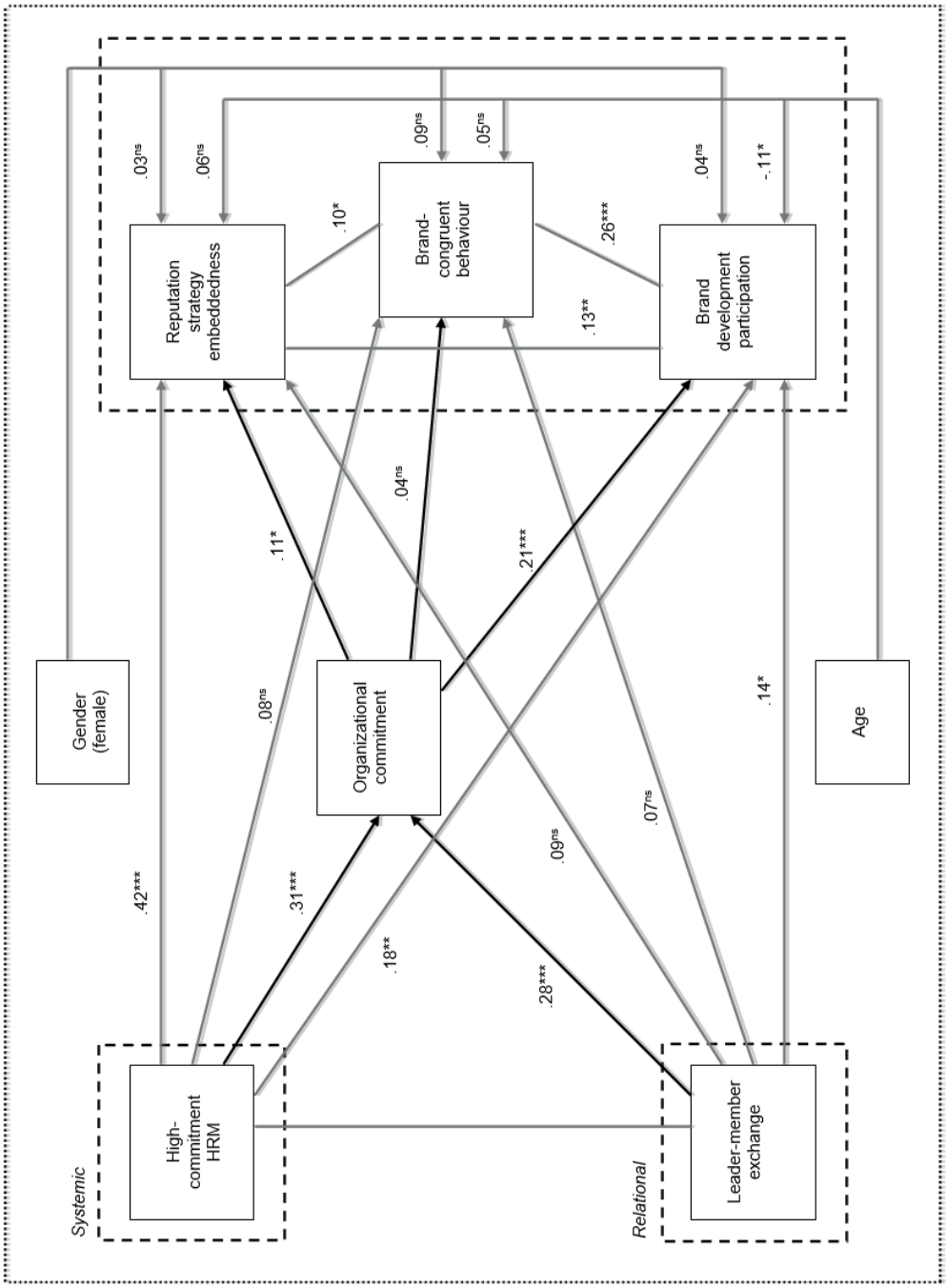

Figure 4: The first model with all paths and effects.

5. Discussion

The present paper is a response to calls for research into the internal sides of branding in organizations (Leijerholt et al., 2019; Müller, 2017; Piehler et al., 2018). Our study indicates that both high-commitment HRM and leader-member exchange facilitates the outcome of employee brand support, and that, as hypothesized, organizational commitment mediates the relationship between them. We believe that our investigation of indirect relationships between HRM approach and the three manifestations of employee brand support strenghens the validity of our findings. In contrast to Chang et al. (2012) and Burmann and Zeplin (2005), who did not check for mediating or moderating effects, we found mediation and some moderation. Our findings are consistent with related findings regarding HRM approach and different outcome variables in HRM research.

Theoretical contributions

The findings indicate that the theoretical links between high-commitment HRM and social exchange theory are strong, and that the elements of reciprocity and mutual commitment underpin internal branding strategies leading to employee brand support. In line with the call for research on "managerial instruments" (Piehler et al., 2018, p. 198), we argue that the study advances existing research in several ways.

First, our findings provide a new and deeper understanding of employee brand support. A few studies find a link between employee brand support and high-commitment HRM (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Chang et al., 2012; Dhiman & Arora, 2019), which is confirmed by the present study. But our study presents another layer of understanding, namely that successful employee brand support depends on high-quality leader-member exchanges. In order to get employees to support the brand as brand ambassadors or brand champions, there should be high-quality relations between employees and managers. Through the role of LMX, internal branding should be viewed as a social exchange. This stands in contrast to studies carried out in Angloamerican work settings short on the Nordic model's focus on dialogue,

cooperation, and codetermination, which in itself facilitates positive LMX relationships.

Second, by studying HRM and leadership simultaneously, we did find some interaction between HRM and LMX, and a moderating effect of LMX on the relationship between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness. Here yet another layer for understanding is presented: Not only does employee brand support depend on high-quality LMX relationships, it depends on the interrelationship of such LMX relationships and high-commitment HRM, as well. Thus, employee brand support is achieved when the HRM-based systemic factor work together with the LMX-based relational factor. However, as this finding applies to only one of the three manifestations of brand support and the inclusion of LMX as a moderator does not contribute singificantly to the model, we encourage other scholars to delve into the particular matter of whether HRM and leadership combined will influence brand support among employees.

Third, the study presents a new perspective on internal branding. By viewing internal branding as a social exchange, we present a third way of conceptualizing internal branding. We neither see it as a normative script for practitioners (Miles & Mangold, 2004), nor as a menacing threat to employee identity (Müller, 2017), but as a new form of social exchange. We advance the optimistic view of internal branding as normative scripts and the sceptical view of internal branding as a threat by conceptualizing internal branding as an exchange of intrinsic benefits for both employers and employees.

Some scholars, however, have interpreted the social exchange as a rehabilitary tool for economic man, a stance which can hardly be justified when reading Blau's original text (Blau, 1964). He stated that an *economic* exchange involves a contractual transaction of specific, tangible resources related to extrinsic and material rewards, whereas a *social* exchange involves transactions of less specific and less tangible resources related to intrinsic rewards. Herein lies the principle of reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which in reality is about repaying or returning intrinsic, social favours. As high-commitment HRM has been found to provide employees with such intrinsic rewards, and we find significant relationships between high-commitment HRM and our three employee brand support variables, the principle of reciprocity seems to be valid for our study and for internal branding research in

general. Our contribution will thus lead to a deeper understanding of internal branding strategies, where intrinsic benefits are key to turning employees into dedicated brand ambassadors.

Admittedly, not all leader-employee relationships are social exchanges. In instances where the power balance between employer and employee is skewed to the advance of the employer, or where a "dark side" of HRM generates negative consequences for employees (Jensen et al., 2013), the relationship may not be characterized by an exchange of intrinsic rewards and mutual commitment between the two parties. We contend that this is more of a reality in Angloamerican work organizations than in, as in the present study, the highly unionized Norwegian public health sector operating within in the Nordic model, with its general emphasis on employee-friendly HRM based on cooperation, dialogue and mutual respect between employer and employees (Byrkjeflot, 2001). In our research setting the power balance is arguably more even and the "dark side" is less prominent than in Angloamerican work organizations.

Practical implications

As the setting for the study is a university hospital organized as a state enterprise, the findings contribute to public sector internal branding. Due to increasing interest in internal branding in a more marketized public sector (Gromark & Melin, 2013; Wæraas, 2008), a need to adjust branding principles and strategies to fit the public sector of today has been proposed (Wæraas & Sataøen, 2014). Our results highlight the importance of both the systemic HRM approach, and the relational social exchange of intrinsic benefits between employee and leader. Both a commitment-based HRM approach and a positive leader-member exchange were found to create organizational commitment, which again lead to brand support among employees in the crossfire of conflicting demands of conformity and differentiation in public hospitals (Byrkjeflot & Neby, 2008). As we found some interaction between high-commitment HRM and LMX, an implication for practitioners is that high-quality people management, as perceived by employees, seems to work when organizations seek to get employees to support their brand. As these findings mirror findings in HRM research, an important

implication is that HRM rooted in trust, empowerment, and a two-way commitment will facilitate brand support in public organizations.

Due to quasi-marketization and competitive measures introduced in the last two decades, public organizations are becoming more similar to private organizations. Hence, our findings may prove to be valid for private organizations as well as for public organizations. A great deal of the HRM studies that unveil positive relationships between commitment-based HRM and and a diverse set of employee-related outcomes are carried out in the private sector. As we come to similar conclusions in the public sector, it may be an indication of increasing similarities between the public and private sector. A counter-argument might be that public organizations have a more long-term perspective and a stronger focus on serving the public interest (Rainey, 2009), but at the same time such regards seem to be getting more attention in private companies (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Whetten et al., 2002). Nevertheless, the implications of our findings should be applicable for a wide spectrum of employees in various organizational settings, as called for by Müller (2017). We might, though, have gotten brand-specific results if we had used brand-specific HRM scales and constructs, as done by Chang et al. (2012) and Burmann and Zeplin (2005). We do use brand-specific scales and constructs for employee brand support, but we believe that general scales will capture the element of human resource management in relation to internal branding for a greater spectrum of employees.

We find the extent that our findings mirror findings in HRM research somewhat striking, as relatively few scholars have investigated the role of HRM approach in internal branding, and there is "a paucity of conceptual and empirical papers adressing this important issue" (Piehler et al., 2018, p. 197). While Piehler et al. (2018) call for research into this, others suggest further studies on "how brand-centred control affects employees selves and the shifting boundaries between work and private lives" (Müller, 2017, p. 912), or call for studies on internal communication, training, and decision making in the branding process (Leijerholt et al., 2019). However, challenges related to creating employee brand support are reminiscent of challenges related to successful human resource management. The key task for practictioners is to get employees to think and act the way their employer wants and in accordance with organizational policies, e.g. employee brand support, and to comply with corporate values and live up to an organization's given mindset. In light of this, the findings

should present clues to practitioners on how to get employees to act in brand-supporting ways.

Limitations and further research.

Like most other studies the present study has limitations. First, the data were gathered at one point in time only, which means that we are not able to make inferences about causal relationships. Neither can we rule out chances of reverse causality. Although we find that organizational commitment has a mediating effect in our model and that there is a significant relationship between LMX and organizational commitment, it may be that the level of organizational commitment in employees affect their relationship with their leader, and possibly also their perception of the organization's HRM approach.

A second limitation is the survey response rate, which ideally should be higher than 20 percent. Although the sample is fairly large, results should be treated with some caution. A third limitation is related to our sample. The sample consisted mainly of blue collar employees, for example porters, medical secretaries, pharmacy assistants, assistant nurses, and laundry operators, not belonging to any of the big medical professions to be found in large hospitals. It may be that data from a sample with employees in the professions would yield different results than the results in the present study. We encourage other scholars to include professions like medical doctors and nurses in similar studies.

Social exchange theory relates to long-term, lasting social relations based on intrinsic benefits, but Shore et al. (2006) argue that exchange relationships may be both of the social type and of the short-term, transactional, economic type based on financial benefits. Kuvaas et al. (2012) find that mainly social, not economical, exchange LMX relationships are positively related to relevant outcome variables. As follows, a fourth limitation is that we do not separate between social and economic exchanges. To do that and investigate whether social and economic LMX relationships differ in their role as mediators and moderators is a possible avenue for future research.

All in all, based on the present findings we would, though cautiously, propose that the theoretical and empirical links between internal branding and research on

people management, again encompassing HRM and LMX, are so pronounced that it might be fruitful for scholars to study HRM and LMX further through the lens of internal branding. Hence, branding strategies may represent a promising setting for HRM and LMX studies.

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5.0. Discussion

Three intertwined and, to some extent, recurring themes are the trajectories that constitute the foundation for this dissertation, namely HRM, employee voice, and organizational branding. The overarching research question was formulated accordingly: What is the relationship between organizational branding, HRM, and employee voice in modern work organizations? Specifically, and in relation to identified research gaps, HRM and voice are studied through organizational branding. The dissertation's four articles sought to fill the identified research gaps and provide answers to the research questions for each article. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the primary intra-organizational facilitators for active employee strategy support, and how do these facilitators conform to the control-commitment continuum? (article nr. 1)

2. What is the role of HRM in reputation management, and what are the implications of reputation-oriented HRM for employee voice? (article nr. 2)

3. How do managers in public sector organizations experience and handle the tension between empowering employees as dedicated brand ambassadors while at the same time regulating their voice, and what are the possible implications for the public interest? (article nr. 3)

4. What kind of people management, incorporating HRM approach and LMX quality as perceived by employees, facilitates internal branding, and, specifically, employee brand support? (article nr. 4)

The research behind each article produced relatively clear findings which empirically answered the research questions. The findings, included diverging and converging factors, are discussed in the present section. First, a summary of each paper is provided.

5.1. Main findings and research gaps

5.1.1. Article nr. 1

In the first article, titled "Trust and shout: HRM as facilitator for active strategy support", the overall aim was to examine antecedents to employee support of strategy, and to analyze the identified antecedents in light of HRM approach and the control-commitment continuum, something which has received little scholarly attention. As branding is a distinctly strategic activity, this widened perspective produced clues to what practitioners should do to ensure that their employees actively support the chosen branding efforts of the organization. Through a literature review spanning 20 years of research, 12 core antecedents, termed facilitators, were uncovered. As hypothesized, the most prevalent facilitators gravitated towards the commitment side, while some gravitated towards the control side of the continuum. These, however, were mainly identified in studies with manager-dominated samples. In sum, a commitment-oriented HRM approach is most effective for getting employees to support strategy, and thus, branding. Pertinent to the research question, commitment-gravitating facilitators are the primary facilitators for active strategy support among employees.

Revisiting research gap nr. 1

A task faced by many organizations is how they effectively get employees to act and behave in ways that support the organizations' strategies, and thus, their brands. Surveying the literature revealed that herein laid a relevant research gap, as these questions had not been significantly explored. As the identified facilitators for employee strategy support were analyzed in light of theory on HRM approach, specifically commitment vs. control-oriented HRM, it came to view that most, albeit not all, facilitators gravitated towards the commitment side of the control vs. commitment continuum. Findings, as presented in the article "Trust and shout: HRM as facilitator for active strategy support", indicated that commitment-gravitating HRM practices are most effective in getting employees to act in strategy and brand-supporting ways, although some control-gravitating facilitators, as well, were

identified as effective. Responding to the call for research by Hitt et al. (2017) and Beer et al. (2015), the findings contribute to the gap by providing a link between HRM approach and strategy support, including a deeper understanding of what it is that builds and shapes such support by employees.

5.1.2. Article nr. 2

In the second article, titled "When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice", we explored the possible tension between organizational desire to creating a flattering reputation in the eyes of external stakeholders, and critical and unflattering communication by employees through prohibitive voice. The paper unveiled that organizations did not trust employees to be committed corporate ambassadors, as several scholars argue enthusiastically for. Instead the tension was handled through technocratic control and coercive HRM, leading to restrictions on employees' scope for use of voice, and in particular, use of prohibitive voice. Since HRM was utilized for this purpose, reputation management was in reality people management. For the research question, this implied that HRM, that is, coercive and control-oriented HRM, is being actively used in reputation management, which negatively affects employees' scope for prohibitive voice.

Revisiting research gap nr. 2

Exposed to market mechanisms, most organizations engage in organizational branding and try to build and uphold a flattering reputation in the eyes of external stakeholders, specifically potential students, patients and clients. The tension between reputation building and employee voice, including the possible risk of unflattering employee communication, in the form of employee voice, for reputation-oriented organizations, and the role of HRM in dealing with it, has hardly been adressed by scholars. It is mostly unchartered territory, and represents a prominent gap in the literature. In response to recent calls for research by Mumby (2016) and Müller (2017), this gap is adressed in the article "When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice", which draws light to communication which managers see as unfavourable. The study provides empirical support to the hypothesis

that such communication, termed prohibitive voice, is regarded by managers as negative, since it may impose harm to the reputation of organizations. This type of voice represents a major reputational risk. The risk is seen as so big and the consequences for market position, student popularity and funding levels so severe that it trumps the hailed propositions of turning employees into brand ambassadors or brand champions. To deal with it, executives chose to handle the tension between reputation and voice by using the HRM function to impose technocratic control and coercive HRM measures in order to restrict the use of this type of voice. The findings contribute to existing research by advancing the importance of people management aspects of reputation management. They provide an extended understanding of how HRM is being used to regulate and restrict employee voice, and, as follows, point towards an inconsistency in the way that organizations deal with the tension between reputation and voice: Using coercive HRM to impose voice restrictions is a way of forcing employees to speak positively of their organization, which seems to be the opposite of trusting employees to be brand ambassadors. It also contradicts research on HRM showing that HRM based on commitment rather than control is the most effective way to get employees to go the extra mile. The outcome of a coercive approach, can, in any instance, be that employees turn into brand saboteurs.

5.1.3. Article nr. 3

The third article, titled "Silence from the brands: Message control, brand ambassadorship, and the public interest", deals with the notion of internal branding, which effectively is about "selling" the brand to employees so that they, in turn, will "sell" the brand to external stakeholders. This too has been met with optimistic writings, from practitioners in particular, on how it can turn employees into brand ambassadors. However, in a marketized upper secondary school sector where schools compete for students and, thus, funding, brand ambassadorship seemed to be an unrealistic proposition. In reality, voice restrictions imposed upon teachers, in the form of message control, was the preferred strategy by school management. Due to strong market mechanisms, brand image concerns trumped internal branding and brand ambassadorship. Educators demonstrate and express a consequence of such voice restrictions, namely a pronounced public silence at the expense of the public

interest. As for the research question, managers in public sector organizations, in this research setting secondardy schools, handle the tension between brand ambassadorship and brand-supportive use of voice by imposing voice restrictions on employees. This effectively functions as a silencer on employees, negatively affecting public debate and the public interest.

Revisiting research gap nr. 3

Moving the perspective from external to internal branding, it might be challenging for organizations exposed to market pressure to anchor the desired brand image in the hearts and minds of their employees, so that they in turn will promote the brand to external stakeholders. Optimistic scholars (Martin & Hetrick, 2006; Ind & Bjerke, 2007) rave about how employers will trust employees to act as brand champions and brand ambassadors, and "sell" the brand externally. However, it remains unclear whether organizations actually will allow for such a trust and dedication when market pressure is strong, the brand is particularly precious, and much is at stake. In addition, possible consequences of not allowing for it are little explored. Based on these shortcomings and distinct gap in existing scholarship, Leijerholt et al. (2019) called for more research into internal sides of public sector branding. The gap and call for research is adressed in the article "Silence from the brands: Message control, brand ambassadorship, and the public interest". The study unveils that the optimism around brand ambassadorship does not reflect real life in organizations, and seems unrealistic as too much is at stake, which seems to be the case for public sector upper secondary schools in Oslo facing the quasi-market with competition for students and funding. Similar to the study among hospital workers presented in article nr. 2, a core contribution is to highlight that internal branding is not a mere operationalization of brand properties or visible brand symbols, but a much more complex and multifaceted management of people, that is, of employees. Relatedly, the need for branding by marketized schools represents an extention of research showing a need for legitimacy and even similarity in public sector organizations (Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015; Wæraas & Sataøen, 2015). Instead of allowing for brand ambassadorship, restrictions in the form of voice control are being imposed, in direct opposition to the notion of voice as a means to democratic gains through transparency and flow of information to all

stakeholders. The result is public silence on the expense of the public interest, which is a core finding. A growing divide between privileged and marginalized schools, with the latter experiencing waning popularity, fewer high-performing students, a higher dropout rate, and less funding (Haugen, 2020), cannot be said to serve the public interest. This is an important contribution, since serving the public interest is exactly what public sector organizations are expected to do. Such an outcome also seems to be at odds with the Norwegian tradition of *social inclusion* in the education sector.

5.1.4. Article nr. 4

How do HRM approach and leader-member exchange affect how internal branding leads to employee brand support? This question was examined in the fourth article, titled "Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM approach and LMX in internal branding". The roles of HRM and LMX were examined with a path model testing for mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation in a sample consisting of employees at a public sector hospital. Findings show that high-commitment HRM and LMX facilitate internal branding and three manifestions of brand support, namely, reputation strategy embeddedness, brand-congruent behaviour, and brand development participation. In addition, the relationships were mediated by organizational commitment, while LMX moderated between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness. Answering the research question, it is mainly a high-commitment HRM approach which faciliates successful internal branding and, as follows, brand support among employees.

Revisiting research gap nr. 4

The role of HRM approach and leader-member exchange in internal branding has not been sufficiently adressed in the literature, and neither the role of HRM, LMX, nor a possible interaction between HRM and LMX have been studied in relation to employee brand support. Herein lies a gap in the literature. Several scholars (Müller, 2017; Piehler et al., 2018; Leijerholt et al., 2019) have called for research into internal sides of organizational branding. To provide a contribution to this gap, a quantitative study presented in the article "Mind anchors and heart grips: The role of HRM approach and

LMX in internal branding" was carried out. Findings reveal that both HRM approach on the organizational level and LMX on a more individual level, with a dyadic interaction between leader and employee, play an important role for internal branding purposes. The mediating effect of organizational commitment and the moderating effect of LMX[8] represents a contribution to and an extension of existing research, and it particularly extends research into brand-centered HRM, brand-specific leadership, and brand-oriented leadership, as an empirical link between internal branding strategies and HRM approach is established.

5.2. Explicating the main argument

While each article offers answers to the respective research questions, the findings provide partial answers to the overall research question: What is the relationship between organizational branding, HRM, and employee voice in work organizations? This section outlines and discusses the main findings of the dissertation, and maps the findings, with both empirical and and theoretical contributions, onto the overall research question in order to present a clear picture of the dissertation as a coherent whole.

5.2.1. Empirical contributions

The empirical contributions of the articles and the thesis as a whole are achieved through the use of a triangulation approach (Flick, 2004), with a multi-method design and data from a set of different sources. As illustrated in Figure 1, the articles discuss how New Public Management and other neoliberal management ideas and practices based on market principles gave the brand a more prominent position in the governing of private and public organizations (article nr. 2). Such a 'brand society' took the need for organizational branding to new heights. The increasing importance of branding affected organizations' HRM approach, as they saw it as a crucial tool for getting employees to support and act in accordance with the brand.

[8] *Between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness.*

The main empirical contributions of the dissertation apply to the stages *after* branding has been established as important for organizations. Figure 2 provides a closer explication of the findings relating to these stages. Executives in most organizations face a choice of what kind of HRM approach they will implement, for example, a choice of where to position the HRM approach on the continuum between commitment and control. The present research indicates that the choice is affected by the presence of employee voice. Employee communication and use of voice may represent a risk to any organization engaged in branding efforts, as critical and prohibitive voice can counteract brand building efforts. In marketized settings, for example in schools and hospitals competing for students and patients, and, thus, necessary public funding, employee voice enters the picture as a complicating element. When an important task is to build, maintain and protect the brand, employees' scope for voice represents a possible risk. This applies especially to critical and prohibitive voice, which often is seen as non-supportive. In light of the risk of voice hurting the brand, organizations seem to disregard internal branding and brand ambassadorship strategies, which gravitate towards commitment, and choose a low-commitment and control-oriented HRM approach in order to reduce or eliminate the risk which employee use of voice represents. As illustrated in Figure 2, the result is both little scope for voice and imposed voice restrictions (article nr. 2 and 3), and a situation where employees do not dare to take part in public debate, which hardly serves the public interest (article nr. 3).

5.2.2. The role of voice

Thus, while each paper answered the overall research question only partially, viewed together they present a more complete answer to the overall research question. As neoliberal ideas set up a scene, in reality a market or quasi-market, for branding, HRM policies became more crucial in organizations' attempts to get employees to support the brand and act in brand-strenghtening ways. However, in public sector organizations, which main mission is not to create revenue, employees in the Nordic countries, including Norway, have traditionally been allowed to speak their mind about matters regarding their job and workplace. In a comparative perspective use of

voice among employees, both in the public and private sector, is tolerated and is more widespread in the Nordics than in most other countries.

The position of voice is interesting not only in the Nordics; it seems to represent a more general puzzle for brand-oriented organizations, as any use of prohibitive voice can be a risk for an organization's reputation and brand independently of the commonality of voice. Arguably there is a certain universality to it; the duality of brand building and employee voice seems to carry an inherent tension. Handling the tension can be said to be a puzzle for organizations. Moreover, voice appears to hold a special position in the interwoven relationships between branding, HRM, and employee voice. The present research indicates that voice is an aspect that directs the choice of HRM approach for organizations engaged in branding. In article nr. 2 and 3 the risk of unwanted use of voice by employees sways the HRM approach in the respective organizations towards control.

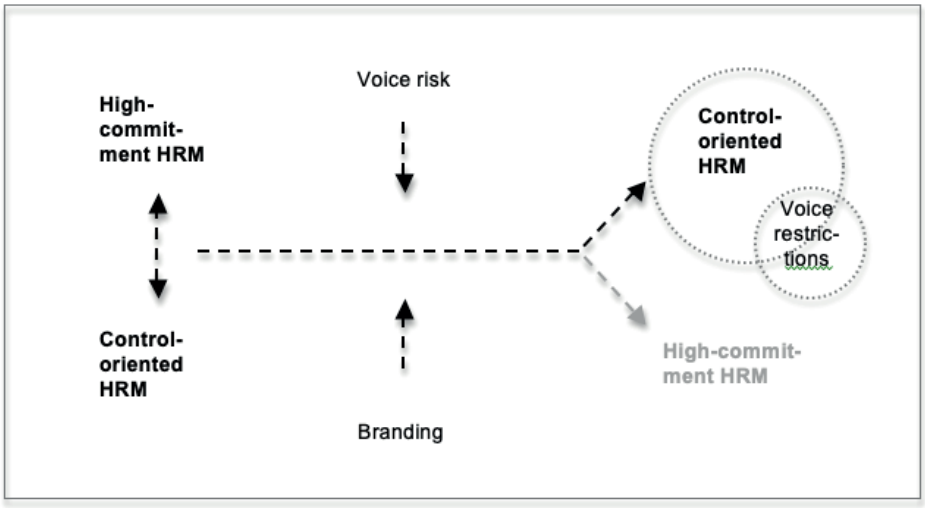

Figure 2: A further explication of the findings and the role of voice.

5.3. Theoretical contributions

While theoretical contributions are discussed in each article, such contributions are arguably valid for the dissertation in general and applicable to the dissertation's main argument.

5.3.1. Introducing strategy support enhancing HRM

To achieve employee support of strategy and, thus, branding, article nr. 1 gives an overview of the literature on facilitators for such a support, with most of the facilitators gravitating towards commitment as the underlying feature of the HRM approach. To understand and illustrate the importance of this particular type of HRM, it is pivotal not only to identify so-called people factors which affect strategy implementation, as strategy "success (…) is very much dependent on the human side of a project" (Minarro-Viseras et al., 2005, p. 8), but also to find out what it is that shapes and creates such factors. In this regard, the role of an organization's HRM approach is fundamental, and it involves the question of how the HRM function best can contribute to establish such factors, so that they can successfully facilitate employee brand support. Prior research highlights dimensions of such a support, for example through the constructs of strategically aligned behaviour and strategically aligned actions (Gagnon & Michael, 2003; Gagnon et al., 2008; Van Riel et al., 2009), strategic and strategy alignment (Boswell, 2006), strategy commitment (Jaros, 2010; Barton & Ambrosini, 2013), and strategy embeddedness (Galunic & Hermreck, 2012), but studies on the role of HRM in facilitating strategy and brand support are few and far between. The construct of strategic HRM, which "covers the overall HRM strategies adopted by business units and companies, and tries to measure their impacts on performance" (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009, p. 64), seems to downplay the part that a) employee support of strategy is important for achieving strategy success, and b) HRM plays a key role in creating such a support. Closer come Burmann and Zeplin (2005), Chang et al. (2012), and Dhiman and Arora (2019), who use the construct of brand-centered HRM, defined as "HR practices that make employees produce positive attitude and behaviours towards the brands" (Chang et al., 2012, p. 629), achieved through psychological links between employee and brand. Relatedly, brand-specific leadership (Morhart et al., 2009) and brand-oriented leadership (Terglav et al., 2016) touch upon HRM in relation to brand support, as well. Notwithstanding, few

theoretical constructs directly acknowledges that HRM is a crucial factor when the task at hand is to get employees to deeply and wholeheartedly support organizational strategies, including branding. To overcome this shortcoming, the construct of *strategy support enhancing HRM (SSEHRM)* was introduced. The construct, defined as HRM which facilitates employee behaviour that actively and directly contributes to strategy realization, represents an important theoretical contribution as it acknowledges what the main body of research tells us, namely that HRM which stimulates employee commitment instead of obedience is the most effective way forward when strategy and brand support is the desired outcome. Relatedly, the construct of *active strategy support* was introduced to emphasize that employee support is not real until it materializes itself in actual behaviour and real actions. Together this pair of constructs represents an alternative to strategic HRM which seems better in line with existing research and empirical findings. This theoretical contribution is tied to the dissertation's main research question, particularly the relationship between organizational branding and HRM.

5.3.2. Social exchange facilitates brand support

The prominent commitment-gravitating dimension in the most prominent facilitators identified in article nr. 1 points towards research showing positive outcomes of psychological bonds between employee and employer. Such bonds, established through psychological contracts and positive social exchanges, are enforced by commitment-gravitating facilitators. Of particular importance are social exchanges. Social exchange theory, with its core elements of reciprocity and mutual commitment between employee and employer, seems to produce high-quality relations between the two parties, which implicates a) that employers trust and empower employees to be brand ambassadors or brand champions, and b) that employees commit themselves to take on a role as brand ambassador or champion. Burmann and Zeplin (2005), and Dhiman and Arora (2019) do not tie brand support to social exchanges, while Chang et al. (2012) state that their findings are consistent with social exchange theory and psychological ownership of the brand through brand-centered HRM. The present research extend and expands on this research. Yet, the scholarship of Chang et al. (2012) is within marketing and they focus on customer satisfaction as an outcome

variable, signalling that customer dimension is key. Withal, in the present research the importance of social exchanges take on a deeper meaning, as branding shapes meanings, identities and values, while marketing is more about market awareness and customer contentment. Moreover, we provide a direct approach, as we argue that the existence of positive social exchanges is an antecedent to employee brand support. This perspective represents an essential theoretical contribution. As it can directly be connected to call for research into internal sides of organizational branding (Müller, 2017; Piehler et al., 2018; Leijerholt et al., 2019), it arguably advances theoretical insights into the relationship between organizational branding and HRM, and, thus, the main research question of the dissertation.

5.3.3. Internal branding is a social exchange

Employers use internal branding in order to encourage brand supporting behaviour among employees. To facilitate for successful internal branding organizations must acknowledge that a ”brand’s values need to be anchored in their minds and hearts". (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2010, p. 182). The anchoring of the brand values resembles the psychological bonds that high-commitment HRM sets up between employer and employee (Arthur, 1994; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2016). The bonds are made up of two elements, namely a two way-commitment and the principle of reciprocity, which are the two core elements in long-term social exchanges of intrinsic benefits, as outlined in social exchange theory. In article nr. 4 the quality of the social exchange is measured with the leader-member exchange (LMX) scale (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), contributing to empirical findings.

A distinct theoretical contribution is that through the role of LMX, internal branding should be viewed as a social exchange between employer and employee. Successful internal branding is about developing commitment to the brand in employees, which in turn will enable them to behave in brand-supporting ways (Miles & Mangold, 2004). Arguably, this is achieved by creating positive social exchanges in line with the Nordic model’s aspects of cooperation and dialogue between employer and employee. The novelty of this theoretical approach is best described by stating what it is not. In prior research internal branding is mainly seen from two different angles and and understood in two different ways. Mitchell (2002) and Miles and

Mangold (2004) present internal branding as *a framework* for how it should be done, including specific guidelines for a successful process and with certain companies, among them Southwest Airlines, as model companies for how it should be done. Müller (2017), on the other hand, sees internal branding as somewhat of a threat to employee identity. Calling it brand-centred control, she analyzes internal branding in an overall branding context, and finds that it not only works as an internal normative control measure, but also ”engages an external audience (customer, fans, and the wider public) as an additional source of normative control” (Müller, 2017, p. 895), which represents a threat to the identities of employees exposed to it.

At the center of our contribution is understanding internal branding in a third, and alternative, way, namely as a social exchange. Internal branding is neither seen as a set of guidelines to practitioners nor as a direct threat to personal identity, but takes on a different understanding where the social exchange takes center stage. It is a positive theoretical stance based on a notion that success is achieved through a positive exchange of intrinsic benefits between the two parties. An alternative and more negative stance would have placed the focal lens on power differences and differing interests within the organisation. Analyzing the data in light of social exchange theory provides another focus, where a good relationship between employer and employee is what matters most. Arguably this represents a constructive standing that could benefit all stakeholders, specifically both employer and employee.

5.3.4. Voice alters the link between internal branding and social exchange

As shown in article nr. 2 and 3, the situation is altered when organizations face high market pressure and the risk of brand-hurting use of voice by employees. Then many organizations seem to alter their internal branding strategies and include cocercion and control in their efforts to protect their brand. The tension between brand building and employee voice seems to represent a risk regarded as so big that organizations do not dare to engage in internal branding without diverting to coercive measures. As discussed in section 5.2.2, the present findings indicate that this risk is the decisive factor for the ways that branding-oriented organizations deal with employee voice, specifically how they use the HRM function and use HRM practices which gravitate towards coercion and control.

The findings indicate that organizations regard use of prohibitive voice as a signal to managers of that employees do not contribute to the social exchange in a positive way. This is especially pertinent in situations where managers perceive the social exchange to be of the high-quality type, partly as a result of efforts by themselves or the organization, for example by efforts made through the HRM approach. In such a situation the organizations may view prohibitive voice as a sign of the employee not contributing to the social exchange or not responding to the organization's contribution in an expected manner. The outcome may be that organizations divert to control and coercion. Relatedly, use of prohibitive voice may be regarded as a breach of the psychological contract between employee and organization. The psychological contract, as a "two-way exchange of perceived promises and obligations" (Guest & Conway, 2002, p. 22), is rooted in the involved parties' beliefs in and perception and interpretation of that the exchange implicates reciprocity. As follows, use of prohibitive voice can easily be seen as a breach of the principle of reciprocity, and thus, of the psychological contract. Again, coercive and control-gravitating HRM may be the outcome.

This represents a novel approach to understand the commitment vs. control dimension. Allowing for prohibitive voice signals a certain degree of trust in employees and leans towards the commitment side of the control-commitment continuum. It is a paradox that a policy that gravitates towards commitment in fact triggers control. The very existence of such a paradox indicates that brand-conscious organizations see the scope for employee voice as being at the far end of the control-commitment continuum, and that allowing for prohibitive voice is perceived as a step too far in the direction of high-commitment HRM.

6. Concluding remarks

6.1. Limitations

Overall, there are limitations to the present dissertation. Most of them were discussed in each paper, such as limitations related to generalizability, sampling in survey and interviews, LMX rating, review rating, and a model without moderators. A few

limitations, however, apply to the dissertation as a whole, which in turn represents avenues for future research.

First, relating to the survey-based article nr. 4, I am not in a position to determine cause and effect and, thus, not causality. According to Shadish et al. (2002), causality is present if the following criteria are met: 1) There is covariation between the expected cause and effect, 2) the cause must occur before the effect, and 3) alternative explanations for the presumed cause and effect have been identified and ruled out. As my data were provided by many respondents at one point in time, the criteria for causality are not met, despite that the theoretical model is based on a presumption of causal relationships. Relatedly, reverse causality cannot be ruled out. On a similar note, the possibility of common method bias, due to all data being collected at one point in time and the survey being based on self-reported measures, might be another limitation. However, the common latent factor test indicated that the presence of common method bias is limited.

Second, in both the survey and the interviews for article nr. 2 and 3 it is the respondents' *self-reported perception* of reality, and not an objective representation of reality, which is measured. This may represent a skewedness due to possible elevated covarariances based on self-reporting, termed percept-percept inflation (Wagner & Crampton, 1994), and, again, common method bias. To counter such a limitation, however, the survey was designed accordingly, with a relatively large sample size, variation in type of measures, and a rather complex questionnaire. Another possible limitation in that only one or very few groups of stakeholders are heard. To counter this, two core groups of stakeholders were interviewed in article nr. 2, namely both employees and executives. In addition, only executives (school principals), were interviewed in article nr. 3, so as to paint a fuller and broader picture of reality, where the perceptions of one group of stakeholders do not dominate. Nonetheless, concentrating on how employees perceive matters carry other possible sources of skewedness, as different informants may understand interview questions or survey items differently, and may interpret them in different ways, leading to a situation where they do not speak about the same or mean the same when they answer survey questions.

Third, the operationalization of HRM systems is not straightforward, since there exists no universal definition of HRM systems or HRM approach. Yet, Ho and Kuvaas

(2020), citing Arthur (1994), Huselid (1995), Jiang et al. (2012) and Way (2002), ascertain that "most empirical and theoretical works define HRM systems as an integrated set or cluster of HRM practices that have the potential to achieve substantially enhanced economic performance" (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020, p. 2). Even so, there is no agreed upon list of practices which together should make up HRM systems (Wright & Ulrich, 2017), which is a limitation as such systems, in this case, high-commitment HRM systems, can consist of a various set of practices. In the present research the choice of an adapted version of the high-commitment HRM scale by Lepak and Snell (2002) for article nr. 1 and, particularly, nr. 4 might attract criticism based on the practices which are included. Although based on a second order model consisting of several latent factors, yielding factors like empowerment, training and development, recruitment, performance appraisal, and compensation, other factors and corresponding HRM practices could have been included. Exemplified, Ho and Kuvaas (2020, p. 2) state that "HRM practices typically include sophistically selection procedures, developmental performance appraisals, substantial investments in traning, teamwork, extensive communication, motivating job design (e.g. autonomy, empowerment, employee participation, and flexible work), performance-related pay / promotion, harmonization, and employment security". It is apparent that the set of included practices in article nr. 1 and 4 is not as extensive as this. This represents a more limited limitation in article nr. 2 and 3, as these papers present no operationalization of HRM systems or HRM approach, but use HRM theoretically related to coercion and control. Nevertheless, it might be seen as a limitation that the analysis in these articles do not have a universally agreed upon operationalization of HRM systems to lean on.

6.2. Convergence and divergence

While the findings generally point in the same direction, and are relatively convergent in their contributions to providing a coherent answer to the overall research question, the paradox instigated by the risk of employee voice highlights a certain degree of divergence. Diverging finds may represent a limitation to the present research.

The literature, as reviewed in article nr. 1, brings forth a relatively clear recommendation to practitioners, namely to use a high-commitment HRM approach,

as it most effectively facilitates strategy and, thus, brand support among employees. Facilitators gravitating towards commitment are the most efficient in facilitating strategy, including brand, support among employees, as compared to facilitators gravitating towards control. This is empirically corroborated and extended by findings presented in article nr. 4. Here organizational commitment mediates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and the three manifestations of brand support, but it is still commitment and not control in regard to HRM which facilitates employee brand support. Put simply, both prior research and new research presented in article nr. 4 indicate that organizations should use high-commitment HRM to get their employees to actively support the brand.

On the other hand, findings in paper nr. 2 and 3 indicate that control, and not commitment, is the preferred strategy for organizations aiming to get their employees to act in accordance with the brand. These finding may appear to diverge from the findings in paper nr. 1 and 4. Arguably such coercive strategies do not facilitate active *support* of the brand. As defined in paper nr. 1, such active support involves employee behaviour which directly contributes to strategy realization, including the realization of successful branding, and embracement of the brand ambassador role so that the employee "sells" the brand to external stakeholders. As laid out in paper nr. 4, such a support can be seen as a reciprocal behaviour in response to fair treatment in a high quality social exchange between employer and employee. Hence, using restrictive measures to drum up brand support will probably not work, as coercion does not go along with the principle of reciprocity. It does not set up a situation where the employee wants to "return the favour" of receiving intrinsic benefits by actively support the brand. This entails that what the schools and hospital in paper nr. 2 and 3 can expect to achieve is brand alignment based on obedience, and not brand support based on commitment. However, the desired outcome is to refrain employees from hurting the brand through unwanted use of voice, and organizations may, at least in the short term, see such brand alignment based on obedience as entirely acceptable as long as the brand does not suffer.

Seen through a different lens, the findings in paper nr. 1 and 4 reveal what works, while the findings in paper nr. 2 and 3. reveal what organizations exposed to market mechanisms actually do. As illustrated in Figure 3, this research clearly shows a divergence in what prior research shows is effective in getting employees to support

the brand, and what organizations actually do to achieve this. Put bluntly: Ideally high-commitment HRM should be the preferred strategy, but in reality HRM gravitating towards control is utilized. Again it seems that the position of voice functions like an empirical crowbar. When voice is introduced into the research design (in article nr. 2 and 3), HRM moves towards control.

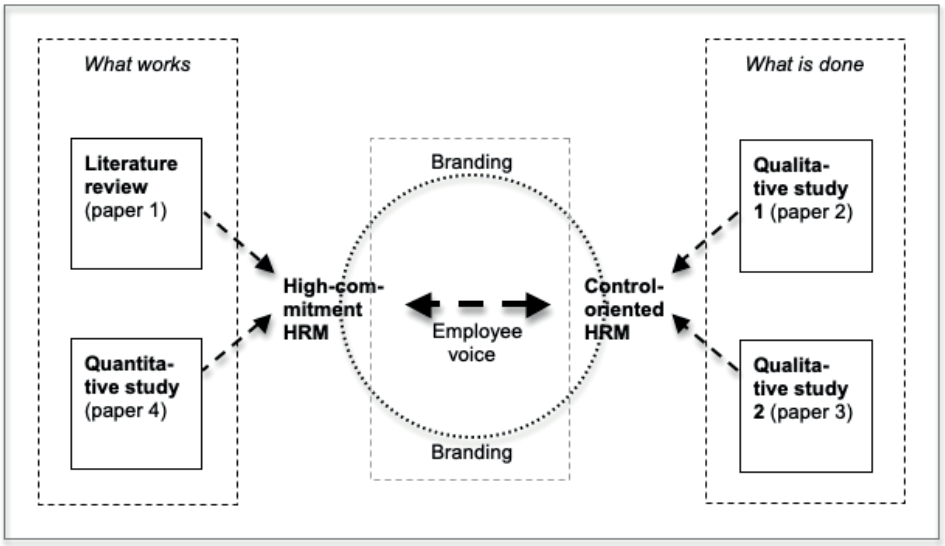

Figure 3: What works and what is being done.

6.3. Directions for future research

Most limitations offer potential avenues for future research, and this is the case with the present research. To provide insights into causal relationships and eliminate the possibility of common method bias, a study where data were collected at two or more points in time, or even a longitudinal study, would give more control over which variables are independent and dependent, that is, explanatory and outcome variables, and, in addition, would give control over the timeline, so as to rule out reverse causality. An experimental design would have similar advantages. Another option would be to gather multi-source data, for example data on the same variables from

both employees and leaders. Studies with such designs represent possible avenues for further research.

Likewise, an operationalization of the HRM approach could benefit from including a broader spectrum of the practices recommended by Ho and Kuvaas (2020), alternatively mapping actual practices used by the case organization in article nr. 4, and tying the operationalization of the HRM approach to these practices, which, arguably, employees face in their role as employed. A promising research opportunity would be to investigate interactive effects between HRM and LMX further, for example in models with other outcome variables than in the present research. It would be equally interesting to explore other possible moderators than LMX, both in the relationship between HRM approach and employee brand support (article nr. 4) and between HRM and other dependent variables. Relatedly, to test whether other variables than organizational commitment may function as mediators is another possible avenue for further research, as is further testing og moderated mediation and mediated moderation, as well.

The HRM literature have increasingly investigated the impact of HRM approach and variables tied to organizational quality and performance. As mentioned in article nr. 2, voice restrictions are found to have negative links to variables commonly related to high organizational performance, e.g. high employee motivation. A promising route to future research would be to further investigate possible empirical links between organizational branding, including internal branding, employee voice and organizational performance. Here, it would also be interesting to explore nuances in use of voice in relation to internal branding and voice restrictions, namely whether all types of prohibitive voice trigger control and voice restrictions, and whether all use of prohibitive voice contributes to organizations' diverting from a social exchange approach and introducing control and coercion. Bringing in the construct of self-censorship could also benefit the research presented in article nr. 3, opening up the possibility that public silence is partly caused by self-censorship as a response to message control. Moreover, the article arguably does not go all the way in explicating how branding efforts by the schools actually play out. Providing a more thorough examination of actual branding activities represents a route for further research.

Another possibility would be to extend the research in article nr. 4 to other organizational fields, particularly in the public sector, for example universities,

colleges, police departments, welfare institutions, governmental ministries, city council administrations, and schools. The latter would provide a quantitative investigation of matters investigated qualitatively in article nr. 2 and 3. Relatedly, the research design could be refined so as to focus on the large professions typically employed in these institutions, for example medical doctors, nurses, lawyers, social workers, social scientists, police officers, professors, and teachers. Exending the research to industries in the private sector could reveal interesting differences between industries. Overall, several of these options would make comparative studies possible.

Theoretically, the finding that use of prohibitive voice seems to break the link between internal branding and social exchange, with control-gravitating HRM and voice restrictons as an outcome, calls for further explication. I encourage other scholars to explore the role of voice in HRM research further, particularly how use of prohibitive voice plays out in organizations which, from the start, base their HRM approach on social exchanges and psychological contracts, and how prohibitive voice affects both the intended and implemented HRM approach (Khilji & Wang, 2006) both in organizations exposed to market pressure and organizations not exposed to market pressure. The construct of strategy support enhancing HRM (SSEHRM) was introduced in paper nr. 1, but it calls for empirical investigation, involving the development of a scale and use of the scale in a quantitative model, for example to test a hypothesized relationship between SSEHRM and employee brand support. This, as well, represents opportunities for further research.

In sum, this dissertation as a whole can be seen as a call for further research in itself: The entangled relationships between branding, HRM, and voice, and particularly between internal branding and social exchange, represent empirical and theoretical links which are so pronounced that organizational branding is an enticing setting for studies of HRM and employee voice.

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Appendix nr. 1: Project approval from NSD

Dag Yngve Dahle
Handelshøyskolen Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
P.O.Box 5033
1432 ÅS

Vår dato: 11.05.2017 Vår ref: 53462 / 3 / AH Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 07.03.2017. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

53462	*Kontrollorientert personalbehandling (HR) i et tillitsorientert arbeidsliv*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Dag Yngve Dahle*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 15.12.2019, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Kjersti Haugstvedt

Åsne Halskau

Kontaktperson: Åsne Halskau tlf: 55 58 21 88
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 53462

Prosjektet er en PhD med formål å utforske omfang og utbredelse av kontrollorienterte HR-metoder som karaktersetting/rating av ansatte og begrensning av ansattes ytringsfrihet.

Utvalget består av medlemmer av sentrale fagforeninger for ulike profesjoner - mellom 4500-5000 personer.

Førstegangskontakt og rekruttering gjøres via fagforeningene. Personvernombudet legger til grunn at taushetsplikten ikke er til hinder for førstegangskontakt og rekruttering, samt at frivilligheten understrekes. Vi anbefaler, slik det er beskrevet i meldeskjemaet, at fagforeningene står for utsendelse av invitasjon til deltakelse.

Data skal samles inn via personlige intervju, samt spørreskjemaunderssøkelse.

Utvalget informeres skriftlig og muntlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet mottatt 08.05.2017 er godt utformet.

Det behandles sensitive personopplysninger om etnisk bakgrunn eller politisk/filosofisk/religiøs oppfatning, medlemskap i fagforeninger.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at forsker etterfølger Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet. Dersom personopplysninger skal sendes elektronisk, bør opplysningene krypteres tilstrekkelig.

Det skal gjennomføres en elektronisk spørreundersøkelse i prosjektet og det benyttes da i mange tilfeller en databehandler. Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet skal i så fall inngå skriftlig avtale med eventuell databehandler om hvordan personopplysninger skal behandles, jf. personopplysningsloven § 15. For råd om hva databehandleravtalen bør inneholde, se Datatilsynets veileder: http://www.datatilsynet.no/Sikkerhet-internkontroll/Databehandleravtale/.

Personvernombudet forstår det slik og legger også til grunn at ingen enkeltpersoner gjenkjennes i publikasjon. Vi anbefaler også at arbeidsgiver/arbeidssted grovkategoriseres/anonymiseres i publikasjon.

Forventet prosjektslutt er 15.12.2019. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:
- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel)
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn)

- slette digitale lyd-/bilde- og videoopptak

Vi gjør oppmerksom på at også eventuell databehandler, samt fagforeninger må slette personopplysninger tilknyttet prosjektet i sine systemer. Dette inkluderer eventuelle logger og koblinger mellom IP-/epostadresser og besvarelser.

Appendix nr. 2: Information letter to respondents

Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet (NMBU).
Handelshøyskolen. Postboks 5003, 1432 ÅS.

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

"Kontrollorientert HR i et tillitsbasert arbeidsliv"

Bakgrunn og formål.

Denne forskningen er en del av Dag Yngve Dahles doktorgradsprosjekt ved Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet (NMBU), Handelshøyskolen. Et formål med prosjektet er å undersøke omfang og kjennetegn ved bruken av kontrollorientert HR-praksis, kalt "coercive HR", i norsk arbeidsliv. Et annet formål er å undersøke sammenhengen mellom en slik HR-praksis og sentrale sider ved det å være arbeidstaker, for eksempel organisasjonsforpliktelse, forholdet til nærmeste leder, opplevd etterrettelighet, opplevd kontrollnivå og ytringsklima (ansattes "voice"). Et tredje formål er undersøke hvilke kontekstuelle faktorer som påvirker forholdet mellom HR-praksis og de nevnte variablene, herunder organisasjoners omdømmebygging (”branding”. Jeg skal gjennomføre både dybdeintervjuer og spørreundersøkelse, og denne forespørselen gjelder deltakelse i intervjuundersøkelsen.

Intervjuundersøkelsen vil bli gjennomført før spørreundersøkelsen. Intervjuene vil være semi-strukturerte med bruk av en veiledende intervjuguide med spørsmål om informantenes erfaring med og opplevelse av arbeidsgiverens HR-praksis. 25 av intervjuene vil ta utgangspunkt i rating eller "performance appraisal" (populært kalt karaktersetting) av ansatte der informantene jobber. 25 - 35 andre intervjuer vil ta utgangspunkt i informantenes opplevelse av klimaet for ytringer der de jobber. Forhold som jobbengasjement, opplevd etterrettelighet, opplevd kontrollnivå vil også være tema i intervjuene. Intervjuene bli bli gjennomført med ansatte og ledere i ulike virksomheter i norsk arbeidsliv.

Virksomhetene vil utgjøre et strategisk utvalg som oppfyller gitte kjennetegn. For intervjuene som tar utgangspunkt i rating er det snakk om fire avgjørende kjennetegn, nemlig at a) virksomhetene har brukt og/eller bruker rating når de evaluerer sine ansatte, b) at karaktersettingen er del av et større system for prestasjonsledelse, c) at virksomhetene er blant de største eller mest sentrale innen sitt felt i Norge og d) at virksomhetene samlet sett dekker store næringsområder i norsk arbeidsliv. For intervjuene som tar utgangspunkt i ytringsklima er det som snakk om tre sentrale kjennetegn, nemlig at a) ansatte har reagert eller reagerer på det de opplever som et begrenset ytringsklima i virksomheten, b) at virksomhetene er blant de største eller mest sentrale innen sitt felt i Norge og c) at virksomhetene samlet sett dekker store næringsområder i norsk arbeidsliv. Dette gir et utvalg

av virksomheter som er blant de største eller mest sentrale innen næringsområder som sysselsetter mange mennesker.

Spørreundersøkelsen vil mest sannsynlig bli gjennomført i samarbeid med flere fag- og bransjeforeninger. I den forbindelse trekkes det et gruppeutvalg for å få med ansatte som sammen utgjør et representativt utvalg for foreningens medlemsmasse. Temaene for spørreundersøkelsen vil være virksomhetens HR-praksis slik respondentene opplever den, ratingens kjennetegn og omfang, respondentenes erfaringer med og opplevelse av karaktersettingen, ytringsklimaet i virksomheten, forholdene for varslere, sanksjoner mot upopulære ytringer, grensene for ytringsfriheten samt andre relevante variabler, inkludert planer om å slutte i jobben. I tillegg kommer et utvalg bakgrunnsvariabler, for eksempel kjønn, alder, utdanningsnivå, lønn, klasseposisjon og annet.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Studiens hoveddeler er altså intervjuer og en en spørreundersøkelse. Intervjuer vil bli registrert ved hjelp av notater og lydopptak (ikke videopptak) der dette er greit for intervjuobjektene og der det lar seg gjøre i praksis. For spørreundersøkelsens del vil datainnsamlingen foregå ved at foreningene sender ansatte i utvalget en link til et nettbasert spørreskjema.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Kun undertegnede, min veileder, som er professor Arild Wæraas, og foreningene (for spørreundersøkelsen) vil ha tilgang til datamaterialet. For spørreundersøkelsen vil kun foreningene ha tilgang til respondentenes e-post-adresser samt IP-adresser til PC-er brukt for å fylle ut spørreskjemaet. Disse vil altså bli lagret adskilt fra selve datamaterialet. Deltakerne vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i forskningsmessige publikasjoner om studien. Datainnsamlingen vil etter planen bli avsluttet i løpet av 2018, mens prosjektet skal være gjennomført ved utgangen av 2019. Data vil bli lagret i anonymisert form på NMBUs sikre servere i denne perioden, men med tanke på oppfølging av studien kan dataene bli lagret på servere til andre vitenskapelige institusjoner etter den tid - også her i anonymisert form. E-post- og IP-adresser vil ikke bli lagret etter den tid.

Frivillig deltakelse.

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert.

Dersom du har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med Dag Yngve Dahle på 92081587 (mobil) eller dag.yngve.dahle@nmbu.no (e-post).

Studien er meldt til og godkjent av Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien.

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta.

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix nr. 3: Survey intruments

HRM approach:

Here, employees can routinely make changes in the way that they perform their jobs.
Here, employees are empowered to make decisions.
Here, the recruitment/selection process focuses on their ability to contribute to our strategic objectives.
Here, the recruitment/selection process focuses on selecting the best allround candidate, regardless of the specific job.
Here, the recruitment/selection process places priority on employees' potential to learn.
Here, employees have jobs that include a wide variety of tasks.
Here, training activities for employees are comprehensive.
Here, compensation/rewards for employees include an extensive benefits package.
Here, compensation/rewards for employees provide incentives for new ideas.
Here, performance appraisals for employees are based on input from multiple sources (peers, subordinates).
Here, performance appraisals for employees emphasize employee learning.
Here, performance appraisals for employees focus on their contribution to our strategic objectives.
Here, performance appraisals for employees include developmental feedback.

(items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')

Leader-Member Exchange:

Do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do? *(rarely / occasionally / sometimes / fairly often / very often)*

How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs? *(not a bit / a little / a fair amount / quite a bit / a great deal)*

How well does your leader recognize your potential? *(not at all / a little / moderately / mostly / fully)*

Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/her position, what are the chances that your leader would use his/her power to help you solve problems in your work? *(none / small / moderate / high / very high)*

Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your leader has, what are the chances that he/she would "bail you out," at his/her expense? *(none / small / moderate / high / very high)*

I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present to do so? *(strongly disagree / disagree / neutral / agree / strongly agree)*

How would you characterize your working relationship with your leader? *(extremely ineffective / worse than average / average / better than average / extremely effective)*

Organizational commitment:

I really feel that this organization's problems are my own.
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
I feel like 'part of the family' at my organization
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
I feel emotionally attached to this organization.

(items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')

Reputation strategy embeddedness:

I am familiar with my company's strategy (e.g., long-term objectives) so that I could explain it to a new colleague
I understand the implications of my company's strategy for my individual work goals
I am convinced that my company is pursuing the right strategy.

(all items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')

Brand-congruent behaviour:

I make no statements that are inconsistent with our brand communications in the media (e.g. advertising or web presence).
I see that my actions are not at odds with our brand.
I pay attention that my personal appearance is in line with our corporate brand.

(all items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')

Brand development participation:

If I have a useful idea on how to improve our brand's performance, I share it with my organization, even when I am not rewarded for doing so.
I would voluntarily accept extra work if that has a positive effect on our brand image.
I participate in building our brand, even when I am not rewarded for doing so.

(all items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')

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ISSN: 1894-6402
ISBN: 978-82-575-1790-8

Dag Yngve Dahle (b. 1971 in Tromsø, Norway) holds a BA in Social Sciences from UiT The Arctic University of Norway, and an Mphil in Sociology from the University of Oslo. He is currently Senior Lecturer / Assistant Professor in Organization and Leadership at Østfold University College, Halden.

The present thesis consists of an introductory section and four papers. The thesis investigates the relationship between organizational branding, HRM, and employee voice in work organizations. This is done by studying the three themes in contect of each other, and seeing them as trajectories crossing each other.

Paper 1 presents a systematic literature review of the literature on factors which facilitate employees' active support of strategies decided on by management in organizations, including branding strategies. Identified facilitators are analyzed in light of HRM approach. 12 main facilitators are identified, of which the most prevalent ones, albeit not all, gravitate towards the commitment side of the control-commitment continuum. Paper II examines the tension between organizational desires for a flattering external reputation and the risk of negative communication about the organization by employees. Findings reveal that organizations handle the tension with coercive HRM and technocratic control, manifested as restrictions on the use of voice. Hence, employees are not trusted to act as brand ambassadors.

Relatedly, paper III reveals that brand ambassadorship and internal branding is not the preferred approach by executives in organizations exposed to marketization, in this case public sector schools. It is being trumped by voice restrictions in the form of prior message control, all in order to protect the desired brand image. The outcome is public silence at the expense of the public interest. Paper IV shows positive relationships between both high-commitment HRM and LMX, and three manifestations of employee brand support. All the relationships are mediated by organizational commitment, and LMX moderates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and reputation strategy embeddedness.

Professor Arild Wæraas was Dag's supervisor.

ISBN: 978-82-575-1790-8
ISSN: 1894-6402

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