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When Context Matters: The Effects of Power Stability and Climate on Supervisors' Willingness to Implement Employee Voice

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Abstract

Implementing employee voice can have substantial organizational benefits. Yet, supervisors frequently fail to implement subordinates' improvement-oriented suggestions. To help explain this tendency, this thesis examines whether contextual factors, such as the stability of power and nature of the departmental climate in which the supervisors are part of, can influence their willingness to implement voice, as well as whether these factors interact. Study 1 (N = 242) demonstrates that although the stability of power does not directly affect willingness to implement voice, a competitive – as opposed to a cooperative – climate decreases voice implementation, an effect that only occurs when supervisors have stable – and not unstable – power. The effect of climate is further supported in Study 2 (N = 114), which also reveals that supervisors' denigration of subordinate benevolence mediates the relationship between climate and willingness to implement voice. The present research extends the extant literature on both voice and leadership by considering the role of the supervisor's context to understand voice implementation, as well as provide important implications for practice. Furthermore, we point out several new avenues for future research.

Keywords: voice implementation, power stability, climate, threat, denigration of subordinate benevolence

An important resource in organizations that is frequently neglected by supervisors, is employees' improvement-oriented ideas (Fast, Burris, & Bartel, 2014), known as employee voice (Hirschman, 1970). Employee voice, hereafter referred to as voice, can be defined as "informal and discretionary communication by an employee of ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, or opinions about work-related issues to persons who might be able to take appropriate action, with the intent to bring about improvement or change" (Morrison, 2014, p. 174). Hence, voice generally concerns well-intentioned suggestions aimed at improving or correcting the current state. Organizations whose supervisors implement the suggestions voiced by employees can reap a number of benefits. For instance, implementation of voice is associated with increased employee motivation (Zapata-Phelan, Colquitt, Scott, & Livingston, 2009), improved managerial effectiveness (Morrison, 2011), enhanced organizational capability to adapt to environmental changes (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001), and reduced employee turnover (McClean, Burris, & Detert, 2013). Overall, research has shown that implementing voice can be highly beneficial, both in terms of addressing and solving issues that employees speak up about, and for the organization as a whole. Thus, through implementing voice, supervisors serve the interests of the organization.

Seeking to understand factors that influence the extent to which supervisors implement voice, prior research has mainly investigated characteristics related to subordinates and their voice message. For instance, content type (Burris, 2012), and emotional valence of the voice message (Grant, 2013) have been found to affect supervisors' implementation of voice. However, research on factors related to the supervisors is surprisingly scarce (Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009). One notable exception is the study by Fast and colleagues (2014), which suggests that supervisors with low managerial self-efficacy might feel threatened by voice, and therefore decrease voice implementation as a strategy to reduce the perceived threat. In this thesis, we aim to take a novel approach by investigating external factors related to the supervisors, namely the extent to which supervisors' context influence their willingness to implement voice. Context, defined as the "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables" (Johns, 2006, p. 386), is the situation surrounding supervisors and subordinates within an organization. Although context can have both subtle and substantial

effects on behavior, researchers frequently fail to consider contextual influences when conducting research (Johns, 2006). Indeed, researchers have argued that until recently, contextual factors have largely been ignored in empirical research (e.g., Li, Chen, & Blader, 2016; Liden & Antonakis, 2009). However, as supervisors do not operate in a vacuum, but are influenced by their surroundings (Fiedler, 1978), more research on how contextual factors influence supervisors' behavior and psychology is needed.

As such, this thesis seeks to answer the repeated calls for research on contextual effects on supervisor behavior (Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Oc, 2018), with the goal of better understanding the underlying factors influencing supervisors' implementation of voice. Undeniably, the role of supervisors' context in regard to voice is important, as supervisors generally possess the power necessary to implement the suggestions raised. Although there might be additional forces influencing voice implementation, this thesis assumes that supervisors have the authority to choose whether or not to implement voice, without having to consult other stakeholders (Burris, Rockmann, & Kimmons, 2017). Consequently, understanding contextual influences on supervisors' response to voice is important, as different contextual factors might influence how sensitive supervisors are to the positive or negative valence of the voice message, which is likely to determine whether voice is implemented.

In general, voice is conceived as a constructive act, derived from the concept of extra-role behavior (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), where subordinates go above and beyond what is formally required of them, with the aim of improving the current state (Miles, Borman, Spector, & Fox, 2002). However, voice essentially also entails critique of the status quo (Burris, 2012), where the extent to which supervisors feel threatened by such critique can be influenced by contextual factors that affect the positive or negative meaning that the supervisors ascribe to the voice message. Such a feeling of threat might in fact explain people's tendency to refuse input from others, as they fear losing face or yielding their status to someone else (Ackerman & Kenrick, 2008). Indeed, when suggestions are presented in a public setting, it might be perceived as threatening to the supervisor's public image and position, causing them to refuse input from subordinates that "rocks the boat".

This line of argument is further supported by Fast and colleagues (2014), who demonstrated that when supervisors' egos are threatened, they exhibit a greater

aversion to voice. This aversion may be explained by the tendency to regard voice as an indirect critique of the supervisors' performance, character, or ability (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), and thus a threat to their position and/or ego (Fast et al., 2014). Unlike the public threat (Ackerman & Kenrick, 2008) described above, this type of threat involves threats to the ego, more specifically a person's self-esteem. Although Leary, Terry, Batts Allen, and Tate (2009) argue that ego threat should be distinguished from public threat, experimental operationalizations of threat usually confounds the two forms, making it challenging for researchers to differentiate between the effects of threats to self-esteem versus threats to public image. Consequently, this thesis draws on research on both forms of threat. More generally, and regardless of type of threat, some conditions may cause supervisors to engage in self-serving behaviors that oppose the common good, such as refusing valuable input from subordinates in order to save face, keep their hierarchical position, and/or maintain the status quo.

To discern contextual factors that might influence supervisors' willingness to implement voice, this thesis draws upon the social comparison-based framework presented by Leheta, Dimotakis, and Schatten (2017). The authors argue that under certain conditions, supervisors can feel that their position is threatened by their subordinates. More specifically, some conditions can increase the likelihood of unfavorable social comparisons for supervisors in terms of the power difference between them and their subordinates, which can evoke feelings of threat in the supervisors. For instance, Leheta and colleagues (2017) propose that contextual factors such as the stability of power and the nature of the climate in which they are a part of may foster conditions where supervisors are more likely to perceive their subordinates as a threat. Such feelings of threat tend to trigger behaviors in the supervisors aimed at reducing such feelings, like social undermining or aggression towards the subordinates, which can result in negative consequences for the supervisors, subordinates, and the organization. This line of thought is supported by Maner and Mead (2010), who found that supervisors whose power was threatened, tended to focus on behaviors aimed at retaining their position, even when this was at the expense of the group's interests. That is, when placed in an unstable hierarchy, supervisors high in dominance motivation engaged in behaviors promoting self-interest, rather than the goals of the group. Thus, this research supports the notion that when supervisors feel that their position is threatened due to contextual factors, their focus on self-serving behaviors tend to increase. As such,

this thesis seeks to examine how supervisors' behavior is affected by distressing contexts rather than their personality traits and dispositions, such as whether they are calculative in nature (Leheta et al., 2017).

The success of an organization often relies upon a joint effort, where the members of the organization work towards common goals. Voice has proven to help organizations and their members increase innovation and improve decision quality (Nemeth, 1997), as well as enhance work functioning (Zhou & George, 2001), and team performance (Dooley & Fryxell, 1999). However, behaviors that are usually considered positive, like voice, can under certain conditions be perceived negatively by supervisors. As mentioned, contextual factors like power (in)stability and climate may foster conditions where some behaviors are more likely to be perceived negatively (Leheta et al., 2017). In such conditions, supervisors may for instance consider highly talented subordinates as rivals and threats to their position, and might therefore attempt to sabotage the work performance of these subordinates (Salin, 2003). Hence, when successful voice behavior (i.e., acknowledgement and implementation of the suggestions raised) can increase the subordinates' hierarchical standing (McClean, Martin, Emich, & Woodruff, 2017), voice may be seen as threatening to supervisors' position. Consequently, supervisors may engage in behaviors aimed at reducing the threat, like refusing to implement voice. Indeed, considering the fact that subordinates' potential increase in power is contingent on the suggestions raised actually being implemented (Schaerer, Tost, Huang, Gino, & Larrick, 2018), supervisors can choose to not implement voice as a way of defending their position. By not implementing voice, supervisors not only hamper the voicer's current power attainment, but also avoids appearing incompetent (Deelstra et al., 2003) and losing face (Ackerman & Kenrick, 2008). Additionally, refusing to implement voice may send signals to the subordinates about the futility of engaging in voice, thereby eliminating a potential future threat to the supervisors' position, by discouraging their subordinates from engaging in voice. In fact, supervisors may refuse to implement voice even when it is at the expense of the group's interest. Thus, not implementing voice could be seen as a self-serving act conducted by supervisors in fear of losing their power.

Power refers to the ability to influence others (French & Raven, 1959) through asymmetric control over valued resources (Emerson, 1962), and is

something most people are generally motivated to gain and keep (Maner & Case, 2016). People's level of power determines their place in power hierarchies, known as structural power (Schaerer et al., 2018), which creates social order and stability (Sligte, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2011). However, in part due to the dynamic business context (Guest, 1998), these hierarchies sometimes exist in a context of instability. Unstable hierarchies can be defined as malleable (Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche, 2007) or flexible (Maner & Case, 2016) ranking systems, where power positions can change (Tajfel, 1984). Research has shown that when hierarchies are unstable, people with the highest hierarchical positions are likely to engage in certain self-serving behaviors, due to an inherent motivation to protect and enhance their position (Maner & Mead, 2010). For instance, they are more likely to cheat (Pettit, Doyle, Lount, & To, 2016), withhold information that can benefit the group (Maner & Mead, 2010), and when motivated by power, they are more likely to prioritize their own rank over the common good (Maner & Case, 2016). These examples demonstrate how unstable hierarchies can negatively affect the ways in which organizational members with high organizational rank behave, causing them to act in a self-serving manner in order to retain their power. As previously mentioned, such self-serving behaviors might be manifested as an aversion to implement voice.

In addition to the stability of power, other contextual factors may also affect the behaviors of the powerful. More specifically, Li and colleagues (2016) argue that the cooperative versus the competitive nature of the relationship between social actors is an important – yet largely overlooked – moderator that may help explain the behaviors of powerful organizational members. The nature of these relationships are often shaped by the group's norms (Li et al., 2016), so that it is the cooperative versus competitive nature of the climate that influences organizational behavior. More specifically, Li and colleagues (2016) propose that in a cooperative setting, the powerful are more likely to display characteristics valuable to the group, like sharing of expertise. Contrastingly, in a competitive setting, the powerful engage more in domineering behaviors aimed at reinforcing their own position. Based on these arguments, it seems likely that that a cooperative climate may foster group-serving behaviors, encouraging supervisors to be amenable to implementing voice. Conversely, it seems plausible that a competitive climate may promote feelings of threat, and thus lead to an aversion towards implementing voice, in order to undermine the threat. In fact, Reh, Tröster, and Van Quaquebeke (2018) argue that, due to the competitiveness of the climate, even the anticipated future threat to

one's position is likely to result in undermining of the perceived source of threat. Hence, the nature of the climate may influence the extent to which supervisors feel threatened, and consequently whether they are willing to implement voice.

According to Oc (2018), research on contextual factors influencing supervisors can benefit from modeling their interaction effects. By understanding the interaction between such factors, one may establish the boundary conditions of the effects, and gain a deeper understanding of the process (Hayes, 2018). This line of reasoning is supported by Leheta and colleagues (2017), who argue that in order to provide a more comprehensive and complete picture of factors influencing whether supervisors feel threatened by their subordinates, future research should examine the interactive effects among such factors. Building on this, the contextual factors presented in this thesis might interact, so that certain combinations of power stability and climate produce specific behavioral outcomes in the supervisors with regard to voice implementation. More specifically, we propose that supervisors with unstable power might not be influenced by climate, as they already feel threatened due to the instability of their power position, and are therefore less willing to implement voice. Conversely, supervisors with stable power may only feel threatened in a competitive – and not a cooperative – climate, resulting in an aversion to voice in the former condition, but not the latter. Thus, we argue that the nature of the climate may only influence the extent to which supervisors with stable power are willing to implement voice.

While voice has been deemed as vital for organizations' ability to survive and prosper, supervisors frequently fail to implement voice (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). By examining contextual factors, this thesis seeks to contribute by offering insight into the contextual conditions influencing supervisors' openness and aversion to voice, thereby expanding the research on the topic. Indeed, to our knowledge, there has been no previous study empirically investigating the effects of both stability of power and nature of the climate on supervisors' willingness to implement voice. Considering the central role that supervisors play in the voice process, these factors are important to take into account in order to comprehend why supervisors fail to implement voice despite a magnitude of positive consequences. Furthermore, understanding the link between context and voice may help inform practitioners, so that they can reap the benefits associated with voice in their organization. More specifically, contextual variables are open for

interventions, thereby making it possible for organizations to modify the extent to which supervisors' context is unstable or competitive, and thus influence the level of voice implementation. This may be especially important for organizations' agility, where today's ambiguous business environment is forcing organizations to adapt to changing market conditions in a swift manner (Harraf, Wanasika, Tate, & Talbott, 2015). Supervisors are therefore relying on their subordinates' input, as the subordinates are likely to have first-hand knowledge of the market conditions and operations. Hence, voice may be an important enabler of organizational success. Consequently, this thesis aspires to explore the conditions under which supervisors are more willing to implement voice, and the conditions under which they are not. Specifically, we propose that the stability of power, as well as the nature of the climate within the organization, influence supervisors' probability of implementing voice, and that these factors interact to produce different outcomes with regard to voice implementation. Thus, the following research question is adopted:

> *To what extent does stability of power and nature of the climate influence supervisors' willingness to implement voice, and do these factors interact?*

Theoretical Background

Voice

Today's business environment can be characterized as highly dynamic, where the implementation of constructive input from organizational members have become essential to an organization's viability (Detert & Burris, 2007; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). In the words of Senge (1990, p. 4): "it's just not possible any longer to figure it out from the top". LePine and Van Dyne (2001) note that because voice behavior is expected to have important organizational benefits, researchers' interest in voice has increased significantly over the past years. For instance, voice behavior may be useful for identifying and correcting inefficiencies in organizations (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998), recognizing opportunities that organizations can capitalize on (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), and enhancing adaptability to environmental changes (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). More specifically, subordinate behavior that can be defined as voice has been found to include positive effects such as increased employee motivation (Zapata-Phelan et al., 2009), innovation (Nemeth, 1997), organizational learning (Argyris & Schön,

1978), improved managerial effectiveness (Morrison, 2011), and reduced employee turnover (McClean, Burris, & Detert, 2013). Thus, voice is seemingly a behavior that should be encouraged by supervisors.

In general, voice can be directed at different recipients. However, most organizational scholars seem to agree that voice is an act that is carried out within an organization (e.g., Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Morrison, 2011). Hence, voice can either be directed towards one's peers by speaking out, or towards one's supervisor by speaking up (Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010). In this thesis, we define our scope in the same manner as Morrison (2014), where only voice that is directed internally to one's supervisor is considered. Indeed, in contrast to one's colleagues, supervisors have a vital function in the voice process as they possess the power necessary to address the issues raised by the subordinates (Burris, 2012; Detert & Treviño, 2010), and implement the solutions provided by the voicer. Thus, the focus in this thesis will be restricted to voice directed upward at the supervisor, as opposed to lateral voice directed at peers.

Further increasing the complexity of the concept, are the many different conceptualizations of voice (for an overview, see Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Indeed, this has caused ambiguity regarding the construct's meaning and scope (Greenberg & Edwards, 2009; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Morrison, 2011). However, most researchers seem to agree that the message conveyed through voice is either intended to make incremental suggestions of how to improve the current state, or more extensive changes when voicing concerns about harmful practices (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). In this thesis, the conceptualization that will be adopted, and that seems most prevalent in the voice literature, is that of Liang, Farh, and Farh (2012). Indeed, this is one of few conceptualizations within the voice literature that has actually been empirically validated (Morrison, 2011). Liang and colleagues (2012) argue that voice can differ in the character of the message that is delivered by the voicer, which led them to coin the terms promotive- and prohibitive voice. Promotive voice concerns "employees' expression of new ideas or suggestions for improving the overall functioning of their work unit or organization" (Liang et al., 2012, p. 74). Such a form of voice is thus challenging as it seeks to change the status quo. Yet, the researchers argue that it is promotive as the focus is on providing innovative suggestions for optimizing a future state (Liang et al., 2012). On the other hand, prohibitive voice refers to "employees'

expressions of concern about work practices, incidents, or employee behavior that are harmful to their organization" (Liang et al., 2012, p. 75). Hence, focus is directed at problems that have previously not been discovered, in order to prevent problematic events (Liang et al., 2012). Thus, the former type of voice is focused on pursuing possibilities to improve current practices, while the latter aims at preventing the occurrence of harm. However, it is important to note that prohibitive voice differs from similar concepts, such as whistle-blowing (Near & Miceli, 1985). Prohibitive voice stems from a wish to help the organization of which one is a part of (e.g., by the prevention of harm), while whistle-blowing is driven by the perceived breach of either moral norms or law (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003), that is often communicated to parties external to the organization (Morrison, 2011).

Although Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) call for an expansion of the voice construct, arguing that voice also entails suggestions that are not well-intentioned, most researchers take on the more traditional view, where voice is considered as behavior intended to improve organizational functioning. It is indeed the paradox of the latter view that is the focus of this thesis, namely how voice is a well-intentioned act with proven positive effects on an organization's viability, yet supervisors often fail to implement the suggestions offered by the voicers. Thus, only supervisors' response to constructive, well-intentioned voice will be considered in this thesis.

Whereas both promotive and prohibitive voice can be characterized as constructive and well-intentioned, the valence of the voice message is still likely to affect the response of the supervisors differently (Burris, 2012; Morrison, 2011). For example, prohibitive voice might entail perceptions of greater resistance than promotive voice. Indeed, Burris (2012) argue that when subordinates engage in challenging voice, which is closely related to prohibitive voice, supervisors might perceive this as an attempt to challenge their authority or competence, consequently resulting in a feeling of threat to their power. Moreover, the likelihood of voice that includes suggestions of conducting fundamental changes to the status quo being met with resistance by supervisors is larger than if the voice message is more supportive of the status quo (Burris, 2012). This tendency may be explained by the fact that although the voicer has an intention of making a helpful contribution, the voice message might be interpreted as indirect critique of the supervisor's abilities, such as lack of knowledge of the problem or an inability to solve it. In fact, research

has shown that feelings of threat in the supervisor triggers an aversion to voice (Fast et al., 2014). When the message type is of a prohibitive nature, thereby pointing to negative aspects of the status quo, and thus threatening the supervisor's position and ego, it may be reasonable to expect that supervisors will be less willing to implement voice, than if the message type is of a promotive character where the focus is on opportunities and ideas that improves the present state.

The extant literature on voice has primarily focused on subordinates and their perceived risk of engaging in voice (e.g., Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009; Detert & Burris, 2007). Morrison (2011) argue that there are two key factors that voicers consider prior to engaging in voice, namely perceived efficacy and safety. Perceived efficacy concerns if the subordinate believes that voicing will lead to a desired outcome, while perceived safety is an evaluation made by the subordinate of whether engaging in voice will entail negative consequences for oneself and/or one's relationships. Such calculations can be affected by implicit voice theories, namely beliefs about the riskiness and appropriateness of engaging in voice (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Within an organization, such beliefs are often collectively held (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011). When organizational members share the belief that voicing their opinions is futile and dangerous, this can foster a climate of silence where they fail to voice (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). More specifically, subordinates may consider the possible consequences to their reputation, such as whether they will be negatively labeled, or ruin their social capital. In addition, subordinates might fear that speaking up will entail negative consequences for their career, as the supervisor might negatively evaluate their performance, assign them with undesirable tasks, or even terminate their contract (Milliken et al., 2003). As a result, Morrison (2014) argues that the likelihood of engaging in voice increases when judgments of efficacy and safety increase, and that a decrease in these judgments are more likely to result in a failure to voice.

Previous research has shown that the behavior of supervisors can affect the occurrence of voice (Morrison, 2014), through sending signals to the subordinates about the consequences of engaging in voice (Detert & Treviño, 2010). Yet, there is still a need for research on factors that influence supervisors' response to voice (Morrison, 2014), such as whether they actually implement suggestions raised by their subordinates (Burris, 2012). As previously stated, one of the few empirical

studies that discusses characteristics related to the supervisors that affect their reactions to voice, is that of Fast and colleagues (2014). The authors argue that soliciting and implementing voice is of great importance to the performance of the organization, yet supervisors can display an aversion to input from employees that are intended to improve the current state. The researchers found that supervisors who did not believe that they possessed the necessary competencies expected of a supervisor, termed as low managerial self-efficacy, sought to avoid voice to protect their own ego. Thus, when supervisors perceive their ego to be threatened, they may fail to solicit and implement voice in an attempt to reduce the perceived feeling of threat.

In a similar vein, Leheta and colleagues (2017) note that it is generally assumed that the main responsibility of supervisors is to facilitate achievement of group-related goals. Thus, initiative taken by a subordinate to achieve those goals, such as engaging in voice, should be encouraged and supported by the supervisor. However, such an assumption might be more describing of a situation where the supervisors' power is stable, and not threatened by their subordinates, thereby painting somewhat of an erroneous picture of today's ever-changing business environment, where supervisors' power is challenged to a larger extent (Leheta et al., 2017). For instance, since the requirements for competence seems to be increasing, supervisors might view subordinates with superior knowledge within a given domain as a threat to their position, rather than a strength that can benefit the group in the attainment of their goals (Case & Maner, 2014; Maner & Mead, 2010). More specifically, an unstable hierarchy could open up for beliefs about social mobility, and competent subordinates may then be seen as possible contenders for the supervisor's position. Likewise, a competitive climate may foster perceptions of challenge to the supervisor's power, resulting in negative reactions being elicited in the supervisor, such as feeling incompetent and/or threatened (Deelstra et al., 2003). Consequently, in order to reduce the threat, supervisors may refrain from implementing the suggestions raised by their subordinates (Detert & Burris, 2007; Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009). Thus, it seems plausible that the counterintuitive insights presented in the extant work on voice, where supervisors are reluctant to act on suggestions raised by their subordinates regardless of the many positive consequences associated with voice implementation, may be ascribed to contextual factors such as stability of power and the nature of the climate in which supervisors are a part of.

Stability of Power

Power has been studied extensively in almost every domain of the social and behavioral sciences (Handgraaf, Van Dijk, Vermunt, Wilke, & De Dreu, 2008) as it has proven to be an omnipresent force in social and organizational life (Schaerer et al., 2018). Yet, the concept is hard to define, as the definitions tend to vary according to the perspective adopted by the researcher (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Nevertheless, and as previously mentioned, power can be broadly defined as asymmetric control over valued resources (Emerson, 1962). Such resources can be either physical (e.g., corner office), financial (e.g., salary and bonuses), or social (e.g., inclusion) (Fiske, Gilbert, & Lindzey, 2010). As this definition suggests, power is inherently relational, in that power exists only in relation to others, where for instance those with low power depend on those with high power to obtain rewards or avoid sanctions (Anderson & Brion, 2014).

In recent years, researchers have specified the distinction between power and other related concepts, such as status, dominance, influence, and leadership (Anderson & Brion, 2014; Maner et al., 2007). However, these concepts often overlap, and correlate empirically with each other, resulting in similar outcomes (Anderson & Brion, 2014). Therefore, although there are conceptual differences between them, this thesis draws on research on both power and related concepts due to their similar effects, strong association, and inextricability in a real-life setting (Magee, Gruenfeld, Keltner, & Galinsky, 2005).

The search for power and the benefits associated with it, is a central motive driving human behavior (Handgraaf et al., 2008). This drive can be explained by the fact that power provides people with a sense of control over their surrounding environment, which is considered a fundamental need among humans (Yang, Jin, He, Fan, & Zhu, 2015). As a result of this control, powerful people tend to experience less stress (Knight & Mehta, 2017), and greater freedom (Keltner et al., 2003). Further, they are more likely to be characterized as sensitive, socially adept, popular, and likeable (Lee & Tiedens, 2001). Hence, possessing power tends to be associated with multiple benefits generally reserved for that position.

Moreover, according to psychological reactance theory (Brehm, 1966), people who already possess power are generally motivated to retain and increase it, and thus tend to adopt certain behavioral patterns regardless of the valence of this behavior. More precisely, the theory assumes that when people's freedom is

jeopardized, they experience an aversive emotional state where the previously held freedom appears even more desirable, so that they are willing to go to great lengths to restore it (Steindl & Jonas, 2012). This line of argument is empirically supported by several researchers, who have found that when people's power is threatened, they tend to engage in selfish decision-making (Maner & Mead, 2010), unethical behavior benefiting themselves (Pettit et al., 2016), objectification of others, and the pursuit of self-interested goals (Keltner et al., 2003). Said behaviors can originally manifest as implicit or explicit attempts to retain power, but may ultimately have negative consequences both for the powerful and for their less powerful peers (Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Thus, people have an inherent motivation to gain and maintain power (Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1987). However, this motivation for power is not only based on a desire to enjoy the perks that accompany it, but also on a fear of the negative consequences associated with not having power. Feeling powerless can be considered an aversive state that people, and especially those in a position of power, seek to avoid (Keltner et al., 2003). For instance, Yang and colleagues (2015) found that people with low power tend to self-dehumanize. Specifically, they believe that they are less human than those in a position of high power, and that this is how they are perceived by powerful people as well as by those observing the power dynamic from the outside. Thus, when the powerfuls' position is threatened, they might attempt to suppress the possible threat that others pose (Maner & Mead, 2010), in order to defend or secure their position, and avoid the unpleasant state of powerlessness. Similarly, when people are powerless, they tend to have less freedom (Keltner et al., 2003), which is also considered an undesirable state (Steindl & Jonas, 2012). In line with psychological reactance theory, when people's power – and thus freedom – is at stake, they often experience hostility, aggression, and resistance towards the source of threat (Gniech & Grabitz, 1980, as cited in Steindl & Jonas, 2012). This line of thought is further supported by Steele (1988), who argue that there is a natural and strong tendency for people to defend themselves against threats to their ego. According to Stucke and Sporer (2002), this is the case even if it involves derogating the source of threat. That is, rather than strengthening their position by actively seeking to make positive alterations to their own behavior, the powerful tend to suppress the source of threat. This is done in order to quickly remove the threatening feeling that is considered so aversive, and to secure their own position.

The motivation to retain power in a context of instability can then be seen as having negative behavioral consequences both for people whose power is put in jeopardy, and for those subject to the powerful. Indeed, power is the main differentiator between a supervisor's role and that of a subordinate, as well as a critical resource needed to exercise influence upon others (Stogdill, 1950). As stated by Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991, p. 52): "power is a leader's currency". Without power, supervisors lose control over, and access to, valued resources that are associated with having power (Anderson & Brion, 2014). Consequently, when their power is threatened, supervisors may become highly distressed, and seek to retain their power at any cost. For instance, in an attempt to retain their position in the power hierarchy, powerful people in unstable hierarchies tend to become avoidance oriented, more rigid, and less creative (Sligte et al., 2011). However, research has shown that these behavioral reactions tend to only occur when power is perceived as unstable, as it would be pointless to engage in position-protecting behaviors if the position is fixed and thus unlikely to change. For instance, Handgraaf and colleagues (2008), showed that when powerful people faced people with lower degrees of power, the powerful engaged in strategic considerations and allocated less resources to the low power receiver. However, when receivers were completely powerless, offers tended to increase, as it was not seen as likely that the powerless could strike back and hurt the powerful and their position. These findings illustrate how supervisors may show certain self-serving behavioral patterns when their power is threatened.

Whereas Jordan, Sivanathan, and Galinsky (2011) found that unstable powerful engage in more risky behaviors, the implications of Maner and colleagues' (2007) research is that the unstable powerful tend to make more conservative decisions. However, the latter researchers only found this effect for people with high levels of power motivation (i.e., those who wanted to possess a position of power), as these people were motivated to maintain the status quo. Thus, the presence of competition for power could cause some powerful people to become preoccupied with maintaining their position (Groysberg, Polzer, & Elfenbein, 2011), which may for instance be attempted by making conservative decisions. In general, the research on the stability of power suggests that when their power position is threatened, powerful people might display certain behavioral patterns, as they are likely to do whatever it takes to maintain their power (Sapolsky, 2005).

Interestingly, in the power literature, the main focus has been on the person possessing power (e.g., Anderson & Brion, 2014; Tost, 2015), while in the voice literature most research has focused on those who are subjected to power. In this thesis, we seek to integrate these opposing perspectives by examining how factors related to the power holder, in this case the supervisor, can influence their willingness to implement voice. As previously mentioned, when people's power is threatened, they may become wary of others, and engage in self-serving behavior (Maner & Mead, 2010). Such self-serving behavior may take the form of refusing help from others in order to avoid losing status (Ackerman & Kenrick, 2008; Lee, 1997), or showing an aversion to voice to protect their ego (Fast et al., 2014). Based on the theory presented by Leheta and colleagues (2017), we suggest that unstable power can cause supervisors to feel that their position is threatened by their subordinates, and thus attempt to defend their position by engaging in behaviors aimed at reducing the threat. More specifically, we propose that unstable power causes supervisors to engage in social undermining of threatening subordinates, by being less willing to implement voice. Thus, we hypothesize that:

> *H_1: Supervisors with unstable power are less willing to implement voice than supervisors whose power is stable.*

Climate

Climate can be defined as "collective beliefs or perceptions about the practices, behaviors, and activities that are rewarded and supported in a given work environment" (Morrison et al., 2011, p. 184). These shared perceptions of the environment are generally assumed to significantly influence the behavior of both subordinates (Ivancevich, Matteson, & Konopaske, 2008) and supervisors (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). In fact, when a certain behavior is in line with the subjective norms of their context, people have greater intentions to engage in such behavior, and consequently are more inclined to actually do so (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Although researchers have identified multiple types of climates in organizations (e.g., Buch, Nerstad, & Säfvenbom, 2017; Jung, Wu, & Chow, 2008), Li and colleagues (2016) argue that a particularly important factor that has been largely overlooked in the research on powerful actors, is the cooperative versus competitive nature of social relations within a team. Often, the nature of these relations are determined by the nature of the climate (i.e., whether the climate is cooperative or competitive). When a team is characterized by a cooperative climate,

the team members' rewards tend to be positively linked, where one member's goal accomplishments benefits the entire team, resulting in the perception of a shared fate. Consequently, the members act in a beneficial, supportive way, and their contributions are encouraged and shared with the team, so that all members can benefit from them. Conversely, when a team is characterized by a competitive climate, the members' rewards are usually negatively linked, so that one team member's increase in success decreases the success of the others (Beersma et al., 2003; Li et al., 2016). For instance, in a competitive climate, subordinates who perform well may be rewarded by rising through the ranks, and may ultimately challenge the supervisor's position in the hierarchy. As a result, in order to gain or keep rewards, like monetary resources or hierarchical positions, members of the team may disregard the others' contributions, and might even impair others' performance (Li et al., 2016). However, in most real-life settings, the situation might be characterized as both cooperative and competitive, resulting in a mix of these types of behaviors. Nevertheless, one of them is usually more prominent in an organization at a given time, influencing the behaviors of both subordinates and supervisors (Li et al., 2016).

Indeed, one factor that may explain why some supervisors actively encourage and implement voice, while others react defensively, is the cooperative versus competitive nature of the climate. In a cooperative climate, supervisors are less likely to feel that their position is threatened, and will therefore more likely engage in group-serving behaviors (Li et al., 2016). Regarding voice, we propose that the group-serving behaviors of the cooperative climate may entail supervisors being more willing to implement voice, as it will likely benefit the group as a whole. In contrast, a competitive climate may cause supervisors to feel threatened by their subordinates (Leheta et al., 2017). More specifically, when their rewards are negatively linked, such as in a competitive climate (Beersma et al., 2003), an acknowledgement of a subordinate's improvement-oriented idea(s) could serve towards the goals of that subordinate, and thus undermine the supervisor's own goals. This might then elicit feelings of threat in the supervisor, who is likely to react by disregarding the subordinate's contributions, in order to avoid the threat (Leheta et al., 2017). We therefore propose that such self-serving behavior may take the form of refusing to implement voice, as a means of safeguarding one's position. Based on these arguments, we predict the following:

H_2: Supervisors in a competitive climate are less willing to implement voice than supervisors in a cooperative climate.

The Moderating Role of Climate on the Relationship Between Power Stability and Implementation of Voice

As illustrated below in Figure 1, the contextual factors presented in this thesis might interact to influence supervisors' willingness to implement voice. According to Leheta and colleagues (2017), both unstable hierarchies and climates promoting competitiveness are likely to cause supervisors to feel threatened and view their subordinates as potential competitors. Thus, the core of our argument is that supervisors' experience of threat will influence their willingness to implement voice. As previously noted, in order to remove the threat, supervisors may undermine their subordinates' behavior, for instance by refusing to implement voice. Thus, it stands to reason that any condition characterized by either unstable power or a competitive climate may result in supervisors' aversion to voice. Hence, we propose that supervisors with unstable power might already feel threatened, and will therefore not be affected by the nature of the climate. Conversely, we expect that supervisors with stable power will feel threatened in a competitive climate, and consequently be less willing to implement voice, yet they will not feel threatened in a cooperative climate as there is no source of threat. Thus, only supervisors with stable power will be influenced by the nature of the climate, making climate a moderator in the relationship between power stability and voice implementation. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H_3: There is an interaction effect between the stability of power and nature of the climate. More specifically, whereas supervisors with stable power implement voice to a greater extent in a cooperative versus competitive climate, extent of voice implementation is not contingent on climate for supervisors with unstable power.

In line with Hayes' (2018) and Oc's (2018) focus on interaction effects, a closer examination of the interaction between stability of power and nature of the climate could provide a deeper understanding of how these factors influence supervisors' willingness to implement voice. Hence, based on the arguments presented above, we suggest that regardless of their stability of power, supervisors in competitive climates are less likely to implement voice, as they already feel threatened simply due to the characteristics of the climate. Similarly, when

supervisors in cooperative climates have unstable power, they are likely to feel threatened due to the instability of their power, causing them to be equally likely to implement voice as supervisors in competitive climates. In other words, we predict that both unstable power and/or a competitive climate will elicit feelings of threat in the supervisors, causing them to be equally less willing to implement voice. However, we believe that when supervisors find themselves in a cooperative climate with stable power, both contextual factors promote group-serving behavior, and none of them elicits feelings of threat, resulting in a higher likelihood of implementing voice. This notion is supported by Leheta and colleagues (2017), who argue that supervisors will react positively towards their subordinates when they do not feel threatened by them. Thus, because supervisors in cooperative climates would likely only feel threatened when their power is unstable, we propose that:

> *H_4: In a cooperative climate, supervisors with stable power implement voice to a greater extent than supervisors with unstable power.*

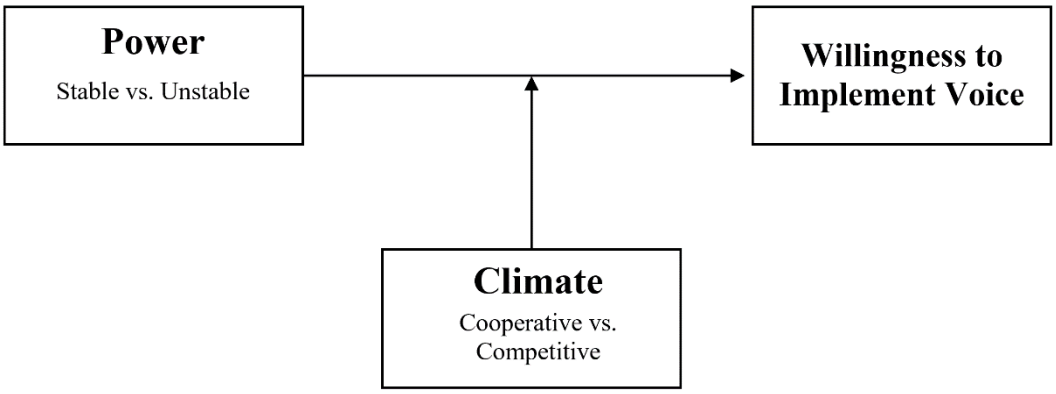

Figure 1. Hypothesized research model of the relationship between the stability of power, nature of the climate, and willingness to implement voice.

Study 1

The research in this thesis was conducted as part of a larger study. The purpose of the present study was to examine the extent to which power stability, climate, and their possible interaction, affected supervisors' willingness to implement voice. To test our hypotheses we conducted an experiment, as this allowed for controlled manipulation of the independent variables and subsequent gathering of information regarding their effects.

Method

Participants and design. Prior to the main data collection, two pilot studies (N = 40, N = 43) were conducted. These studies examined factors influencing whether supervisors were willing to solicit and implement voice, as well as the extent to which they denigrated subordinates' benevolence and competence. Although the pilot studies were restricted to the manipulation of power stability, and not climate, it was useful in terms of examining the participants' responses to the scenario and the related questions. Based on the results from the pilot studies, which indicated potential effects of the different conditions, the main study was deemed as feasible, with some minor alterations made.

A total of 242 participants completed the experiment in the main study, out of which 139 (57 %) identified as female, 102 (42 %) as male, and 1 (1 %) as other. Data on age was collected in yearly intervals: 18-25 (n = 71), 26-35 (n = 56), 36-45 (n = 38), 46-55 (n = 51), and 56+ (n = 26). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, where an online experiment was distributed by the use of social media. In addition, snowball sampling was employed as those in our social networks were requested to share the experiment with their respective networks. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions from a 2 (power stability: stable vs. unstable) x 2 (climate: cooperative vs. competitive) between-subjects design.

Procedure. The present study was conducted in both Norwegian and English. In order to ensure equivalence between both language versions of the experiment, the scenario and items were translated and back-translated in line with the recommendations of Brislin (1970). Both versions were distributed in the form of an online experiment using the survey tool Qualtrics, which allowed for easy logging of participants' replies, and subsequent retrieval of the entire dataset once data collection had been completed. In total, the experiment was estimated to take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

After an informed consent was obtained, assuring that no personally identifiable information would be collected, demographic data was gathered. Thereafter, the participants were presented with a scenario inspired by that of Fast and colleagues (2014). In an attempt to avoid influencing participants' responses, detailed information about the experiment was masked until the debrief. In the

experiment, the participants were asked to imagine holding a supervisory position while reading the following scenario:

> *Imagine that you are a manager in a company that sells consumer electronics. In your department, you have 20 employees under your supervision and leadership. Your managerial responsibilities include developing strategic plans, delegating work tasks, allocating holidays and bonuses. In addition, you decide who to reward and promote, and who to punish and demote. Your subordinates have little impact on your working days, holidays, and bonus.*

Once the participants had read the introductory scenario, they were randomly, and relatively evenly, assigned to one of four conditions, where the stability of power and the nature of the climate were manipulated. The conditions were; stable power position - cooperative climate (n = 63); stable power position - competitive climate (n = 60); unstable power position - cooperative climate (n = 63); and unstable power position - competitive climate (n = 56).

Independent variables.

Stability of power. In the scenario, the stability of power was operationalized as the change (increase/decrease) in company profits over the last years, and consequently the likelihood that the supervisor would keep his/her position in the company. Participants who were assigned to the stable condition were presented with the following scenario:

> *In recent years, the company's profits have increased steadily, and as a result, the company's Board of Directors would like to maintain how the company is managed by keeping the current set of managers. Specifically, your supervisors have expressed faith in your competence in leading your department. This makes you* ***certain*** *that you will get to keep your current managerial position.*

Participants who were assigned to the unstable power condition, however, were given this scenario:

> *In recent years, the company's profits have declined, and as a result, the company's Board of Directors are considering making some changes to how the firm is run. There are rumors of replacing managers as part of these changes. Specifically, your supervisors are now considering whether you as*

> *a manager are competent enough to lead your department, or should be replaced. This makes you **uncertain** as to whether you will get to keep your current managerial position.*

Climate. The climate was operationalized as either cooperative, with a "strong team spirit", or competitive, with an "every man for himself" mindset. In the cooperative condition, the scenario read:

> *Your working environment is characterized by strong **cooperation**, where the employees work together as a team to achieve their department's goals and objectives. You sense the existence of a strong team spirit among the employees, where everyone support each other and are willing to collaborate with others. In fact, employees rarely challenge each other's suggestions, and when they do, they always extend help and provide a solution.*

Conversely, in the competitive condition, participants read:

> *Your working environment is characterized by strong **competition**, where every employee's main objective is to get a promotion. You sense there is an "every man for himself" mindset among the employees, where everyone focuses on their own tasks and goals, with little willingness to support or collaborate with others. In fact, employees often challenge each other's opinions without extending any help or provide a solution.*

The remainder of the scenario went on to explain how a recent customer survey indicated some dissatisfaction among the customers, which led the participant to present possible solutions to these issues at a quarterly departmental meeting. Further, the scenario described how a subordinate named Henry (Henrik in the Norwegian version) voiced his concerns about these solutions during the meeting. Henry had been a part of the company for almost seven years, and was described as young, ambitious, and competent. After Henry had commented on the limitations of the participant's plan, he offered other solutions to the problem, arguing that these had proved successful at his former job.

Dependent variable.

Willingness to implement voice. Our dependent variable, willingness to implement voice, was assessed using four items inspired by those of Fast and

colleagues (2014). The items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*):

1) "The comments from Henry would cause me to have second thoughts about my plan"
2) "I would revise my plan and incorporate Henry's comments"
3) "I would take Henry's comments to my supervisors"
4) "Henry's comments about my plan are valuable"

In line with the cutoff criteria of $\alpha = .7$ presented by Nunnally (1978), the scale was found to be reliable, with $\alpha = .82$. Thus, a high score on this variable indicates greater willingness to implement voice.

Manipulation check. Analyses were conducted to examine whether the participants had successfully completed the manipulation checks measuring the effectiveness of the stability of power manipulation, as well as the manipulation of the nature of the climate. First, the participants responded to two recall items indicating to what extent they considered their position to be a) unstable, and b) stable using two 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = *Not true*, 7 = *True*). A 2 (actual power stability: unstable vs. stable; between-subjects) x 2 (perceived power stability: unstable vs. stable; within-subjects) mixed-design ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect of actual power stability and perceived power stability ($F(1, 240) = 222.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .48$), suggesting that participants with a stable power position differed from participants with an unstable power position in their perception of hierarchical (in)stability. Specifically, participants assigned to an unstable power position perceived their position to be more unstable ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.32$) than participants with a stable position ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.43$); ($F(1, 240) = 158.55$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [1.88, 2.58]). Conversely, participants assigned to a stable power position perceived their position to be more stable ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.39$) than participants with an unstable position ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.33$); ($F(1, 240) = 128.56$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [1.64, 2.33]).

Similarly, the participants also completed two more recall items indicating to what extent they considered the climate to be a) competitive, and b) cooperative using the abovementioned two 7-point Likert-type scales. A 2 (actual climate: competitive vs. cooperative; between-subjects) x 2 (perceived climate: competitive vs. cooperative; within-subjects) mixed-design ANOVA showed a significant

interaction effect of actual climate and perceived climate ($F(1, 237) = 353.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .60$), suggesting that participants in a competitive climate differed from participants in a cooperative climate in their perception of the nature of the climate. Specifically, participants in a competitive climate perceived their position to be more competitive ($M = 6.10$, $SD = 1.12$) than participants in a cooperative climate ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.63$); ($F(1, 237) = 288.60$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [2.74, 3.46]). Conversely, participants in a cooperative climate perceived the climate to be more cooperative ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.40$) than participants in a competitive climate ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.40$); ($F(1, 237) = 272.67$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [2.70, 3.43]). Thus, these results supported the effectiveness of our manipulations.

Results and Discussion

To assess the hypotheses, a two-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted, with a chosen alpha level of .05 for all the statistical tests. Due to the specific hypothesized directions of effects, one-tailed tests were adopted in all analyses, unless stated otherwise. In the analysis of the first hypothesis, namely the extent to which supervisors with stable versus unstable power were willing to implement voice, a Levene's test was run to check for the assumption of homogeneity of variance, which was not violated. Results of the analysis showed that the hypothesized main effect of stability of power on supervisors' willingness to implement voice did not reach statistical significance ($F(1, 240) = 1.26$, $p = .13$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$). Hence, our first hypothesis was not supported.

Turning to the second hypothesis, about the extent to which the nature of the climate influenced supervisors' willingness to implement voice, we conducted another Levene's test to check for homogeneity of variance, which again was not violated. The analysis revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the supervisors in the cooperative and the competitive conditions ($F(1, 240) = 8.14$, $p = .003$). Consistent with our second hypothesis, Figure 2 illustrates how supervisors in the cooperative climate ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 0.90$) were more willing to implement voice than supervisors in the competitive climate ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 0.97$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [-0.57, -0.10]). These results indicate that the cooperative versus the competitive nature of the climate did have an effect on supervisors' willingness to implement voice, although the effect size ($\eta_p^2 = .03$) can be classified as somewhat small, according to Cohen's (1988) criterion.

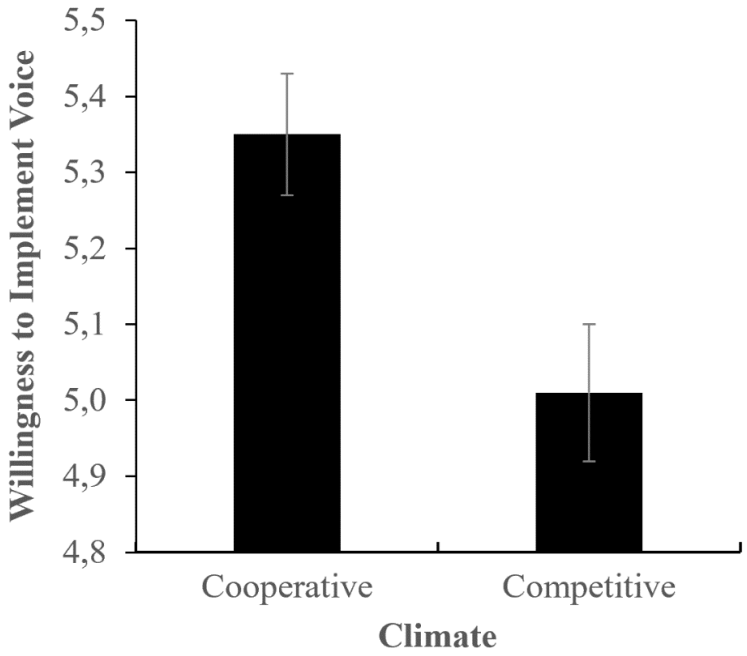

Figure 2. Experiment 1, the estimated effects of the nature of the climate on willingness to implement voice. Error bars represent standard errors.

Further, we tested the third hypothesis; that there is an interaction effect between the power stability and climate, where supervisors with stable power implement voice to a higher degree in a collaborative versus a competitive climate, while degree of voice implementation is not contingent on climate for supervisors with unstable power. As with the analyses of the main effects, the Levene's test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. The overall interaction effect between power stability and climate was found to be close to what some organizational scholars (e.g., Bornstein & Arterberry, 2010; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000) would classify as marginally significant ($F(1, 238) = 2.52$, $p = .057$). Due to our a priori hypothesis about the specific nature of the interaction effect, we conducted a two-tailed planned comparison test, as recommended by Rosenthal, Rosnow, and Rubin (2000). As illustrated in Figure 3, the results showed that, in line with our hypothesis, only supervisors with stable power were influenced by climate. Specifically, as summarized in Table 1 below, supervisors with stable power would implement voice to a greater extent when in a cooperative climate ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 0.80$) than when in a competitive climate ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.08$, ($F(1, 238) = 9.87$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [0.20, 0.86]). Conversely, the data showed that supervisors with unstable power in a cooperative climate ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 0.99$) did not significantly differ from supervisors with unstable power in a competitive climate ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 0.82$, $F(1, 238) = 0.74$, $p = .391$, $\eta_p^2 =$

.003, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [-0.48, 0.19]) in their willingness to implement voice. Thus, the results support our third hypothesis of the interaction effect between power stability and climate, where the latter only influenced supervisors with stable power.

Table 1.

Experiment 1: The Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations of Supervisors' Willingness to Implement Voice Depending on their Context

	Power Stability	Climate	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1	Stable	Cooperative	5.38	0.80	-			
2		Competitive	4.85	1.08	-0.341**	-		
3	Unstable	Cooperative	5.33	0.99	-.0352**	-0.341**	-	
4		Competitive	5.18	0.82	-0.326**	-0.315**	-0.326**	-

$N = 242$
** $p < 0.01$

In order to examine our fourth hypothesis, about the extent to which supervisors in a cooperative climate are more willing to implement voice when they have stable power than unstable power, we compared the effect of supervisors' stability of power within each type of climate. Contrary to our hypothesis, the results of the two-tailed analysis showed that supervisors in the cooperative climate condition did not differ in their willingness to implement voice depending on whether they had stable (M = 5.38, SD = 0.80) or unstable (M = 5.33, SD = 0.99) power ($F(1, 238) = 0.10$, $p = .76$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [-0.28, 0.38]). Rather, it was the supervisors in the competitive condition that marginally differed in their willingness to implement voice, depending on whether they had stable (M = 4.85, SD = 1.08), or unstable (M = 5.18, SD = 0.82) power ($F(1, 238) = 3.62$, p = .058, η_p^2 = .02, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [-0.67, 0.01]). However, as the confidence interval bestrides the zero mark, these results should be interpreted with caution. Hence, we did not find sufficient support for our fourth hypothesis.

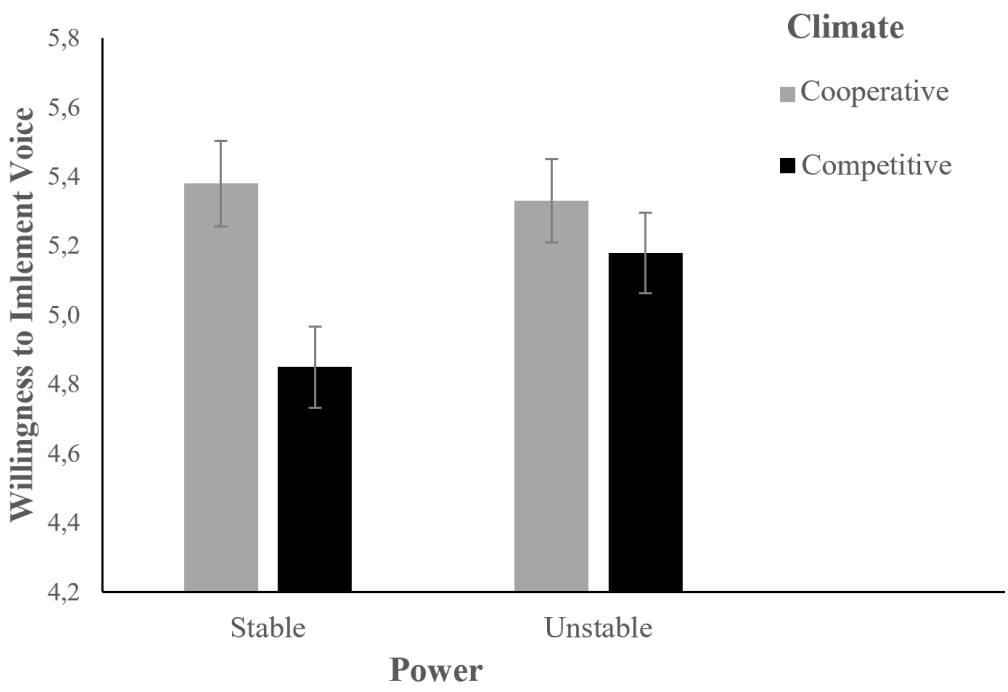

Figure 3. Experiment 1, the estimated interaction effects of stability of power and nature of the climate on willingness to implement voice. Error bars represent standard errors.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the results of the analyses of the interaction effect showed that climate did not have a significant effect on supervisors' willingness to implement voice in the unstable condition, but the effect of climate was highly significant when the supervisor had stable power. This finding is in line with our third hypothesis. However, contrary to our fourth hypothesis, supervisors in the cooperative condition did not significantly differ depending on their stability of power, while supervisors in the competitive condition did, although marginally, with the stable-competitive supervisors being the least willing to implement voice.

Study 2

Considering how the results of Study 1 showed significant effects of climate on willingness to implement voice, we wanted to examine a potential indirect effect that could account for this relationship. More specifically, we investigated whether supervisors' negative perception, and subsequent denigration, of subordinates' benevolence could have a mediating effect on the relationship between climate and supervisors' willingness to implement voice.

Denigration of Subordinate Benevolence

Benevolence can be defined as "the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an egocentric profit motive" (Mayer & Davis, 1999, p. 124). In this context, perceived benevolence refers to supervisors' perception of whether the subordinate will act in the best interest of the supervisor (Knoll & Harjinder, 2011; Leheta et al., 2017). Such a perception is often based on the presence or lack of trust in the supervisor-subordinate dyad. Indeed, benevolence is one of the antecedents of trustworthiness (Knoll & Harjinder, 2011; Mayer & Davis, 1999). Distrust, on the other hand, refers to "a lack of confidence in the other, a concern that the other may act so as to harm one, that he does not care about one's welfare or intends to act harmfully, or is hostile" (Govier, 1993, p. 240). This tendency, we would argue, might be more likely to occur when supervisors find themselves in a climate characterized by competition, rather than cooperation.

According to Kramer and Gavrieli (2005), supervisors that find themselves in a highly competitive climate are constantly surrounded by others challenging their power and competing for their position. As a result, supervisors may fear that their subordinates are looking to take their place, which in turn can lead the supervisors to distrust them. In fact, the authors argue that even supervisors who are cooperatively oriented tend to become more competitive when they interact with subordinates who are perceived as competitive. Thus, when supervisors perceive their subordinates' behavior to be threatening to their power, they may attempt to minimize or prevent its damage by being reluctant to implement voice.

Moreover, Kramer and Gavrieli (2005) argue that being wary of subordinates' intentions is a natural consequence of holding a supervisory position, as it "simply comes with the territory" (p. 252). Further, the authors posit that when supervisors are under the impression that their subordinates are out to get them, they may engage in behaviors that could entail a substantial cost to the organization (Kramer & Gavrieli, 2005), such as an unwillingness to implement voice. Indeed, if supervisors believe that their subordinates engage in voice behavior with the intent of questioning the supervisor's abilities in front of the rest of the department (i.e., public threat), thereby creating a sense of threat in the supervisors, it seems plausible that they will engage in behaviors that reduces or removes that threat. In this respect, we argue that the supervisors might choose to not implement the

suggestions provided by the voicer, in order to ensure that the voicer's structural power does not increase.

Thus, we propose that supervisors who distrust the voicer as a natural consequence of a competitive climate, might be fearful and suspicious of the voicer's intentions. This might in turn cause the supervisors to evaluate the intentions of the subordinate who speaks up in a negative manner (Burris, 2012), hereby referred to as denigration of subordinate benevolence. Hence, when the climate is characterized by competition, supervisors may denigrate their subordinates' benevolence as a self-protective reaction (Fast et al., 2014). On the other hand, supervisors may be less likely to denigrate subordinate benevolence when they trust that the voicer has a desire to act in the best interest of the supervisor. This is more likely the case in a cooperative climate, where the rewards are positively linked. Hence, as illustrated in Figure 4, we hypothesize that:

> *H_5: Supervisors' denigration of subordinate benevolence mediates the relationship between climate and willingness to implement voice.*

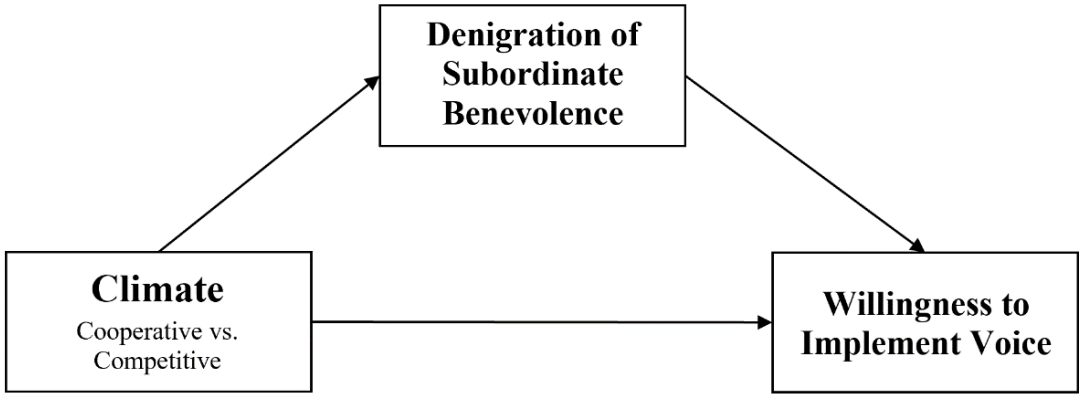

Figure 4. Hypothesized research model of the mediating effect of supervisors' denigration of subordinate benevolence between climate and willingness to implement voice.

Method

Participants and design. In the second study, a single mediator model was adopted. In total, 114 participants completed the experiment, where 70 (61 %) identified as female, and 44 (39 %) as male. As in the first study, data on age was collected in yearly intervals: 18-25 (n = 60), 26-35 (n = 32), 36-45 (n = 9), 46-55 (n = 7), and 56+ (n = 6). The participants were recruited through convenience- and snowball sampling, as the online experiment was distributed and shared through social media. To ensure that participants' responses were not influenced by their

knowledge of the experiment, potential participants were asked not to take part in the second experiment if they had participated in the first study, or had any pre-existing knowledge of it. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions: competitive climate or cooperative climate.

Procedure. The study was distributed in Norwegian, in the form of an online experiment using the same survey tool as in Study 1. The experimental scenario was nearly identical to the first study, but did not include the manipulations of stability of power, and the potential mediating variable of denigration of subordinate benevolence was added. Thus, climate was the only variable that was manipulated in Study 2. In total, the experiment was estimated to take approximately 6 minutes to complete.

Independent variable.

Climate. Identical to the first study, the climate described in the scenario was operationalized as either cooperative, with a "strong team spirit", or competitive, with an "every man for himself" mindset. The participants were divided equally into the two conditions, with 57 participants in each condition.

Mediating variable.

Denigration of subordinate benevolence. The hypothesized mediating variable was denigration of subordinate benevolence. This variable was assessed using four items adapted from Mayer and Davis (1999), and was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*):

1) "Henry would not knowingly do anything to hurt my managerial position"
2) "Henry would go out of his way to help me"
3) "My needs and desires are very important to Henry"
4) "Henry wants me to be successful"

The estimated reliability was $\alpha = .82$, indicating satisfactory internal consistency of the scale (Pallant, 2013). To create a measure of denigration, the scores were reverse-scored in line with Fast and colleagues' (2014) approach, so that high scores on this variable indicates a higher degree of denigration of subordinate benevolence.

Dependent variable.

Willingness to implement voice. As in the first study, the dependent variable was willingness to implement voice, and was therefore assessed using the same scale. The scale was found to be reliable, with α = .89, so a higher score on this variable likely indicates a greater willingness to implement voice.

Manipulation check. In order to assess the effectiveness of the climate manipulation, participants responded to a manipulation check, where they indicated to what extent they considered the climate to be a) competitive, and b) cooperative using two 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = *Not true*, 7 = *True*). A 2 (actual climate: competitive vs. cooperative; between-subjects) x 2 (perceived climate: competitive vs. cooperative; within-subjects) mixed-design ANOVA showed a significant interaction effect of actual climate and perceived climate ($F(1, 112) = 229.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .67$), suggesting that participants in a competitive climate differed from participants in a cooperative climate in their perception of the nature of the climate. Specifically, participants in a competitive climate perceived their position to be more competitive ($M = 6.19$, $SD = 1.23$) than participants in a cooperative climate ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.69$); ($F(1, 112) = 142.17$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [2.75, 3.85]). Conversely, participants in a cooperative climate perceived the climate to be more cooperative ($M = 5.77$, $SD = 1.27$) than participants in a competitive climate ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.28$); ($F(1, 112) = 229.56$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Differences}}$ [3.14, 4.09]). Thus, these results supported the effectiveness of our climate manipulations.

Results and Discussion

To examine the relationship between climate and supervisors' willingness to implement voice more closely, an independent-samples t-test was conducted in order to determine whether there was a significant main effect between the two variables. An alpha level of .05 was adopted, and a Levene's test was run to check for the assumption of homogeneity of variance. The test showed that equal variance should not be assumed, so the approximate t-statistic was considered in the analysis. The result of the t-test revealed a significant main effect of climate on willingness to implement voice ($t(99.02) = -2.5$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .05$). Specifically, supervisors in a cooperative climate ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 0.90$) were significantly more willing to implement voice than supervisors in a competitive climate ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.31$, 95% CI $_{\text{Mean-Difference}}$ [-.94, -.10]). Hence, the data showed a significant main effect between climate and willingness to implement voice.

In order to test whether denigration of subordinate benevolence mediated the relationship between climate and willingness to implement voice, we employed SPSS PROCESS macro from Hayes (2018, Model 4). A 5,000 resampled percentile bootstrap revealed an indirect effect of climate on willingness to implement voice through denigration of subordinate benevolence $b = 0.54$, $SE = 0.16$, 95% CI [0.25, 0.88], as the confidence interval did not contain zero (Hayes, 2018; MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011) (see Figure 5). These results indicate that supervisors' denigration of their subordinates' benevolence may act as a mediator in the relationship between climate and supervisors' willingness to implement voice, and thus support our fifth hypothesis.

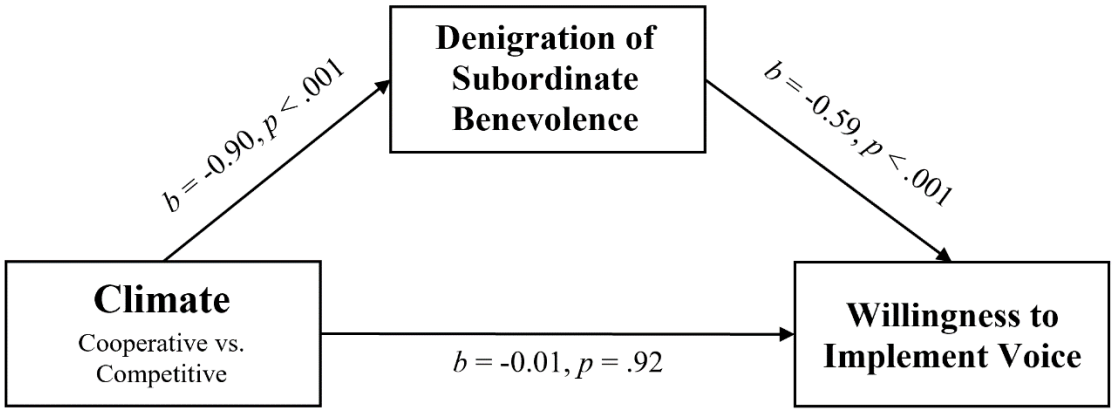

Figure 5. Experiment 2, the estimated mediation effect of supervisors' denigration of subordinate benevolence between climate and willingness to implement voice. The calculated beta values and significance levels are provided.

General Discussion

By definition, voice involves sharing improvement-oriented ideas with someone who has the perceived power to act on the issues raised. Hence, because supervisors usually have the resources needed to implement voice readily available, they are inherently important in the voice process (Detert & Burris, 2007). However, the majority of previous research on voice has failed to consider factors that influence supervisors' willingness to implement voice (Fast et al., 2014). Indeed, the interplay between various contextual factors affecting supervisors' behavior have largely been ignored in research on leadership in general (Oc, 2018). Thus, the purpose of this thesis was to contribute to the expansion of knowledge by examining contextual factors that influence supervisors' willingness to implement voice. In fact, to our knowledge, our studies are among the first to explore whether

contextual factors such as the stability of power and the nature of a departmental climate could predict supervisors' willingness to implement voice, and whether these two factors interact.

In both experiments, participants were presented with a scenario illustrating promotive voice (Liang et al., 2012), where suggestions were made with the intent of improving departmental functioning. We assumed that this type of voice would be easier for supervisors to disregard if they felt threatened, and conversely, easier to implement if non-threatened. The reasoning behind this argument is that promotive voice is a form of proactive behavior that is not essential at the time in order to prevent harm, as is the case with prohibitive voice (Liang et al., 2012). By adopting this type of voice in the scenario, we expected that we would be able to obtain more distinct results based on the independent variables, than we would have if the voice message was of a prohibitive character that more strongly compelled action among all participants. However, the analyses revealed that Henry's promotive voice message still compelled action in most conditions. This could perhaps either indicate a failure to properly manipulate the voice message to be promotive; that most conditions in the experiment did not elicit feelings of threat; or that promotive voice may not have had the anticipated effect on willingness to implement voice.

In the first study, the results showed that although there was no support for our hypothesis of a significant main effect between the stability of power and supervisors' willingness to implement voice, there was a significant relationship between climate and willingness to implement voice. Specifically, whereas unstable power did not cause supervisors to be less willing to implement voice, a competitive climate did. However, it should be noted that willingness to implement voice was above average in all conditions, yet supervisors in a cooperative climate were willing to implement voice to an even greater extent. Nevertheless, these findings demonstrate the significant influence of climate on supervisor behavior.

Despite the lack of a significant main effect between stability of power and voice implementation, the results from the interaction analysis illustrate the importance of considering power stability in regard to voice implementation, as the effect of climate was found to be contingent on whether supervisors' power position was stable or unstable. Supporting our interaction hypothesis, climate did not significantly affect the extent to which supervisors with unstable power were

willing to implement voice, yet it did have an effect on willingness to implement voice for supervisors with stable power. Specifically, for supervisors with stable power, a cooperative climate was associated with a greater willingness to implement voice, than a competitive climate. However, contrary to our beliefs, supervisors in a cooperative climate did not differ in their willingness to implement voice, depending on their level of power stability. Whereas we expected that supervisors with stable power would be more willing to implement voice in a cooperative climate than supervisors with unstable power, this was not supported in the data. By inspecting the means of the different conditions in Figure 3, it seems more plausible that supervisors with stable power in a competitive climate are less inclined to implement voice than supervisors with unstable power in the same competitive climate. However, cautions should be made to this interpretation since it was only marginally significant. Notwithstanding the non-significant findings, it appears that supervisors with stable power in a competitive climate might have been less willing to implement voice, while the supervisors in the three remaining conditions were willing to implement voice to an equally greater extent.

A potential explanation for these results could be that instead of reacting to the threat of losing power by socially undermining their subordinates (i.e., by not implementing voice), unstable power may have caused supervisors to feel like their every move was being monitored by their own leaders and subordinates. Thus, supervisors with unstable power may have felt that their freedom to act was limited (Keltner et al., 2003). This feeling of wariness may have resulted in an aversion to engage in any behaviors that could reflect negatively on them, such as not taking others' constructive inputs into account. Implementing voice may then be seen as conservative, as this is behavior that is generally expected of supervisors. Thus, in line with the research of Maner and colleagues (2007), the supervisors with unstable power positions may have become risk averse, making conservative decisions in order to maintain their position. Therefore, a potential explanation for our results could be that power instability increased supervisors' risk aversion, leading to more conservative decisions, which made the context of climate less important in influencing degree of voice implementation.

Moreover, the wariness of being observed could be experienced as rather stressful for the supervisor. Indeed, researchers have found that powerful people in unstable hierarchies tend to experience a high level of stress (Knight & Mehta,

2017). Considering how stress has been found to impede thinking and performance on mental tasks (e.g., Liston, McEwen, & Casey, 2009), wariness may then have taken up a great deal of the supervisors' mental capacity when experiencing unstable power. This might in turn have left little room for influence by the nature of the climate. Conversely, the supervisors with stable power may not have experienced the same wariness, allowing them to be more susceptible to the climate manipulation. More specifically, in the cooperative, stable power condition, the supervisors may not have felt threatened, causing them to be more willing to implement voice. However, supervisors with stable power in the competitive condition may have felt threatened due to the nature of the climate, but also confident enough in their power position that they could suppress the perceived threat from their subordinates. Thus, the combination of stable power and competitive climate may facilitate a condition where supervisors feel like they are able to disregard the expectation of implementing voice, while the three other conditions facilitate a context that, for different reasons, encourage voice implementation.

To further examine the effect of climate, the second study examined whether supervisors' denigration of subordinate benevolence mediated the relationship between the nature of the climate and supervisors' willingness to implement voice. Hence, Study 2 aimed to replicate the findings from the first experiment, but also attempted to illuminate a possible psychological mechanism behind the effect of climate on voice implementation. The results of the study showed a significant main effect between climate and willingness to implement voice, which completely disappeared when denigration of benevolence was introduced as a mediator. Thus, the predicted mediation model was supported, demonstrating how a competitive climate may cause supervisors to be wary of their subordinates and denigrate their benevolence, leading the supervisors to be more reluctant to implement voice. This finding indicates that denigration of subordinate benevolence may account for the finding that supervisors in a competitive climate were less willing to implement voice than supervisors in a cooperative climate.

Theoretical Contributions

The present research offers several noteworthy contributions to theory. As noted by Leheta and colleagues (2017), previous research has often assumed that organizational hierarchies are stable entities where supervisors' positions are

unlikely to change, and that supervisors strive to act in the best interest of the organization and its members. However, said assumptions may no longer be valid in today's dynamic and competitive business environment. As demonstrated in the experiments, unstable power and a competitive climate can cause supervisors to engage in behaviors that might hinder the organization in reaching its goals, such as not implementing voice. These results can then be used to explain why some supervisors are unwilling to implement voice in their organization. Thus, the assumptions of hierarchical stability and supervisors' groups-serving behavior is something that should be reconsidered in future research.

However, the primary contribution of this research lies in the application of Leheta and colleagues' (2017) social comparison-based framework in a new setting, namely in the experimental field of voice. Inspired by their focus on sources of leader insecurity, this thesis emphasizes and extends the research on external sources and how they may affect voice implementation. Specifically, we examined contextual factors and their influence on supervisor behavior, as called for by several researchers both within the field of voice (e.g., Burris, 2012; Fast et al., 2014; Morrison, 2014), and leadership (Liden & Antonakis, 2009). When examining supervisors' behavior, context is an important variable to consider, as their behavior cannot be understood completely without being examined in the setting in which it occurred (Liden & Antonakis, 2009). Thus, this thesis provides much needed insight into the effect of context on supervisors' behavior, which not only contributes to the voice literature, but also to the literature on leadership in general.

Moreover, this thesis shifts the topic of interest from subordinate characteristics to potential contextual factors influencing supervisors. This is a valuable contribution to the literature on voice, as supervisors are indeed the power holders in the sense that they are the ones to determine whether the suggestions voiced by their subordinates are actually implemented. Thus, highlighting factors influencing the supervisors is important, especially considering that these factors influence whether voice is implemented regardless of the content of the voice message or the way it is presented.

In addition, this research also highlights a plausible psychological mechanism underlying the paradoxical tendency of not implementing voice raised by subordinates. Thus, we answer Leheta and colleagues' (2017) call for research

on context-driven antecedents of maladaptive supervisor behaviors. Moreover, by revealing denigration of subordinate benevolence as a mediator between climate and supervisors' willingness to implement voice, this thesis provides a possible explanation for *how* climate influences voice implementation. As such, this finding not only expands the literature on denigration of benevolence, but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind an important influence on supervisors' willingness to implement voice.

Finally, this thesis contributes to the literature on power, more specifically, to the literature on unstable power hierarchies. Although Anderson and Brion (2014) argue that unstable power causes supervisors to act in a self-interested manner, a notion supported by several researchers (e.g., Pettit et al., 2016; Maner & Mead, 2010), the current research did not find this effect in regard to voice implementation. Hence, this thesis offers support for the boundaries of the effect of unstable power.

Practical Implications

It is important to note that the effect sizes obtained from our analyses could be considered moderate for the variables that reached statistical significance. Hence, the practical significance of our results is somewhat limited (Lakens, 2013). Nevertheless, as moderate effect sizes still indicate a meaningful effect, and should therefore not be disregarded, the results from this research may provide valuable insights into how practitioners can facilitate conditions in their organization that enhance the likelihood of voice implementation. For example, in line with the results of our first study, creating a cooperative climate, and, ironically, unstable power positions, could increase the tendency for supervisors to be willing to implement voice. However, with reference to research on the negative effects of unstable power (e.g., Maner & Case, 2016; Maner & Mead, 2010; Pettit et al., 2016), the latter is not recommended. Thus, only a cooperative climate remains a significant factor that increases willingness to implement voice for supervisors with stable power. Given the many positive consequences of voice implementation, organizations should strive to cultivate a cooperative climate where voice implementation is not only encouraged, but also more likely to occur, as revealed in our findings. For instance, this may be achieved by implementing a formal reward system where behavior that serves the team and/or organization is rewarded instead of using individual bonus schemes that rewards self-serving behaviors,

thereby undermining a cooperative climate (Van Bavel & Packer, 2016). Moreover, organizations should be mindful of the choice of their core values, as research has found that the norms of a group influence intentions to act according to them, resulting in a greater probability of doing so (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Indeed, values that promote cooperation lead to organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) (Ye, 2012). Thus, it seems reasonable to believe that such organizational values can increase the occurrence of voice implementation, as this is considered an example of OCB.

The second study did not only reveal a mechanism underlying supervisors' unwillingness to implement voice, but may also inform of a practical solution for subordinates and organizations looking to reduce the likelihood of this maladaptive response in supervisors. Specifically, in departments and organizations characterized by a competitive climate, denigration of subordinate benevolence might for instance be reduced by incorporating practices where voice is presented anonymously. By presenting voice anonymously, voicers would not be individually rewarded with any potential advancements in the hierarchy, and are therefore less likely to constitute a threat to the supervisor. When supervisors do not perceive the voicer(s) as a threat, they are less likely to denigrate their subordinates' benevolence, and therefore more likely to be willing to implement voice.

Strengths and Limitations of This Research

The aim of our research was to explore the largely overlooked effects of contextual factors on supervisors' behavior, such as power stability and climate. Given the lack of research on these factors, there are both important strengths and shortcomings to consider in our research. Firstly, a noteworthy strength of the present research is the establishment of a causal relationship between our independent and dependent variables. Specifically, the use of online experiments allowed for easier manipulation of our variables, supported by the results of our manipulation checks. Combined with the randomly and relatively evenly assignment of participants to each experimental condition, causality can be implied (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). In addition, the participants remained completely anonymous throughout the entire experiment, potentially circumventing the social desirability bias (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Secondly, the two pilot studies conducted prior to the present research, allowed us to make necessary improvements to the design, as well as providing us

with useful information to consider when developing the scenario. Furthermore, although the first main study demonstrated the effect of contextual factors on supervisors' behavior, one of its limitations was the lack of exploration into the mechanisms behind the effects. To address this limitation, we conducted a second study to demonstrate how denigration of subordinate benevolence acted as a mediator between climate and willingness to implement voice. Thus, the inclusion of the second study provided a more complete account of the ways in which climate influences supervisors' behavior in terms of implementing voice. Additionally, the second experiment was able to replicate the findings of the effect of climate found in Study 1, further supporting our hypothesis of the existence of this effect.

Thirdly, considering how our scales had a low number of items (<10 items), one could have expected rather low Cronbach's alpha values (Pallant, 2013). Yet, all of the obtained alpha values were above .8, suggesting high internal consistency of the scales, again strengthening our confidence in the findings.

Along with the strengths of this thesis, one should also consider its limitations. Firstly, the experiments were distributed through social media, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, thereby employing convenience sampling. This sampling method may include several caveats. For instance, it may have resulted in a somewhat homogeneous sample, perhaps affecting the generalizability of the results. However, although our findings cannot be claimed to be representative of the general population, it has provided empirical support for a significant effect of contextual factors on supervisors' behavior, and can therefore be seen as an early exploration of contextual variables in relation to supervisors' response to voice. Moreover, as many of the participants were rather young, especially in the second study (< 35: 93 of 114), they might have limited experience with similar situations. Thus, they may have struggled to identify with the situation described in the scenario, perhaps increasing the occurrence of social desirability in their responses. In addition, the majority of the participants were Norwegian and likely familiar with the Norwegian Working Environment Act, which is characterized by strong protection of workers (Regjeringen, 2017). Thus, the responses to the instability of power might be culturally contingent, where employees belonging to cultures characterized by low job security might perceive an unstable power position as more threatening than employees in cultures with a legal system protecting the workers, as is the case in Norway. Therefore, future research should seek to employ

a culturally diverse sample, in order to explore whether (in)stability of power might act as a more valid predictor of willingness to implement voice in low job security cultures.

Secondly, characteristics of the voicer in the scenario might have subconsciously triggered emotions in the participants, due to either positive or negative connotations of such characteristics. For instance, the use of a male voicer might have affected the participants' response. As shown by Detert, Burris, and Harrison (2010), men tend to receive more recognition than their female counterparts for the suggestions that they propose. Similarly, Brescoll (2011) found that women are generally more reticent than their male colleagues, as they anticipate that speaking up will entail negative consequences, an assumption that is actually supported. In fact, women who spoke up received significantly lower ratings in terms of whether they were considered suitable for a leadership position, as well as their overall competence, than the men that spoke up for the same amount of time. Moreover, these women were regarded in this manner by both their female and male colleagues. Thus, it seems likely that a supervisor, regardless of gender, will react differently to suggestions raised by a woman than a man. In addition, as researchers have found that individuals can be negatively perceived simply due to their name (e.g., Bursell, 2007; Carlsson & Rooth, 2008), the voicer's name might also have affected the participants' response. Since it is nearly impossible to find a "neutral" name that none of the participants would have any preconceptions about, we attempted to circumvent the strong influence of the name by using a relatively common name in both the English and Norwegian scenario, in the hope that participants would not come to think of one person in particular. However, as we did not control for the potential effect of the voicer's gender nor name, the possible influence of said characteristics remains undetermined.

Thirdly, there might exist important boundary conditions not accounted for in this research. For instance, the scenario used in the experiments described a situation in which the voicer spoke up in front of the entire department, thereby increasing the probability of the supervisor perceiving the action taken by the voicer as a public threat. The results might have shown a different tendency had the voice message been presented privately or anonymously, thus only constituting an ego threat. In addition, the participants' personalities were not measured. Provided that we were unable to create a strong situation (Cooper & Withey, 2009) where the

participant's personality dispositions were sufficiently constrained, it seems plausible that participants' propensity to act in either a self-serving or group-serving manner could have affected how they reacted to power (in)stability and climate, ultimately affecting their responses to voice.

Directions for Future Research

Considering the moderate effect sizes found in this research, it is likely that there are several factors yet to be explored in order to fully grasp the concept of voice implementation. Echoing Li and colleagues' (2016) call for an increased focus on context, future research may for instance explore whether various contextual factors can account for the remaining variance in supervisors' willingness to implement voice. For example, in a society that values accountability, supervisors might be more willing to implement voice, as a failure to do so would need justification. Conversely, national cultures characterized by high power distance (Hofstede, 1983) may put less pressure on supervisors to implement voice, because subordinates are expected to stay in their rightful place and not speak up. The density of the team or department may also influence voice implementation, as the number of ties between organizational members have been found to affect sharing of critical information and degree of cooperation (Serban et al., 2015), aspects that are likely important antecedents of voice and its implementation. Finally, it could be interesting to examine whether the physical or spatial proximity between supervisors and subordinates could influence voice implementation. Such distances have been found to correlate negatively with group altruism, and positively with group role conflict (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996), which may indicate a decreased likelihood that supervisors would implement voice raised by subordinates who are physically or spatially distant from them. Thus, future research is needed to both identify and explore the effect of other contextual factors on voice implementation.

In an attempt to fully control the independent variables, we used a scenario in the experiments. However, our examination was restricted to how people think or claim that they behave, not how they actually behave in such situations. Thus, although this method can be argued to provide greater control and precision (Fast et al., 2014), it may also compromise the external- and ecological validity of our findings. Hence, future research may benefit from examining the variables applied in this research in a practical setting by employing correlational methods. Such

research may also be able to identify other contextual variables influencing supervisors' behavior in regard to voice implementation.

Further, the present research has explored the psychological mechanism of denigration of benevolence that can reduce the occurrence of voice implementation in a competitive climate. Future research could contribute to both theory and practice by looking into plausible personality dispositions that attenuates or ceases the link between climate, denigration of subordinate benevolence, and willingness to implement voice. For instance, DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis, and Ceranic (2012) found that having a strong moral identity was associated with prosocial behaviors in powerful people. Thus, a supervisor's moral identity and the centrality of it could be an important driver for more prosocial organizational behavior, like implementing voice. Such a strong moral identity could for example manifest itself in the form of group-serving behavior (Anderson & Brion, 2014), where the supervisor is predominantly other-oriented (Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Said behavioral tendencies might possibly breaking the link between denigration of subordinate benevolence and willingness to implement voice, as the supervisor's main concern would be to ensure collective success.

As previously discussed, the attempted use of promotive voice in the scenario did not have the intended effect of eliciting feelings of threat only in the supervisors with unstable power and/or a competitive climate. However, the reason why we might have been unable to sufficiently manipulate the voice message to be promotive could be that the public nature of the voice message encouraged action regardless of – or because of – feelings of threat. Hence, an interesting future avenue of research may concern differentiating between public and ego threat, as recommended by Leary and colleagues (2009). Specifically, additional work could examine whether supervisors would be less willing to implement voice when it is presented in a private setting, thus only constituting a threat to the supervisors' ego. Thus, supervisors with unstable power may feel less obligated to respond to voice in a private setting.

By examining the factors outlined above in relation to voice implementation, researchers may gain a more comprehensive understanding of the voice process. Such an understanding is important in enabling organizations to leverage their human capital in order to reap the full benefits associated with voice implementation.

Conclusion

An essential part of a supervisor's job description is to ensure the attainment of group-related goals (Leheta et al., 2017). One of the most potent ways supervisors can improve their team's performance, is by implementing voice. However, previous research has indicated that some supervisors display a strong aversion to voice implementation under certain circumstances (e.g., Fast et al., 2014; Milliken et al., 2003). In this thesis, we have taken a novel approach by examining the effect of contextual factors on supervisors' willingness to implement voice, and identifying a psychological mechanism underlying this relationship, namely denigration of subordinate benevolence. The results of our research revealed that the (in)stability of power did not have a significant main effect on voice implementation, whereas the competitive versus the cooperative nature of the climate was a significant predictor of supervisors' willingness to implement voice. The effect of climate was further found to be contingent on whether the supervisor was in a position of stable or unstable power, and we identified denigration of subordinate benevolence as a significant mediator of the relationship between climate and willingness to implement voice. Overall, the contextual factors power stability and climate was found to significantly influence supervisors' behavior with regard to voice implementation, although to a moderate extent. Taken together, this research offers interesting and much needed insights into contextual conditions influencing voice implementation. Specifically, whereas previous research has largely failed to consider the effect of context on the voice process, this research has shown that when supervisors are exposed to certain conditions, suggestions voiced by subordinates that disrupts the status quo might be perceived as a threat, resulting in an unwillingness to implement voice. By revealing these effects, this thesis has indeed demonstrated *when context matters*.

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GRA19501 – Preliminary Thesis Report

Hand-in date:

15.01.18

Supervisor:

Ingvild Müller Seljeseth

Name of students:

Eline Amb Dyrdal

Karoline Kaldheim

Program:

Master of Science in Leadership and Organizational Psychology

Programme (S): Master of Science in Leadership and Organizational Psychology **Major (s): -**	First part of the Master thesis **GRA 19501 Thesis registration form (pass/fail)**

Thesis topic: Status dynamics

Working title:

Clinging to a cliff – The effect of power, stability and organizational climate on advice taking.

Thesis supervisor:

A potential supervisor has approved my proposal.

Name of supervisor: **Ingvild Müller Seljeseth**

Signature ……
(Signed by supervisor or Associate Dean)

The area of study:

Research has shown that when power is perceived as unstable, individuals with little power tend to be more creative and flexible thinkers, while powerful individuals become avoidant oriented, more rigid, and less creative (Sligte, de Dreu, & Nijstad, 2011). The findings of Scheepers, Roell and Ellemers (2015) complements this, where those with low power showed signs of challenge in an unstable environment, while those with high power in unstable environments showed signs of threat. Jordan, Sivanathan & Galinsky (2011) argued that the latter group (the unstable powerful), as well as the stable powerless, tend to engage in more risky behaviors, due to the physiological arousal of stress. Stress has also been used as an explanation in Knight and Mehta's (2016) study, where high status individuals in an unstable hierarchy did not perform better (due to stress), as those in stable hierarchies did.

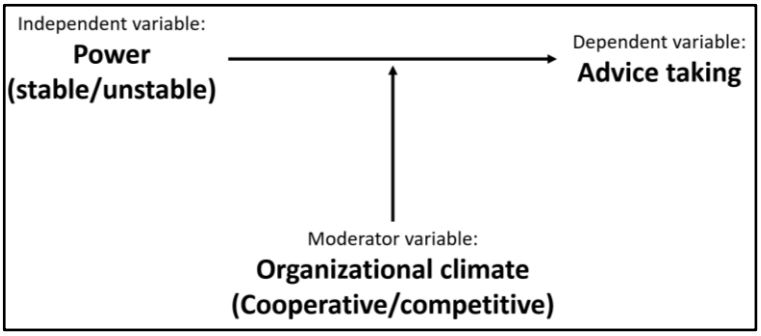
Jordan et al.'s (2011) argument that unstable powerful engage in more risky behaviors is contradictory to the implications of Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche's (2007) research, where unstable powerful leaders made more conservative decisions. However, the researchers only found this effect for people with high levels of power motivation (i.e. those who wanted to achieve a position of power). They reasoned that high power motivated people wanted to maintain the status quo. This line of argument is supported by several other researchers, who have found that people are more likely to cheat in order to avoid losing power (Pettit, Doyle, Lount, & To, 2016), that dominant leaders in unstable hierarchies would prioritize their own rank over the common good (Maner & Case, 2016), and that unstable powerful individuals tend to withhold information that can benefit the group, to secure his/her own position as the leader. However, this behavior decreased drastically when the group was faced with intergroup competition, as assuring group success trumped the leader's individual power motivation (Maner & Mead, 2010).
Li, Chen and Blader (2016) call for more research on the role of context in status dynamics. More specifically, they argue that contextual factors like national culture, group norms and organizational climate (cooperation vs. competition) are likely to influence the behaviors of individuals with high vs. low status in a different manner.

The research question:

Powerholders have been found to be reluctant to accept useful advice from others (See et

al. 2011; Tost et al. 2012). Combined with the research on the instability of power, it is likely that this reluctance to take advice is affected by whether the powerholder has stable or unstable power. There are currently no published articles examining the relationship between the stability of power and advice-taking, but theory predicts a relationship. The field of contextual factors' influence on status dynamics is not a well-researched one (Li, Chen, & Blader, 2016). We wish to examine if and how organizational climate (competitive vs. cooperative) moderates the relationship between the stability of power and advice taking. We therefore propose this as a working research question:

> *Does organizational climate moderate the relationship between the stability of power and advice taking?*



The research method:

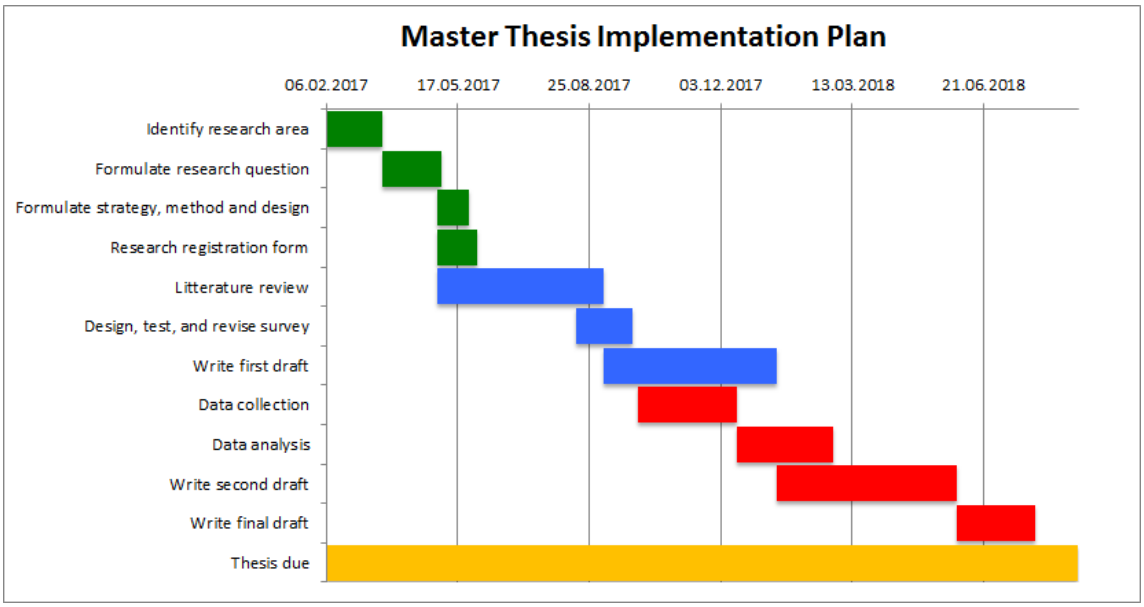
In order to gather the necessary data, we wish to conduct a web-based experiment. The reason being that a web-based experiment allows us to reach a rather diverse and large number of respondents, through the use of our personal networks, thus utilizing convenience sampling as our sampling approach. The goal is to have 50 respondents within each cell. Moreover, a web-based experiment facilitates easy coding of answers, thus simplifying subsequent data analysis.

The respondents will be presented with a vignette/scenario, where they are randomly assigned to one of the following four conditions:

1) Unstable power, cooperative organizational climate
2) Unstable power, competitive organizational climate
3) Stable power, cooperative organizational climate
4) Stable power, competitive organizational climate

Assuming that parts of our networks have little (if any) work experience, we find it most appropriate to present the respondents with a scenario rather than designing the questions based on their personal experiences. Based on the different conditions we wish to examine whether the perceived stability/instability of power will affect the respondent's willingness to receive advice, and if the type of organizational climate acts as a moderator of this relationship.

Implementation plan:



Task Name	Start	End	Duration (days)
Identify research area	06.02.2017	20.03.2017	42
Formulate research question	20.03.2017	04.05.2017	45
Formulate strategy, method and design	01.05.2017	25.05.2017	24
Research registration form	01.05.2017	01.06.2017	31
Litterature review	01.05.2017	05.09.2017	127
Design, test, and revise survey	15.08.2017	27.09.2017	43
Write first draft	05.09.2017	15.01.2018	132
Data collection	01.10.2017	15.12.2017	75
Data analysis	15.12.2017	26.02.2018	73
Write second draft	15.01.2018	01.06.2018	137
Write final draft	01.06.2018	30.07.2018	59
Thesis due	06.02.2017	01.09.2018	572

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