# The Feedback Hunt in Dutch Public Sector: The Relationship Between Performance Shortfalls and Feedback-Seeking Behaviour and the Moderating Role of Psychological Safety

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Master Thesis, January 7th, 2022

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# Acknowledgements

*I would like to acknowledge the support and expertise of Prof. van der Voet who provided me with time and guidance, passionately believing in my thesis' topic.*

*This project would not come to an end if not support of my family, dearest friends, and colleagues to whom I would like to thank deeply.*

*Lastly, I would like to devote this work to my grandma Eva, who has always been my biggest supporter.*

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Public sector institutions have been known to be slower and less efficient when compared to the private sector (Meier & O'Toole, 2011; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). Through the use of personal and manager feedback, public sector teams aim to fill the gaps and improve the learning and performance of teams, departments and institutions to reduce the public sector innovation lag effect. In light of this, *feedback* is "information provided by an agent (…) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" and its inherited nature is to provide input for improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). It is considered to be one of the most powerful drivers of learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Scholars in the field of organizational science and psychology have proven that feedback has a great influence on enhancing role and tasks clarity of employees (Coutifaris & Grant, 2021; Qian et al., 2020), openness to making mistakes (Carless, 2012), and as a result – improving team performance and effectiveness in the workplace (Ashford et al., 2018; Passos & Caetano, 2005; Vashdi, 2013). Additionally, studies prove that feedback is a crucial part of the learning curve (Vashdi, 2013; Coutifaris & Grant, 2021). The lack thereof might pose several consequences, the most vital ones including task ambiguity, negative changes in motivation, well-being as well as decreasing a teams' effectiveness (Vashdi, 2013).

Feedback is nested in the wider discussion concerning teamwork and team learning, the latter consisting of several concrete learning behaviours. Defined as an "ongoing process of improvement", *team learning* involves distinct behaviours including "exploring, reflecting, discussing errors, seeking feedback, and experimenting within and as a team" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 353). One of these behaviours – 'seeking feedback', is best understood as an act of asking or requesting information about how one can improve (Coutifaris & Grant, 2021;

Savelsbergh et al., 2009). This concept is academically referred to as Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (hereafter referred to as FSB) and constitutes a central part of this thesis.

Academic literature favourably proposes numerous consequences of feedback, most frequently choosing performance as the direct observable outcome. However, academic discussion hesitates from researching the causes that lead to seeking feedback. The literature that studies FSB focuses on seeking feedback from agents (e.g., managers, supervisors, peers), however and crucially, it does not distinguish where the agent comes from (for instance whether the feedback comes from within or outside of the team or organisation). This thesis will fill this academic gap by distinguishing between internal FSB (feedback that is searched within the team) and external FSB (feedback that is searched for outside of the teams in which individuals operate).

Additionally, the topic of FSB has been thoroughly discussed in the fields of Psychology and Education albeit Public Administration literature tends to solely focus on the link between feedback and team effectiveness (Passos & Caetano, 2005; Vashdi, 2013) as well as team learning, and its constituting behaviours. This thesis aims to shed a light on the topic of feedback focusing on the public sector, more specifically, by focusing on social-welfare teams, operating in Dutch municipalities.

Delving further into the literature void concerning FSB, scholars almost exclusively consider FSB as an independent variable, frequently linking this concept to performance and effectiveness. However, what one could find if this relationship would be reversed? After all, there is scanty information regarding the cause of performance shortfalls on feedback. From a theoretical point of view, performance shortfalls are considered one of the potential predispositions for FSB as it reinforces the desire for improvement and searches for alternatives. Team performance is in context understood as “a multilevel process arising as team members engage in managing their individual and team-level taskwork and teamwork

processes" (Salas et al., 2008, p. 541). This thesis aims to convert this causal process and showcase the association between low performance and the likelihood of asking for feedback.

FSB encompasses the behaviour of 'search' and 'seeking', particularly, to solutions for improvement which paves a way for individuals and teams for engaging in *problemistic search*. The search entails looking for solutions in times of performance shortfalls or challenges those individuals encounter (Posen et al. 2018). People involved in problemistic search frequently find the solution by asking others for help, which involves interpersonal risk-taking.

This leads to an observation that a crucial predisposition for this behaviour to occur is a notion of trust. Seeking-feedback involves risk-taking, which might threaten one's position in the workplace, therefore, in order for people to seek feedback, a safe working environment needs to be facilitated. A concept that has been vastly popular in literature for the last two decades, that combines learning with risk-taking behaviour and the notion of trust is Psychological Safety (referred to as PS). PS is defined by Edmondson (1999) as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking which applies to both organisations and teams**.** Developing and maintaining PS was found to be a crucial predisposition for facilitating a culture in which asking for help and admitting mistakes is accepted. Psychological Safety will be studied in this thesis as a moderation between performance shortfalls and FSB.

## 1.2 Research Objective and Question

This paper aims to find the predispositions for Feedback-Seeking Behaviour to occur, and which teams are more likely to facilitate the feedback culture. In consideration of that, the following research question is proposed:

*To what extent does the degree of team performance relate to the internal and external Feedback-Seeking Behaviour within Dutch social-welfare teams, and what is the moderating role of psychological safety on the occurrence of such behaviour?*

This thesis hypothesises that lower-performing teams are more inclined to exhibit Feedback-Seeking Behaviour. The assumption, that will be further elaborated in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, is based on the current literature from behavioural theory research in the field of Psychology and Strategic Management. The theory argues that in situations of low performance, people are willing to take risks to find plausible solutions - engaging in feedback search is seen as one of them. This thesis argues that this relationship between low performance and FSB is positively moderated by Psychological Safety. The goal of incorporating Psychological Safety into the research is to find whether its presence influences the strength of the relationship between the key variables, hence taking the role of a moderator.

Psychological Safety has been used as a moderator in previous literature research focusing on feedback by Edmondson (2002) and there is a strong theoretical argument of its influence on team learning – reasons for which this moderator is included in this thesis's framework.

Upon the analysis of academic literature on the topic of feedback, it was noticed that one of the underappreciated topics is the lack of distinction between obtaining feedback *within* the team (internally) and *outside* of the team (externally). Since two decades, the distinction has been made by Edmondson (1999), who conceptualized Feedback-Seeking Behaviour as "seeking and analysing feedback *internally* among team members and *externally* from outsiders to the team" (p. 357). However, current studies are insensitive to this distinction, but rather focus on different factors or variables surrounding this behaviour. There is a strong expectation that Psychological Safety will help employees to ask for feedback nearby, within the teams. Regarding feedback obtained outside of the teams, the same assumptions hold. However, there is limited literature discussing external feedback and psychological safety (Scheepers et al., 2018). This thesis will examine this distinction as it might give an important

source of information and show if people are more likely to turn to outsiders for feedback and the reason for this choice.

The thesis will utilise quantitative methods of analysis such as regression analysis to test the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 2: Theory (see Appendix A for full list). To obtain information about the studied topic, this thesis will rely on a dataset collected in 2020, redistributed by Prof. van der Voet. The data is a secondary source survey that was collected as a collaboration between Leiden University and Erasmus University. The dataset includes responses from professionals and their leaders across Dutch social-welfare teams**.** This specific type of team has certain characteristics that are important for the analysis of this thesis, therefore the next section will discuss this team design in more detail.

### 1.3 Social-Welfare Teams

The social welfare teams, also known as 'neighbourhood teams' or 'multidisciplinary teams', originated on January 1st 2015, when the Dutch government introduced the de-centralization of tasks and responsibilities from the highest level to local municipalities. This reform largely changed the operation of municipalities, transferring the decision making and policy planning to their level (Nowak et al., 2015). As the municipalities were given an increased number of responsibilities and an array of expertise, the teams operating within the local units have been restructured to meet those expectations.

The social welfare teams consist of professionals working on a wide range of services, enabling them to carry decision making autonomously from the central government. To get the necessary information required, professionals working in the teams need to strongly collaborate with other professionals and services including healthcare, housing and education" (van der Voet & Steijn, 2021).

As Nowak et al. (2015) noticed, the Netherlands is not the only country to implement this change. Decentralisation of governmental tasks is also present in other European countries

as it provides more efficient work by enhanced collaboration and more effective decision making (van Zijl et al., 2019).

There are several objectives that this setting of the neighbourhood teams aims to achieve. First of all, there was a need to decentralize the system to increase efficiency. Secondly, by fragmenting the teams, the professionals should be better serving the citizens by having more information about the needs of the people (van Zijl et al., 2019). As noticed by van Zijl et al. (2019), by staying closer to the public, professionals working in the teams have easier access to the information and are granted autonomous decision making, as they are the ones to be best informed about the interest of the people.

Additionally, the setting of the teams is designed to enhance the exchange of information and collaboration between stakeholders. The teams have been studied in terms of heterogeneity which was found to largely enhance the networking and collaborating of people (van Zijl et al. 2019). Specifically, professionals working within the teams need to actively obtain information from outside of the team or provide information to outside, which, is described by van Zijl et al., as the notion of boundary management (2019). This information search stimulated by heterogeneity creates a greater probability of emerging behaviours that engage in activates outside of their team. This creates a relevant link to the external Feedback-Seeking Behaviour studied in this thesis.

Considering those objectives, social welfare teams share several common characteristics which can be seen across municipalities. The most common characteristics include efficiency, independence, and social cohesion. As far as these are the main characteristics, the municipalities differ largely from each other, due to their size, context, expertise, and responsibilities that include setting their own policies (Nowak et al., 2015).

## 1.4 Relevance

### *1.4.1 Scientific Relevance*

This section aims to present the relevance of this thesis to a wider academic spectrum, in relation to the existing gaps in literature of the occurrence of the Feedback-Seeking Behaviour, specifically within teams.

Firstly, this thesis aims to showcase the importance of studying teams. Teams, unlike groups, are unique institutions that provide meaningful information about the behaviour and processes of the people in the workplace. The key difference with studying the behaviour of organizations is observing a smaller sample of people that allows for a more accurate representation and a more personalized approach. The objective of studying teams also comes from the fact that many organizations put increased emphasis on teamwork. This thesis, therefore, moves away from the traditional model of studying organizations. Applying the behavioural model to the teams has not been yet studied hence this research provides a novel perfective to this theory.

Secondly, this study incorporates a novel connection to the already existing literature of FSB. Whilst the topic of the effect of FSB on performance and effectiveness is popular within literature, the study of the reverse connection is infrequently found in academia. This study enriches current academia by distinguishing between internal and external feedback. Currently, internal feedback is defined as feedback originating from the team member of the individual who is seeking feedback. External feedback on the other hand is feedback given by somebody else, outside of the team (Nicol & Selvaretnam, 2021). This study will reveal the importance of that distinction. A novel addition to the relationship between FSB and performance shortfalls is adding a moderating role of Psychological Safety on the occurrence of FSB. As both concepts share similar values (such as trust and learning), this connection enriches the current academic literature that studies the relationship between performance and feedback. Additionally, this thesis takes one step further than existing research in regards to

problemistic search by extending the research through narrowing down the broad information search behaviour, to single behaviour of Feedback- Seeking.

Lastly, the topic is nested in the wider discussion about teamwork and team learning in the public sector. Much attention has been drawn to the FSB topic in the private sector literature, therefore this thesis aims to show that both the behavioural model as well as the writings on the private sector are applicable in the public sector. This novel application is vividly shown in the methods of conceptualizing the independent variable of Performance Below Social Aspirations presented in Chapter 2: Theory of this thesis. By applying this model to multidisciplinary teams, the study will enrich the current academic spheres that focus on the cases from the field of healthcare and education.

### *1.4.2 Societal Relevance*

Alongside academic relevance, the thesis aims to shed light on the importance of bringing up errors in the workplace and examine how teams can facilitate the culture of open feedback. Researchers agree that learning behaviour in teams is positively associated with team performance (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354) therefore if we know more about FSB and team learning in general, we are closer to finding the predispositions for enhancing team processes, including psychological safety.

This study focuses on both leaders and followers that are working as a team. By dividing both groups, this thesis will examine what behavioural changes are experienced by both groups when it comes to feedback, trust, as well as learning. With the knowledge of how context can influence the behaviour of professionals, managers in the public sector can predict certain behaviours and events. An example of that is foreseeing a more open and trusting environment as a consequence of performance shortfalls. The knowledge of context on teams will help to understand behavioural changes that teams in the public sector exhibit.

The discussion on team learning also aims to share awareness about the powerful tool that feedback can be, and encourage its implementation in the public sector workplace.

## 1.5 Roadmap

This chapter aimed to introduce the main idea of the thesis and the relationship between the variables. In the next chapter, the variables will be introduced further, and their relationship will be discussed in detail. First, the concept of Feedback-Seeking Behaviour will be discussed, followed by defining the independent variable of performance shortfalls (further introduced as Performance Below Social Aspirations) and moderating variable of Psychological Safety. The concepts will be placed in the current academic discussions and their relevance to this thesis will be explained. Based on that, the thesis will outline its hypotheses. Chapter III: Methods will present the process of collecting data and operationalising the variables. Chapter IV: Results, will focus on presenting the statistical analysis leading to either refuting or approving the hypotheses presented before. Chapter V: Discussion, is dedicated to discussing the results and conclusions, together with presenting limitations for the study as well as its implications.

# 2 Theory

This chapter is devoted to the theoretical explanation, which aims to answer the following research question - *To what extent does the degree of team performance relate to the internal and external Feedback-Seeking Behaviour of Dutch social-welfare teams, and what is the moderating role of psychological safety on the occurrence of such behaviour?* This chapter aims to showcase the core of the thesis and outline the assumptions for this research nested in the current academic literature. First, the thesis will outline the dependent variable (internal and external Feedback-Seeking Behaviour), followed by the independent variable (Performance Below Social Aspirations), and finally the moderator (Psychological Safety). Each concept will be defined based on previous research, and dominating trends in the literature will be presented. This will lead to formulating a relationship between the variables, based on which the thesis defines the hypotheses.

## 2.1 Feedback–Seeking Behaviour

### *2.1.1 Feedback*

According to Hattie & Timperley (2007), who combined thousands of responses to create a conceptual analysis of feedback, this concept is defined as „information provided by an agent regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (p. 81). The authors argue that "the purpose of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between current understandings and performance and a goal" (p. 86).

When thinking of feedback, what often comes to mind is providing advice, instructions, guidance, evaluation or commenting on one's performance or behaviour (Wiggins, 2012). These actions provide useful information; however, they are not enough to yet be named feedback. What is missing in those instances is providing *tangible and learning* action points as to how the performance can be improved. In other words, what makes feedback unique from

other actions, is the notion of *improvement via learning*. Appendix B presents examples of two scenarios from a person in a leadership position which showcases a good example of feedback.

Scholars agree that the facilitation of feedback, its execution as well as the degree to which feedback is being sought and implemented, largely depends on context. It can be easier to both ask and obtain feedback in some places, such as in environments more prone to reinforcing learning culture. Simultaneously, other contexts are constituted of less 'feedback friendly' environments in which it is more challenging to facilitate this activity. One of the predispositions of feedback is the notion of trust which will be discussed in more detail in the latter part of this chapter whilst discussing Psychological Safety.

The contextual factors in which people operate can highly influence their behaviour. According to Van der Hoek et al. (2018), context might be seen as a moderator and predictor for the behaviour to occur. The context in which this thesis is placed is unique as the analysed social welfare teams operate in a multidisciplinary public sector environment, different from a traditional model of teams. The studied teams largely rely on external activities and independence which resonates with the types of team design dominating in the private sector.

Positive feedback is seen as one of the most powerful motivators. More specifically, feedback is seen as an *intrinsic motivation* – motivation that goes beyond the system of rewards, and focuses on increasing the satisfaction and confidence of the employees (Harackiewicz, 1979). Simultaneously, contrary consequences will arise if the feedback given is negative (Vashdi, 2013). In the context of the public sector, civil servants often experience *public service motivation*, which is a form of motivation that derives from the impact that they have on society (Perry, 2000; Wright, 2001).

Feedback is also discussed in relation to tasks and goals. As cited in Locke and Latham (2002) "for goals to be effective, people need summary feedback that reveals progress concerning their goals" (p. 798). Goals alone are not effective if they are not combined with

*effective* feedback. Drawing on the writings discussing feedback in education, effective feedback is considered to be goal-oriented, tangible, actionable, timely, ongoing, including learning (Wiggins, 2012). In this thesis, the quality of feedback as well as the effects on motivation will not be measured as the dataset chosen for this study is limited to information about *to what extent feedback occurs* in the workplace (see Appendix C for the measured variables). As this thesis aims to include practical implications for public managers, it is a valuable reminder for public professionals who want to engage in FSB in their workplace.

### *2.1.2 Internal and External Feedback–Seeking Behaviour*

Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (FSB) is defined as "conscious effort towards determining the correctness and adequacy of one's behaviours (…) such as skill development, good performance or promotion" (Crommelinck & Anseel, 2013, p. 233). When studying Feedback-Seeking Behaviour, it is crucial to mention the agent who is being asked to provide the feedback. In academic literature, the most frequent distinction is made between seeking feedback from colleagues versus feedback-seeking from supervisors and managers (Srikanth & Jomon, 2013). The distinction between seeking feedback internally and outside of the team which is studied in this thesis is substantially less observable. The difference and definition of those two concepts have been identified by Edmondson (1999) as "seeking and analysing feedback *internally* among team members and *externally* from outsiders to the team" (p. 357). This distinction between external and internal feedback is an important part of this thesis, therefore the following section will discuss this topic in more detail.

Ancona and Caldwell (1992) focused their study on how people are operating in teams. By distinguishing two types of processes within the teams into *internal* and *external activities*, the authors found that high team performance is passively associated with engaging in external activities. Specifically, engaging in external activities means obtaining information from

external stakeholders and resources (Ancona & Caldwell, p. 643). The authors argue that people are more likely to first engage with internal activities before taking action to obtain information from the outside. For example, in case team members will seek information to complete a task, they are more likely to first engage with their teammates (unless they require knowledge specifically from outside of their team).

There are two major reasons why people will first look for the information *nearby.* The first reason regards easier access to information, with the second reason laying in the reduced efforts to seek the necessary information. Additionally, it has been found by Ancona and Caldwell (1992) that the higher level of cohesion, the lower the likelihood of engaging in external activity as cohesive teams tend to isolate themselves from external collaboration. As the scholars argue, once this information is obtained, people will look for information externally as an additional source. Teams and groups that engage in the external activities, on the other hand, might display less strong cohesion, hence they search for the information externally (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992, p. 652).

Crommelinck and Anseel (2013) put forward three main motives for people to seek feedback: *instrumental motive* to seek feedback for achieving a goal; *ego-based motive* to seek feedback as an ego booster; and *image-based motive* to protect and enhance one's public image.[1]

The scholars have observed that public sector context discourages FSB due to its potential "face loss costs", which among many reasons, most commonly lay in the urge to reduce uncertainty and define goal settings (Crommelinck and Anseel, 2013, p. 235; Ashford & Cummings 1983; Morrison 2002).

### *2.1.3 Feedback and Information Search*

[1] The instrumental motive is most commonly researched in academic literature (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992).

The majority of academic literature considers FSB as an independent variable, and team performance as a dependent one (Lan et al., 2020; Srikanth & Jomon, 2013.). The question as to when feedback search is more likely to occur is not well discovered, therefore, the next section will delve deeper into the concept of feedback-seeking and the broader term of information search.

*Information-seeking* or *information-search* is a multidimensional process that involves many behaviours that aim at changing one's knowledge over time (Ikoja-Odongo & Mostert, 2006). It has been defined as a search for information to bridge a gap between the current and desired knowledge (Ikoja-Odongo & Mostert, 2006; Shah, 2014). The literature defines several information-seeking behaviour models, with the most prominent models identified by Wilson (1996). Wilson (1999) focuses on the behaviour and context that leads to information seeking, based on the idea of feedback loop, which is a continuous process of communication between the provider of the feedback and the recipient's response to it (p. 264). The author conceptualises information behaviour as a process of "engaging" in different processes, whilst looking for relevant information (p. 249), putting forward this model to explain that information-seeking behaviour emerges as a consequence of "satisfying a need" of possessing information (p. 251).

## 2.2 Performance Below Social Aspirations

### *2.2.1 The Variety of Performance Definitions*

Team performance is widely conceptualised in the private and public sectors, although it is difficult to find a standardized definition for the term. A number of schools of thought have surfaced based on the research of different aspects of team performance concepts by scholars. The next section will disclose the most prominent trends in the literature, paving a way for presenting the definition of team performance used in this thesis.

According to Kozlowski and Klein (2000) who have been researching this concept in several studies, team performance is defined as a multilevel process occurring by engaging team members in managing their tasks and processes on individual and team levels. Within this definition, the 'teams' are defined as „social entities composed of members with high task interdependency and shared and valued common goals" (Salas et al., 2008, p. 541). In Public Administration literature, team performance is measured by various distinctive concepts, which involve effectiveness, lawfulness, equality, transparency, responsiveness, and flexibility (Van der Hoek et al., 2018).

The literature concerned with behavioural theory defines the performance in the light of effectiveness (Cyert and March 1963). There have been many attempts to define effectiveness, and the more common measurements include team synergy, performance objective, skills, use of resources, innovation and quality (Bateman et al., 2002, p. 216). On the other hand, Hackman and Wageman (2004) define team effectiveness in terms of "collective effort; amount of knowledge and skill members bring to bear on the group task; and the appropriateness to the task of the performance strategies used by the group in its work" (p. 41).

Cohen and Bailey (1997) noticed that Hackman and Wageman omitted the behavioural outcome of performance meaning that there is a lack of attention to the changes in behaviour. Therefore, in their definition, Cohen and Bailey included this behavioural outcome and attempted to define team effectiveness as the following: *Performance outcomes* (efficiency, productivity, response times, quality, customer satisfaction, and innovation); *Attitudinal outcomes* (employee satisfaction, commitment, and trust in management); *Behavioural outcomes* (absenteeism, turnover, and safety) (p. 243).

### *2.2.2 Performance as a Set of Values*

As this thesis is focusing on analysing the behaviour of teams, rather than defying team performance in terms of effectiveness or efficiency alone, this thesis will interpret team performance as ‘set of values’ that employees adhere to. This definition is inspired by an article by Christopher Hood published in 1991 titled "A New Public Management for All Seasons" which paved a way for defining the ideas for New Public Management (NPM). The following section will thoroughly discuss the values identified by Hood (1999) as this thesis is fundamentally relying on this theory in order to conceptualize team performance.

The article by Hood (1991) presents core values that are fundamental for well managed public sector organisations. The values are named by Greek letters: Sigma, Theta and Lambda; their meaning and corresponding behaviours are presented below:

1. The first value is *Sigma*. This value represents a set of behaviours that aim to “keep work lean and purposeful” (Hood, 1991, p. 12). This family of behaviours focuses on “matching resources with tasks”, setting tangible goals and avoiding waste of resources at all costs. Success and failure are measured by ‘time and money’ (Hood, 1991) therefore there is an emphasis on the final output.
2. The second value is *Theta*, which consists of behaviours orientated around honesty and fairness. Theta concerns the behaviours that are aimed at equality, providing a lack of bias, and facilitating an inclusive environment. It is concerned with ethics in the public sector. Adhering to those norms is seen as success whereas displaying behaviour such as dishonestly, favouritism and bureaucracy is seen as a failure.
3. The third set of values is called *Lambda* and focuses on the “reliability, robustness and adaptivity” (Hood., p. 13). Lambda represents how people react to difficult situations or challenging events. Behaving according to resilience in various challenging situations is seen as the greatest strength. The failure is identified in terms of ‘breakdown and learning failure' (p. 14).

According to the author, at least two of those three values should be present for the NPM to work accurately (Hood, 1991, p. 11). For example, if the teams are focused on the output and meeting a budgetary goal, there is less focus on the processes as the end goal is more important than how the goal has been obtained. The failure to meet the objectives presented by each value, in this thesis, is interpreted as low, unsatisfactory performance.

This thesis defines team performance as a combination of the described values that encompasses several behaviours.

### *2.2.3 Performance Below Social Aspirations*

The behavioural literature presents two most common measurements of performance, which are referred to by scholars as *aspiration levels* (Lopes, 1987; Schneider, 1992, Greve 1998; Salge, 2011; Posen et al., 2018). The aspiration level can be understood as the desired level of performance that "is the borderline between perceived success and failure and the starting point of doubt and conflict in decision making" (Greve, 1998, p. 59). There are two main levels of aspiration, defined as historical and social levels (Salge, 2011; Posen et al., 2018). The historical level of performance is referred by Posen et al. (2018) as the current level as compared to past performance (p. 18). The author presents that the social level on the other hand is a performance that is compared to other teams or organisations (p. 18). The comparison between the aspiration levels is referred to as 'performance evaluation' (Salge, 2011, p. 184).

As the survey used in the thesis to conduct this research includes the responses from teams at one point in time, the measurement for team performance will be reflected by the *social aspiration levels*. This thesis will refer to this concept in the name of the independent variable 'Performance Below Social Aspirations' (PBSA).

This thesis will measure team performance based on the perception of the leaders. The measured item, therefore, is not actual performance but rather a perception about it seen through leaders' eyes.

### *2.2.4 Problemistic Search*

The relationship between Performance Below Social Aspirations and FSB is embedded in the concept of problemistic search initiated by Cyert and March (1963) and further explored in the writings of Posen et al. (2018) and Salge (2011). This concept is essential to discuss as it links the PBSA to FSB, therefore providing an explanation for formulating Hypothesis 1 later in this chapter.

Posen et al. (2018) define problemistic search as a "specific case where the search for alternatives is triggered when the organisation encounters a problem and ceases when a satisfactory solution is identified" (p. 211). It can be therefore understood as a behaviour of "search that is stimulated by a problem" in order to find plausible solutions to the current performance (Cyert & March, 1963, p. 121). Problemistic search is part of the behavioural model, and the process of the search is identified in four phases presented in Figure 1.

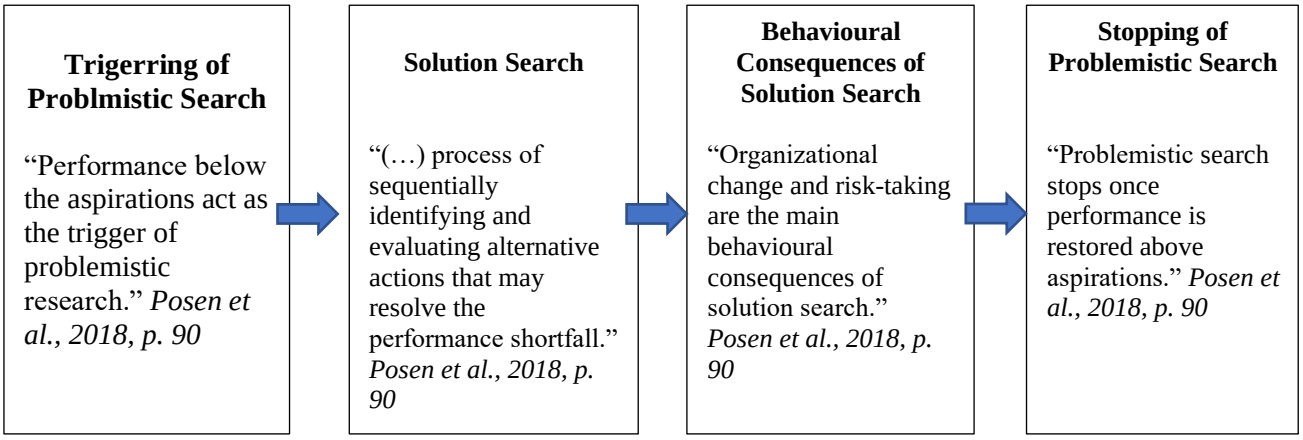
First, the problemistic search is being triggered as the performance is lower than initially aspired. If this is the case, organisations or teams are looking for a solution to that situation to improve the performance. To find a solution, they are willing to change their current organisational behaviour which stimulates their willingness for risk-taking to find that solution. According to Posen et al. (2018), the problemistic search stops once the "aspiration level is brought back to normal" (p. 55).

The literature also frequently discusses two other types of searches – mainly, a slack and institutional search which, contrary to the problemistic search, continue when the performance reaches the above aspiration level (Posen et al. 2018). It is also worth mentioning

that the previously discussed literature about problemistic literature applies this concept to organisations (Cyert and March, 1963; Posen et al., 2018; Salge, 2011). Problemistic search has not yet been applied to the context of teams, and this research will be testing the assumptions as previously studied on an organisational level. This research will benefit from using the concept of problemistic search as a basis for the assumption that people within teams will search for feedback. The next section delves deeper into discussing this relationship, combining the aforementioned concepts of social aspiration levels and problemistic search.

**Figure 1**

*The Process of Problemistic Search*




### *2.2.5 Performance Below Social Aspirations and FSB*

This thesis aims to find a link between team performance and FSB, assuming that teams under the social aspiration level are more likely to ask for feedback. Based on the writings of Posen et al. (2018) as well as Ancona and Caldwell (1992), there is a strong theoretical assumption that when lower performance occurs, people will be first seeking feedback nearby. On the other hand, teams with higher performance are willing to experiment and take risks in order to broaden their scope of information search, testing this assumption in this thesis. It is also notable to mention that feedback-seeking is one of many kinds of information seeking

(Morrison, 2002, p. 233). The literature discussing the connection between performance shortfall and problemistic search is focusing on the information search rather than the FSB. The thesis will therefore link those two searching behaviours.

Once the level of aspiration is lower than initially expected, theory shows that the behaviour of people will change as they strive to achieve the level of aspiration before it has fallen. This implies the search for solutions to improve, causes the behaviour to change into an exploratory one. Due to engaging with exploratory behaviour, the FSB is more likely to occur. However, there is also the notion that people will not ask for feedback by their lower performance, simply because they will be afraid of consequences. Based on this discussion, the subsequent hypotheses are proposed:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Teams with Performance Below Social Aspirations (PBSA) are more prone to display Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (FSB) than teams whose perceived performance is above social aspirations.

**Hypothesis 1a (H1a):** Teams with PBSA are more likely to display internal FSB in comparison to teams whose perceived performance is above social aspirations.

**Hypothesis 1b (H1b):** Teams with PBSA are more likely to display external FSB in comparison to teams whose perceived performance is above social aspirations.

## 2.3 Psychological Safety

In the previous sections, this thesis discussed the relationship between performance shortfalls and the likelihood of searching for feedback. This section will continue this discussion by enhancing the research with the moderating variable of Psychological Safety (hereafter at times referred to as PS). In order to understand the role of psychological safety in

the relationship between low performance and feedback search, it is first necessary to discuss the concept of risk- taking.

### *2.3.1 Risk-Taking*

The theory put forward by Cyert and March in the book titled "Behavioural Theory of the Firm" (1964) explains the causal mechanisms between the aspiration level (degree of performance) and risk-taking behaviour. The theory suggests that lower performance (referred to as the Performance Below Social Aspirations - PBSA) 'triggers' the problemistic search, which increases the likelihood of risk-taking to occur (Lim & McCann, 2014, p. 262). The PBSA on the other hand leads to lower chances of taking risks (p. 262)

The connection between performing below aspiration level and risk-taking behaviour has been researched by many scholars in both public and private sectors (Posen et al., 2018, p. 38). It is argued that a lack of success in meeting the desired level of aspiration causes decision-makers to increase their appetite for risk-taking. Consequently, decision-makers will seek a plausible solution for the situation (Posen et al., 2018). On the other hand, many scholars claim the opposite, arguing that lower performance implies that decision-makers will become more risk-averse (Bromiley & Washburn 2011). The other side of the spectrum of literature presents arguments that, if small firms are performing below the aspiration, their risk-taking behaviour decreases, whereas performing below the aspiration levels in large firms has "either no significant effect, or increases the risk-taking" (Lim & McCann, 2014, p. 262).

Scholars claim that if the social aspiration level is low within the 'unit', then individuals are more prone to take a risk (Kahneman & Tversky, 2013; Posen et al., 2008). This is because people feel pressured by being compared to others who might be performing higher than them, therefore threatening their position in the workplace. On the other hand, a lower social aspiration level in comparison to the 'external' unit, is a 'higher level issue' that leads to change

(Posen et al., 2008, p. 40). The literature is divided about to what extent risk-taking is a consequence of performance shortfall.

There is a wide discussion in academic literature about performance level and risk-taking, however, scholars have divided opinions about the influence of performance on risk-taking. One school of thinking claims that performance below aspiration level motivates leaders to engage in risk-taking behaviour. Other scholars however claim that in a situation when performance is significantly below the aspiration level, organizations tend to be redundant to risk-taking (see Table 2 for the list of authors). This is because low-performance organizations want to ensure their survival (Posen et al., 2018, p. 39).

An alternative school of thinking also emerged, providing a more nuanced explanation of the relationship between performance and risk-taking. Scholars following this line of thinking, emphasize similarly to literature regarding feedback, the role of context and the occurrence of risk-taking (Table 2). This school of thought leaves a lack of definite arguments for the link between performance and risk-taking, as it is highly dependent on many factors. When applying to organizational context, prominent factors include complexity, munificence, and dynamism (Palmer & Wiseman, 1999). As this thesis distinguishes between the role of leader and follower, it is important to mention that Boyle & Shapira (2012) distinguishes between aspiration and survival level, noticing that leaders are operating more often on their aspiration level whereas the followers on their survival. Greve (2011) found that larger teams that exhibit performance below aspiration are more inclined to risk-taking rather than small firms.

**Table 1**

*Main Trends in the Literature on the Impact of Performance Shortfall on Risk-Taking Behaviour (Posen et al. 2018).*

| Reaction to PBSA | Chosen literature |
|---|---|
| Increased risk-taking behaviour | Boyle & Shapira (2012); Bromiley (1991), Fiegenbaum (1990); Fiegenbaum & Thomas (1988); Greve (2003); Maslach (2016) |
| Reduced risk-taking behaviour | Audia & Greve (2006); Klingebiel (2017); Miller & Bromiley (1990) |
| Contextual factors as moderator for risk-taking behaviour | Audia & Greve (2006); Boyle & Shapira (2012); Greve (2011); Madisen (2013); Miller & Bromiley (1990); Miller & Chen (2004) |

### *2.3.2 Psychological Safety and FSB*

Studies agree that engaging in FSB involves risk-taking (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). There are many reasons why this behaviour could be considered to be risky. The most common risks highlighted in the literature involve: being rejected and the feeling of being judged; feeling of being perceived as incompetent (Edmondson 2002); and sharing personal information that might be potentially disclosed (Ashford & Cummings, 1983, p. 390). The next sections aim to put forward arguments linking risk-taking to psychological safety and as a consequence - facilitating behaviour of feedback-seeking.

Trust was found to enhance the five learning behaviours mentioned in Chapter 1: Introduction (Edmondson, 1999). The logic behind this lies in the mechanism that psychological safety, by facilitating trust, decreases the fear of judgement in the workplace. In addition, it creates an environment in which taking risks is encouraged (Hirak et al., 2012; Ming et al. 2015). The willingness to take risks stimulates the causal mechanism with FSB, as team members are *willing* to take a risks and become vulnerable with their co-workers (Savelsbergh et al., 2009).

Ashford and Cummings (1983) illustrated that the more risk, the less likelihood of FSB to occur. Therefore in order for the FSB to occur, a central predisposition is trust. It is defined

as the expectation and confidence that others' actions will be favourable to one's interests, such that one is willing to be vulnerable to those actions (Jones and George, 1998). A higher level of trust, which is expressed in giving greater vulnerability (Mayer et al., 1995), increases the chances of being involved in taking the risk with the trusted person (Edmondson, 1999).

This thesis previously discussed the concept of problemistic search, explaining why people are inclined to seek feedback, which creates a link to the discussion of risk-taking. Posen et al. (2008), found that the main consequences of the problemistic search include risk-taking and, in some cases, organizational change (p. 33). Greve (1998) studied the connection between performance and its influence on organisational behaviour, claiming that change involves risk which is pushed by "individual risk-taking behaviour which is then oriented towards goal" (p. 58). Connecting this topic to the Performance Below Social Aspirations, it is argued that "behaviour differs depending on whether the actor is above or below some aspiration level" (Greve, 1998, p. 58). There is a strong assumption that individuals tend to be more likely to take the risk when their aspiration level is not satisfactory (Greve, 1998; 1979; March, 1988).

In light of this discussion, this thesis hypothesizes that Psychological Safety moderates the relationship between Performance Below Social Aspirations and Feedback-Seeking Behaviour. As such, context can highly influence whether the FSB will occur (Van der Rijt et al., 2012). PS acts as a moderator between goals and team learning (Edmondson, 1999) which has been proved to lower the risks that teams take in the workplace (Edmondson, 2002). In order to avoid the risk, people simply will not engage in team learning, which can be extended to state that risk-avoidance causes a lack of FSB. Therefore, the context of a supportive open environment, that allows employees to make mistakes and become vulnerable, makes people more prone to engage in taking the risk as they are less afraid of the consequences. As a result, when people are feeling the presence of PS, they are more likely to engage in FSB.

Based on the literature review and discussion around FSB and PS, the second hypothesis of the thesis is identified:

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Psychological Safety moderates the relationship between teams with Performance Below Social Aspirations (PBSA) and the Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (FSB). Specifically, the relationship between teams with PBSA and the occurrence of FSB is stronger when Psychological Safety is present in the teams.

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a):** Teams with PBSA are more prone to display internal FSB when Psychological Safety is present in their team.

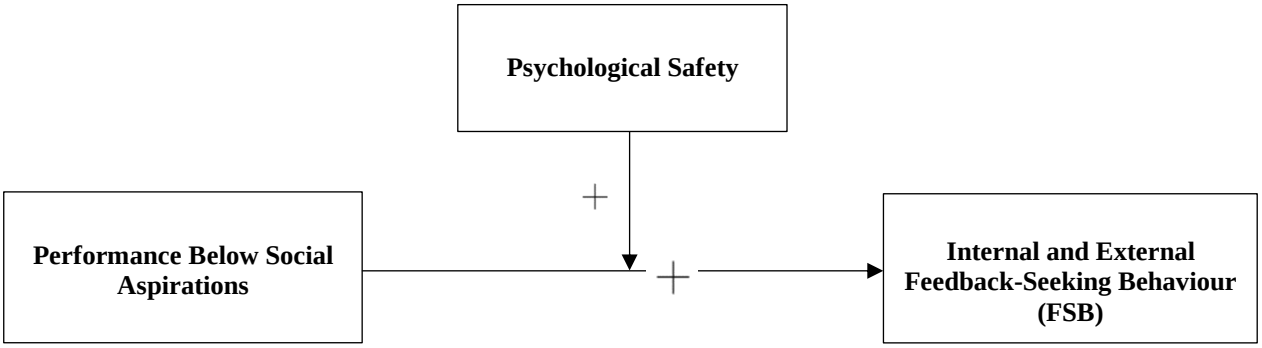
**Hypothesis 2b (H2b):** Teams with PBSA are more prone to display external FSB when Psychological Safety is present in their team.

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework

The theory used for this thesis relies on the unconventional measurement of performance as a set of values that are inspired by the writings of Hood (1991) on New Public Management. The thesis uses concepts of 'aspiration levels' to measure the performance between teams, linking team performance with FSB based on 'problemistic search'. This thesis argues that PS moderates the relationships between PBSA and FSB (both its internal and external dimensions) such as the lower the PBSA, the higher FSB. The visual representation of the conceptual model is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework*



# 3 Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methods that have been used to conduct this study. First, this chapter will outline the research design followed by a case selection. Next, the data collection will be outlined together with the description of the dataset used for the analysis. This will be followed by the operationalisation of key variables. The last part of this chapter presents the validity and reliability of the study, paving a way for the analysis.

## 3.1 Research Design

This thesis seeks to establish the nature of the relationship between performance shortfalls and feedback-seeking behaviour and the moderating role of psychological safety on this relationship. The analysis relies on quantitative data gathered by surveying neighbourhood teams oriented in the public sector.

The thesis is explanatory in nature, aiming at answering the 'why' and consequently the 'how' of mechanisms in social science (Toshkov, 2016). Researching the explanation of an event, can, in many ways predict the future effect of these mechanisms (Toshkov, 2016). This type of research, due to its nature, allows to chase the process of mechanisms aiming at finding associations between phenomenon. The causal mechanisms will be identified by studying the PBSA (understood as performance shortfalls) on the Feedback-Seeking-Behaviour of team members (outcome).

To study this relationship, the thesis will make use of a secondary source with a large N database which has been distributed to two respondent groups (leaders and their subordinates referred to in this thesis as followers. The surveys have been shared with the participants via an online questionnaire.

Online surveys are often used in explanatory research as a tool for gathering data. The surveys allow for targeting a specific group of participants, ease of redistributing questions and

ensuring internal validity (Bolarinwa, 2015). Surveys are designed to gather information about "(…) self-reports beliefs or behaviours" (Neuman, 2014, p. 317), therefore there must be a certain caution put to interpreting those responses as they are subjective and might not be the most accurate reflection of reality. This is not considered to be an issue in this thesis as the responses are taken from this survey to measure the perception of the participants.

The level of analysis in this thesis is oriented around teams. This type of research is referred to as meso-level analysis and examines the "relations, processes and structure of mid-level of social life" (Neuman, 2014, p. 71). Becker and Cropanzano (2015) claim that this type of research is highly recommended for studying groups that are interdependent from each other, working towards a common goal. Additionally, "meso-level models simultaneously investigate multiple levels of analysis in order to understand how the team and individual variables are linked to each other" (Becker and Cropanzano, 2015, p. 232).

### 3.2 Methods of Data Collection

This research is based on a quantitative questionnaire that has been redistributed to two categories of participants – the team members of the neighbourhood teams as well as the leaders of the teams. The original dataset contains responses from 844 participants who work in 87 social welfare teams. The teams have been chosen across the five mostly populated municipalities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Delft, Tilburg and Capelle (Van der Voet & Steijn, 2021, p. 7).

As stated in Chapter 1: Introduction, the leaders and followers' questionnaires have been created as a collaboration between Leiden University and Erasmus University in the Netherlands and the data is available per request. The responses from the participants have been gathered between October and December 2020. In total, the survey measured 222 variables.

The variable Performance Below Social Aspirations (referred to in this thesis as PBSA) will be measured as a performance perceived by the leaders. Therefore this independent variable will be using the responses from the leader's questionnaire. The dependent variable Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (with its internal and external dimensions) together with moderating variable (Psychological Safety) will be measured by using the questionnaire from the followers.

It is important to underline that the survey is designed to measure the opinions of the leaders and the followers. This means that the answers of participants reflect their perspectives, hence this research measure their perception. Measuring variables in terms of perceptions is a well-known method that attributes to personal and a realistic view of the teams' working environment.

All individuals were asked to answer the questions in a survey on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. Each key variable in the questionnaire has been measured on this scale, indicating 1 – *totally disagree*, 2 – *partially disagree*, 3 – *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 – *partially agree*, 5 – *totally agree*.

The questionnaire was conducted in Dutch and for the purpose of this study, it was translated to English. The full list of translated statements from the questionnaire used for this research can be found in Appendix C.

### 3.3 Sampling Method

The respondents have been chosen to participate in the survey via non-random sampling. The population was chosen as a convince sampling – the municipalities in which the teams operate were chosen based on the availability and network of the researchers gathering the data. The survey has been redistributed to the participants via email and participation in the research was voluntary. The results from the survey have been anonymized and the participants

are distinguished by unique ID numbers. Due to confidentially, the names of municipalities were given letters A-E. Table 2 shows the number of respondents operating within a team in a certain municipality and shows the teams' corresponding response rate.

**Table 2**

*Distributions of Individual Responses Among Five Municipalities Included in the Analysis (N=698)*

| Municipality | Respondents | *N* Teams | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Municipality A | 212 | 22 | 51.59% |
| Municipality B | 281 | 22 | 47.91% |
| Municipality C | 43 | 4 | 44.00% |
| Municipality D | 95 | 6 | 37.67% |
| Municipality E | 67 | 4 | 51.00% |
| Total | 698 | 58 | 100.00% |

Of all 698 eligible responses used for this study (see Table 3 for the overview of the participants), the most populated municipality is Municipality B with 281 participants. The municipality that has the lowest number of respondents within a team is Municipality C with 43 responses. The lowest response rate has been recorded in Municipality D, where 37.67% out of all eligible participants from this municipality took part in the survey. The number of teams per municipality ranges from 4 to 22, with an average response rate of 46.4%.

### *3.3.1 Respondents*

This section aims to delve deeper into the characteristics of the leaders and followers that belong to the teams included in this thesis. The division between leaders and followers can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Division of Participants (N=698)*

| Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Participants | 698 | 100.00% |
| Leaders | 58 | 8.40% |
| Followers | 640 | 91.60% |

3.3.1.1 Followers

The vast majority of the followers included in the analysis are women counting for 88.10% (Table 4). 11.10% of the followers are male and 0.80% identified with another gender. The high number of women working in the teams can be attributed to the more female-centered working environment in which the social welfare-teams teams operate.

The average age of the followers is 42. The biggest age group among followers consists of people with an age between 30 to 39, which was the case for 32.30% of the respondents. The least populated age group is above 60 years. Regarding the level of education, the vast majority of the respondents hold HBO and WO degree (97.4% combined) [2]. The largest group of followers finished HBO education, which amounted to more than ¾ of all participants.

**Table 4**

*Information About Followers (N = 640)*

| Groups | Frequency | Percentage | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | | | – | 0.33 |

[2] HBO – (in Dutch 'hoger beroepsonderwijs') stands for 'higher professional education'; WO (in Dutch 'wetenschappelijk onderwijs') stands for 'higher university education'.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 564 | 88.10% | | |
| Male | 71 | 11.10% | | |
| Other | 5 | 0.80% | | |
| Valid | 640 | 100.00% | | |
| Missing | 0 | 0.00% | | |
| Total | 640 | 100.00% | | |
| Age (in years) | | | 41.86 | 11.15 |
| 18-29 | 82 | 12.80% | | |
| 30-39 | 207 | 32.30% | | |
| 40-49 | 170 | 26.60% | | |
| 50-59 | 121 | 18.90% | | |
| >60 | 50 | 7.80% | | |
| Valid | 630 | 98.40% | | |
| Missing | 10 | 1.60% | | |
| Total | 640 | 100.00% | | |
| Tenure (in months) | | | 36.02 | 22.70 |
| 1-12 | 133 | 20.80% | | |
| 13-24 | 107 | 16.70% | | |
| 25-36 | 102 | 15.90% | | |
| 37-48 | 72 | 11.30% | | |
| 49-60 | 101 | 15.80% | | |
| >60 | 91 | 14.20% | | |
| Valid | 606 | 94.70% | | |
| Missing | 34 | 5.30% | | |
| Total | 640 | 100.00% | | |
| Education | | | – | – |
| Primary/Lower secondary | 1 | 0.20% | | |
| Secondary general | 2 | 0.30% | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Secondary vocational | 13 | 2.00% |
| HBO | 488 | 76.30% |
| WO | 134 | 20.90% |
| PhD | 2 | 0.30% |
| Valid | 640 | 100.00% |
| Missing | 0 | 0.00% |
| Total | 640 | 100.00% |

#### 3.3.1.2 Leaders

Similarly to the followers, females are dominating gender in leadership positions accounting for more than ¾ of the leaders (Table 5). More than half of the positions are filled by people in the age group of 40 to 49 and the youngest recorded age for the leader is 30 years. The biggest proportion of leaders working in the team holds the position for more than 5 years, which accounts for 43.10%. As the social-welfare teams originated in the year of 2015, it indicates that most of the leaders acquired their positions from the beginning of the formation of the teams. The leaders hold either HBO or WO degrees, of which the HBO degree is in majority (67.20%).

**Table 5**

*Information About Leaders (N = 58)*

| Groups | Frequency | Percentage | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | | | – | 0.42 |
| Female | 45 | 77.60% | | |
| Male | 13 | 22.40% | | |
| Valid | 58 | 100.00% | | |
| Missing | 0 | 0.00% | | |
| Total | 58 | 100.00% | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | | | 48.10 | 8.63 |
| 30-39 | 9 | 15.50% | | |
| 40-49 | 30 | 51.70% | | |
| 50-59 | 10 | 17.20% | | |
| >60 | 9 | 15.50% | | |
| Valid | 58 | 100.00% | | |
| Missing | 0 | 0.00% | | |
| Total | 58 | 100.00% | | |
| Tenure (in months) | | | 49.74 | 24.87 |
| 1-12 | 8 | 20.70% | | |
| 13-24 | 3 | 5.20% | | |
| 25-36 | 7 | 12.10% | | |
| 37-48 | 6 | 10.30% | | |
| 49-60 | 5 | 8.60% | | |
| >60 | 25 | 43.10% | | |
| Missing | 4 | 6.90% | | |
| Valid | 54 | 93.10% | | |
| Total | 58 | 100.00% | | |
| Education | | | – | – |
| HBO | 39 | 67.20% | | |
| WO | 19 | 32.80% | | |
| Valid | 58 | 100.00% | | |
| Missing | 0 | 0.00% | | |
| Total | 58 | 100.00% | | |

### 3.4 Level of Analysis

In this thesis, teams are the central unit therefore the responses have been aggregated to the team level. In order to provide a valid picture of the behaviour of the teams, only teams

with responses of 30% or higher are included in the analysis. It was necessary to match the leaders with their teams, hence the analysis excludes the teams without the leader. The final sample includes 58 teams, consisting of 698 participants (58 leaders and 640 followers). Table 6 displays information about the 58 teams studied in this thesis and the following section will elaborate on those characteristics.

Within the range of 2 to 26 people per team, more than half of the teams consist of 9 to 15 people, whereas there are only three teams with more than 22 professionals. The average age of the respondents in the teams is 41.87 years. Most of the teams constituted of people with an age between 38 and 42 years. The youngest team has a mean of 33 years, and the most mature team consist of professionals up to 50 years old. Regarding the tenure of the participants, on average, people have been working in the social welfare teams for 2 years and 11 months. Several participants responded that they have been working in social welfare teams since the beginning of its existence in 2015.

**Table 6**

*Frequencies and Means of Team-Level Team Size, Age and Tenure (N=58)*

| | Frequency | Percent | Range | Mean | SD | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Team Size | | | 24.00 | 12.03 | 5.08 | 2.00 | 26.00 |
| 2-8 | 13 | 22.40 | | | | | |
| 9-15 | 32 | 55.20 | | | | | |
| 16-22 | 10 | 17.20 | | | | | |
| >22 | 3 | 5.20 | | | | | |
| Team Age | | | 18.83 | 41.87 | 4.12 | 33.00 | 49.83 |
| 33-37 | 7 | 12.10 | | | | | |
| 38-42 | 24 | 41.40 | | | | | |
| 43-47 | 21 | 36.20 | | | | | |
| >48 | 6 | 10.30 | | | | | |
| Team Tenure | | | 40.06 | 36.59 | 9.18 | 13.94 | 54.00 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 12-24 | 4 | 6.90 |
| 25-37 | 26 | 44.80 |
| 38-50 | 24 | 41.10 |
| >50 | 4 | 6.90 |

## 3.5 Operationalisation

In this section, the thesis will describe how the variables of the thesis will be measured. First, the thesis will present the dependent variable Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (FBS) and its two dimensions internal and external FSB. This will follow by the independent variable of PBSA. The moderating variable of Psychological Safety will be measured lastly.

### *3.5.1 Feedback-Seeking Behaviour*

The dependent variable FSB will be measured by taking two statements from the followers' survey. This thesis differentiates the source of obtaining feedback therefore two dimensions of FSB will be measured here - internal and external counterparts. The act of searching for feedback nearby, within the team, will be called *internal Feedback-Seeking Behaviour*. In order to measure the internal FSB, this thesis takes the following statement: *"In our team, we collect feedback on the way we approach the work."* The beginning of the statement "in our team" implies that the feedback is collected within that team.

Similarly, seeking feedback outside of the team will be referred to as *external Feedback-Seeking Behaviour*. The statement used to measure this dimension is as follows: *"In our team, we ask parties we work with for feedback on our work."* This thesis considers 'parties' are seen as external actors involved in activities outside of the team. To obtain a broad picture of both of the examined behaviours, both variables will be combined into a dependent variable of FSB. In order to provide a consistency of measuring FSB, Cronbach's alpha has been calculated and equals .724.

### *3.5.2 Performance Below Social Aspirations*

The Performance Below Social Aspirations (PBSA) will be measured by using responses from the leaders' questionnaire. The measurement was created by combining nine statements from the questionnaire that measure equality, lawfulness, transparency, efficiency, responsiveness, and resilience. The measurement is inspired by the writings of Hood (1991) who defined desired behaviours in public sector organisations as a set of values. Based on that, this thesis adopts a novel scale that has been developed for the purpose of studying the neighbourhood team project. The corresponding statements for PBSA are presented in Appendix D. The Cronbach's alpha for the nine statements that measure PBSA equals 0.834 which provides high consistency in compared items.

It is important to discuss how the team performance will be compared and how to estimate high and low performance. Chapter 2: Theory presented the theory about performance and aspiration levels. This thesis will measure the team performance as below social aspiration levels, meaning that low performance is established by comparing the performance to other neighbourhood teams.

In order to translate this theory into practice, the nine corresponding statements measuring PBSA, presented in Appendix C, will be combined into one variable Performance Below Social Aspirations (PBSA). Next, the results will be assigned to the corresponding municipality in which the teams operate. Based on that, the thesis will extract the mean per municipality. In conclusion, the variable of PBSA, represents the teams that fall under the mean score per municipality.

### *3.5.3 Psychological Safety*

The moderating variable of Psychological Safety will be measured by collecting the responses from the follower's questionnaire. Based on the statements that have been designed by Edmondson's (1999) to measure Psychological Safety, corresponding statements from the follower's questionnaire have been searched for (Table 7).

The statements presented in Table 7 are similar to the original equivalents proposed by Edmondson (1999). However, as they are not identical, it is important to address the slim differences. For example, the statement from the survey "In our team, it is allowed to make mistakes" differs from the original statement used by Edmondson (1999): "If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you" as it not only implies that making mistakes is accepted but also, that making such action might be used against the person.

This however is not foreseen to impact the quality of the measurement as Cronbach's alpha for the four items is .823, which provides high reliability of this scale. In summary, Psychological Safety is measured by combining the four aforementioned items.

**Table 7**

*Measurement of Psychological Safety Based Edmondson (1999)*

| No | Concept | Statement |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Allowing mistakes | In our team, it is allowed to make mistakes. |
| 2. | Bringing up problems | In our team, you can bring up your problems or tricky issues. |
| 3. | Asking for help | In our team, it is easy to ask others for help. |
| 4. | Skills and talents value | In our team, everyone's unique skills and talents are valued. |

### *3.5.4 Control Variables*

To control for the FSB, three variables have been chosen – *team size*, *team age* and *team tenure*. Firstly, the size of the group has been chosen as it often influences the group dynamics and team cohesion (Carron & Spink, 1995). There is an assumption that team size might

influence the degree to which people feel comfortable asking their teammates for feedback. Secondly, age will be controlled for as it was found to influence learning outcomes (Gerpott et al., 2015). Anseel et al., (2015) put forward an argument that with age, people are more resistant to displaying Feedback-Seeking Behaviour. Lastly, tenure will be controlled for which will be measured in the months worked in the team. Tenure is often used as a control variable in other studies examining feedback (Synder et al., 1984) and similarly to age, it is seen to decrease the FSB (Anseel et al., 2015). The information about the variables is taken from both leaders and followers questionnaires and the results have been aggregated to the team level, with the exception of team size, which has already been given on team level.

## 3.6 Analysis Strategy

### *3.6.1 Principal Component Analysis*

Principal component analysis (PCAs) will be calculated to pave a way for the validity and reliability of the measured items (Van der Hoek et al., 2018, p. 479). As the responses of the followers were given individually, it is essential to aggregate those responses to the team level. The intraclass correlation has been performed which "indicates the variance accounted for by group membership (ICC1) and signifies the reliability of the group-means (ICC2)" (Van der Hoek et al., 2018, p. 481).

As the team size differs across the teams (from 2 to 26 people), the average size was estimated based on the equation provided by Bliese and Halverson (1999, p. 168). The calculation presents that on average, the teams consist of 11.6 people.

$$Ng = (1/(\text{Number of groups} - 1)) \times (\sum \text{Team sizes} - (\sum \text{Team sizes}2/ \sum \text{Team sizes}))$$

$$= (1/(58 - 1)) \times (698 - (9872/698) = 0.017 \times 683.857 = 11.625.$$

For ICC1 to be acceptable, the values must range from 0.05 to 0.2. FSB falls under this requirement with ICC1 equal to 0.07. Psychological Safety does not meet this range with 0.03. For ICC2, values higher than 0.7 are considered a good score, and scores 0.40 to 0.75 are considered fair (Koo & Li, 2016). The ICC2 indicates that 45% of FSB and is 29% of Psychological Safety is explained because of the responses being provided on the team level. The score for FSB is therefore moderate and Psychological Safety is considered to have a low value. Despite those low scores, aggregating the responses to the team level is beneficial from a theoretical point of view.

**Table 8**

*Intraclass Correlation (N=698)*

| Variable | ICC1 | ICC2 |
|---|---|---|
| FSB | .07 | .45 |
| PS | .03 | .29 |

### *3.6.2 Analysis Structure*

The research will be conducted in SPSS (version 26). First, the descriptive statistics will be calculated to obtain information about the teams. Next, the correlation analysis will be computed to determine whether a significant relationship is present between the variables. The key variables with significant values will be further tested in the regression analyses. Lastly, the moderation analysis will be performed to test the interaction between PBSA and Psychological Safety.

## 3.7 Validity and Reliability

This section will present the strengths and limitations of this study design reflected in validity and reliability

### *3.7.1 Validity*

Validity is concerned with the quality of the measured variables (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). The quantitative nature of this study provides a diverse sample of respondents, however, the online questionnaire used to measure the responses might contain certain biases. Due to measuring the perception of responses, the answers might not be an accurate reflection of reality (Neuman, 2014).

Another limitation is related to the way concepts have been measured. For instance, Psychological Safety has been originally measured by Edmondson (1999) using seven statements. This thesis uses four similar statements to measure PS, which might not entirely reflect the original question asked. In order to measure team performance, a novel scale has been applied, moving away from defying it in terms of effectiveness and rather, conceptualising it as a combination of lawfulness, equality, transparency, efficiency, responsiveness and reliability, and resilience. This scale however is statistically relevant and is based on widely known theoretical literature by Hood (1991), therefore the measurement suffices the validity. Moreover, the dataset that has been used to measure the variables was already designed in the survey to measure those concepts in the leaders and followers, which suffices the validity.

### *3.7.2 Reliability*

Reliability determines if the results of the study are consistent and replicable every time the research is conducted (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). Team performance as well as other variables score high on Cronbach's alpha. Generally, high scores indicate consistency of the measured variables, therefore the measurements used in this thesis are reliable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). On the other hand, as the study relies on aggregated data, it is possible that the results were affected due to low values of intraclass correlation.

This study focuses on social-welfare reams, which are expected to have enhanced information sharing, are directed towards more effective work and are characterized by high autonomy. Due to the nature of the teams which is more similar to the one in the private domain, the results might not be translated to other teams with a more traditional structure. Studying distinctive neighbourhood teams provides a unique sample of participants however it might hinder the generalizability of the results to other sectors of public administration.

Additionally, the survey has been conducted during the Covid-19 outbake which might influence the degree to which people perceive Psychological Safety due to changes in the workplace. This possesses limitation of inability to control the environment in which employees operate and there is a possibility that other contextual factors that have not been controlled for influenced the results. Replicating this study could give different results, therefore the quantitative responses could be accompanied by qualitative methods, such as interviews.

# 4 Results

This chapter will expand on the previous analysis in order to deliver the results of this thesis. First, the descriptive statistics will be presented, followed by a correlation analysis of the main variables. This will pave a way for the hypothesis testing in which the regression and moderation analysis will be calculated. The results from the analysis will reveal if the aforementioned hypotheses are refuted or not.

## 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

This section will present information regarding the teams' characteristics. In total, this study analyses 58 teams that constitute 58 leaders and 640 followers. On average, teams consist of 12 people per team with an average age of 42 years and work experience in the team of three years. The team sizes vary from 2 up to 26 people per team.

The standard deviation presents the information on how far the responses are redistributed from the mean. For all variables measuring Feedback-Seeking Behaviour, the SD is close to 0.40 implying that the responses are, to a high degree, homogeneous. Internal FSB scores are higher than external FSB and are characterised by lower variability. The external FSB has the lowest minimum score out of all key variables (3.07 out of 5.00).

On the other hand, Psychological Safety has the highest mean out of all key variables (4.31 out of 5.00). The scores in PS are characterized by low variability between the responses given by the teams. The minimum score for PS is relatively high (3.73 out of 5.00). As the variability is low for the responses and the majority of the responses are close to the highest value, we can speak of the *ceiling effect* being present. This effect could arise as most of the responses do not differ from each other and are all similar to the highest score possible.

The standard deviation for PBSA is similar to those of FSB, and the scores are also redistributed closely to the mean. The results are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Mean, Median, Range, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum of Key Variables for Teams (N=58)*

| Variable | N | Mean | Median | Range | SD | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FSB | 58 | 3.28 | 3.28 | 2.08 | 0.41 | 2.25 | 4.33 |
| Internal FSB | 58 | 3.50 | 3.37 | 2.17 | 0.42 | 2.33 | 4.50 |
| External FSB | 58 | 3.07 | 3.07 | 2.37 | 0.41 | 1.80 | 4.17 |
| PS | 58 | 4.31 | 4.31 | 1.27 | 0.26 | 3.73 | 5.00 |
| PBSA | 58 | 4.14 | 4.11 | 1.89 | 0.47 | 3.00 | 4.89 |
| Team Size | 58 | 12.03 | 11.00 | 24.00 | 0.67 | 2.00 | 26.00 |
| Team Age | 58 | 41.87 | 41.72 | 16.83 | 4.11 | 33.00 | 49.83 |
| Team Tenure | 58 | 34.75 | 35.02 | 41.63 | 8.91 | 12.37 | 54.00 |

As the analysis is based on the comparison between five municipalities that incorporate the teams, each key variable has been assigned to municipality. In order to get information about the variables per municipality, the means has been extracted from the variables. Table 10 presents the calculated mean scores.

**Table 10**

*Mean Scores of Key and Controlled Variables per Municipality (N=58)*

| Variable | Municipality A | Municipality B | Municipality C | Municipality D | Municipality E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FSB | 3.29 | 3.33 | 3.38 | 3.19 | 3.01 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internal FSB | 3.49 | 3.55 | 3.57 | 3.48 | 3.22 |
| External FSB | 3.10 | 3.11 | 3.20 | 2.89 | 3.07 |
| PS | 4.33 | 4.29 | 4.36 | 4.34 | 4.20 |
| PBSA | 4.21 | 4.11 | 4.31 | 4.06 | 3.89 |
| Team Size | 9.64 | 12.77 | 10.75 | 15.83 | 16.75 |
| Team Age | 40.27 | 43.87 | 40.36 | 40.96 | 42.46 |
| Team Tenure | 35.98 | 41.28 | 37.74 | 23.63 | 32.42 |

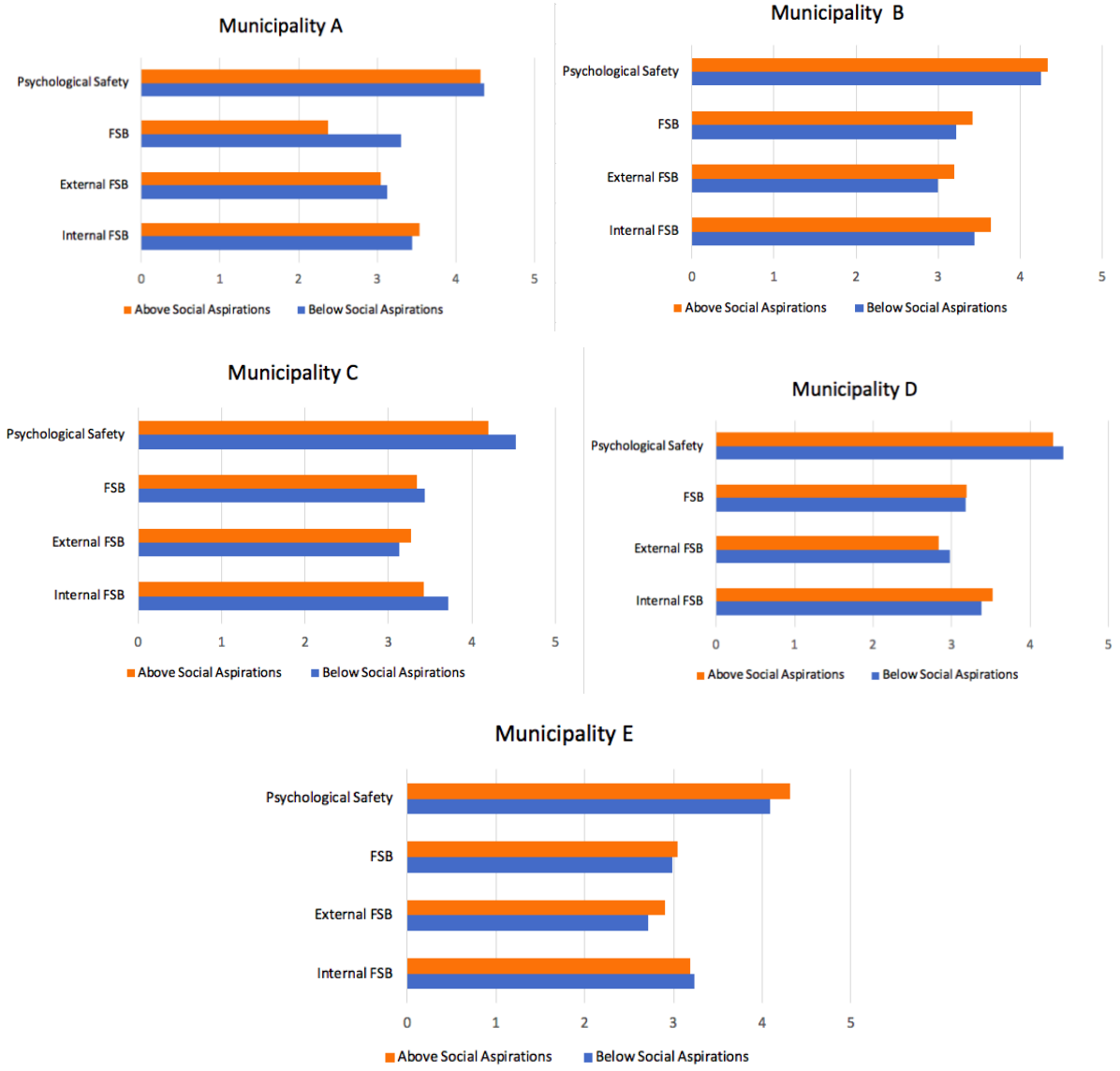
All five municipalities have similar means of FSB. In each municipality, the internal FSB is higher than the external FSB. The mean scores for PS are also similar, with high scores, ranging from 4.20 to 4.36. The range of the mean score of PSBA is broader than other key variables, ranging from 3.89 to 4.31.

An interesting observation can be made regarding the minimum and maximum scores for the municipalities. Municipality C has the highest scores on all variables whereas Municipality E scored lowest on all variables. The average tenure, as well as the team size, differed across municipalities. Notably, the average age per municipality for all teams was highly homogeneous ranging between 40 and 43.

Based on the means for PBSA, the teams whose mean score is below the mean of a given municipality will be assigned a value of 1. The teams whose response was above the mean of a given municipality will get a score of 0. This procedure is done in order to create a dummy variable of PBSA and distinguish teams that perform below and above social aspiration level. This dummy variable will be used in the regression analyses in this chapter. Figure 3 displays mean scores for key variables per municipality per social aspiration group.

**Figure 3**

*Municipalities Divided Into Above and Below Social Aspirations Groups and Means of Key Variables*




In order to acquire basic knowledge about the scores in PBSA for each municipality, the teams and key variables have been grouped per municipality, differentiating between the scores for teams below and above social aspirations. Table 11 displays the results.

**Table 11**

*Teams Below and Above Social Aspirations Together With Means for PBSA per Municipality (N=58)*

| Municipality | *N* of teams | Mean |
|---|---|---|
| Municipality A | Below social aspirations (12)<br>Above social aspirations (10)<br>Total: 22 | 4.21 |
| Municipality B | Below social aspirations (12)<br>Above social aspirations (10)<br>Total: 22 | 4.11 |
| Municipality C | Below social aspirations (1)<br>Above social aspirations (3)<br>Total: 4 | 4.31 |
| Municipality D | Below social aspirations (4)<br>Above social aspirations (2)<br>Total: 6 | 4.06 |
| Municipality E | Below social aspirations (2)<br>Above social aspirations (2)<br>Total: 4 | 3.89 |

The municipalities differ in the number of teams ranging from 4 to 22. The teams with performance above and below social aspirations are divided rather evenly. Municipality C has the highest mean score for PBSA, whereas Municipality E is characterized by the lowest value.

Following the analysis of the performance of the teams, the internal and external FSB have been compared for both groups of teams per municipality (for those above and below social aspirations). Appendix E discloses the results. We can derive from the means that 2 out of 5 municipalities with performance below social aspirations exhibit higher internal and external FSB. The differences between the scores for all five municipalities are minor, and further analysis is necessary to showcase the results in greater detail.

The results are also similar with regards to PBSA and Psychological Safety. As demonstrated in Appendix E, the degree of Psychological Safety varies lightly in both groups of teams, regardless of the municipality. The for PS are high, with the average score of 4.31 per municipality. With that in mind, all teams score higher on Psychological Safety than FSB.

The next section devoted to the correlation matrix will reveal more information about the relationship between key variables.

## 4.2 Correlation Analysis

In order to estimate the relationship between the variables, the bivariate correlation was calculated using Pearson correlation coefficient (Pearson's *r*). The variables have been correlated based on the aggregated data from 58 teams. The results are displayed in Table 12.

**Table 12**

Pearson Correlation Coefficients *(N= 58)*

| Variable Name | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. FSB | | | | | | | |
| 2. Internal FSB | .88** | | | | | | |
| 3. External FSB | .92** | .62** | | | | | |
| 4. PS | .51** | .55** | .38** | | | | |
| 5. PBSA | .14 | .17 | .09 | .18 | | | |
| 6. Team Size | –.04 | –.10 | .02 | –.16 | –.25 | | |
| 7. Team Age | .13 | –.15 | .34** | –.06 | .14 | .30* | |
| 8. Team Tenure | .07 | –.04 | .14 | .02 | .04 | .16 | .46** |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From this correlation analysis, it can be deducted that the relationship between the key variables is positive. The highest correlation between the variables is present between internal Feedback-Seeking Behaviour and Psychological Safety with a coefficient of .55. This implies that there is a strong, positive correlation between Psychological Safety and internal FSB. This relationship indicates that the stronger the Psychological Safety, the higher the internal FSB. Additionally, there is a moderate, positive correlation between PS and external FSB, and a strong, positive correlation between FSB and Psychological Safety.

PBSA and Psychological Safety are not significantly correlated, which was not accounted for earlier and therefore PBSA will not be included in regression analyses.

The correlation analysis also presents interesting results regarding control variables. External FSB and age were found to be significant and positive, which implies that the higher the external FSB, the more mature the people are. Moreover, age is significantly and positively correlated with team size and tenure. These correlations indicate that the age of people increases with the rise of the months worked in the team as well as the number of people working within the teams is higher when the age is higher as well.

### 4.3 Hypothesis Testing

Firstly, the Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis (OLS) was conducted. Beforehand, the variables have been centered.

In order to investigate the degree of intercorrelation between the variables, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) has been calculated. The VIF for all key variables did not exceed 1.38, therefore there is no issue of multicollinearity.

The Hypotheses from H1 to H1b (displayed in Appendix A) will not be explicitly tested as no correlation has been found between the independent variables PBSA and FSB (alongside its internal and external dimensions).

The first regression analysis therefore has been performed for the dependent variable FSB to test the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Psychological Safety moderates the relationship between teams with Performance Below Social Aspirations (PBSA) and the Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (FSB). Specifically, the relationship between teams with PBSA and the occurrence of FSB is stronger when Psychological Safety is present in the teams.

The initial regression analysis involved computing four regression models. Model 1 did not fit the data, as none of the control variables were significantly correlated with FSB (see Table 13 for correlations). The values for Model 1 include $F(3, 54) = 0.41$, $p = .748$ and $R^2 = .02$. Similarly, Model 2 does not offer significant results for control variables, PBSA and FSB, $F(4, 53) = 0.45$, $p = .772$, $R^2 = .03$. Due to the insignificance, both models have been excluded from the regression table (displayed in Table 13).

Model 3 fits the data, $F(4, 53) = 5.27$, $p = 0.001$, $R^2 = .29$. Psychological Safety is a significant predictor of FSB. Likewise, Model 4 is significant with $F(5, 52) = 4.27$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .29$. Psychological Safety is also a significant predictor for FSB. For both models, the higher Psychological Safety, the higher FSB is.

**Table 13**

*Regression Analyses for Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (N = 58)*

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | Standardized Coefficients | *t* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | *B* | Std. Error | Beta | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Constant | –.54 | .57 | | –.95 | .344 |
| 2 | Constant | –.56 | .57 | | –.99 | .328 |
| 3 | Constant | –.66 | .49 | | –1.34 | .185 |
| | Team Size | .00 | .01 | –.01 | –.04 | .967 |
| | Team Age | .02 | .01 | .17 | 1.23 | .225 |
| | Team Tenure | .00 | .01 | –.02 | –.15 | .884 |
| | PS | .81 | .19 | .52 | 4.41 | <.001 |
| 4 | Constant | –.67 | .49 | | –1.37 | .178 |
| | Team Size | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .994 |
| | Team Age | .02 | .01 | .18 | 1.30 | .200 |
| | Team Tenure | .00 | .01 | –.02 | –.18 | .860 |
| | PBSA | –.07 | .10 | –.08 | –.70 | .490 |
| | PS | .81 | .19 | .52 | 4.35 | <.001 |

In order to delve deeper into the dimensions of Feedback-Seeking Behaviour, the regression analysis has been performed in an identical manner for internal FSB. By analysing this dimension, the Hypothesis 2a will be tested:

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a)**: Teams with PBSA are more prone to display internal Feedback-Seeking Behaviour when Psychological Safety is present in their team.

The regression analysis shows that Model 1 does not fit the data as the control variables were not significantly correlated with FSB. Model 1 includes $F(3, 54) = .506$, $p = .680$, $R^2 = .027$. Model 2 has also been nonsignificant, and it showcases the following values: $F(4, 53) = .512$, $p = .727$, $R^2 = .037$ .

Model 3 and 4 offer more promising results as Psychological Safety was found to be significant predictor in both models. For Model 3, the values are as follows: $F(4, 53) = 6.29$, $p = <.001$, $R^2 = .32$. Model 4 includes $F(5, 52) = 5.07$, $p = <.001$, $R^2 = .33$ . This means that the higher the PS, the higher the internal FSB is.

**Table 14**

*Regression Analyses for Internal Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (N = 58)*

| | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | | *B* | Std. Error | Beta | *t* | Sig. |
| 1 | (Constant) | .65 | .58 | | 1.16 | .270 |
| 2 | (Constant) | 4.12 | .58 | | 7.06 | <.001 |
| 3 | (Constant) | .20 | .96 | | .21 | .833 |
| | Team Size | .00 | .01 | .03 | .24 | .815 |
| | Team Age | –.01 | .01 | –.13 | –1.00 | .324 |
| | Team Tenure | .00 | .01 | .01 | .07 | .946 |
| | PS | .89 | .18 | .55 | 4.80 | <.001 |
| 4 | (Constant) | .21 | .96 | | .22 | .827 |
| | Team Size | .00 | .01 | .03 | .28 | .780 |
| | Team Age | –.01 | .01 | –.12 | –.90 | .372 |
| | Team Tenure | .00 | .01 | .01 | .04 | .970 |
| | PBSA | –.06 | .10 | –.08 | –.67 | .509 |
| | PS | .88 | .19 | .55 | 4.74 | <.001 |

The last dependent variable (external FSB) will be included in the final regression analyses to test the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b)**: Teams with PBSA are more prone to display external FSB when Psychological Safety is present in their team.

Models 1 and 2 were nonsignificant as it was the case with previous FSB variables. The control variables were found not to be significantly correlated. The values for Models 1 and 2 were respectively: $F(3, 54) = 2.53$, $p = .067$, $R^2 = .12$; $F(4, 53) = 2.00$, $p = .108$, $R^2 = .13$.

Model 3 is significant with $F(4, 53) = 5.07$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .28$. It shows that both age and Psychological Safety are significant predictors for external FSB. It implies that with higher age and Psychological Safety, there is an increase in external FSB.

Model 4 is also significant with $F(5, 52) = 4.08$, $p = .003$, $R^2 = .28$. Once again, age and PS significantly predict external FSB, with age being a stronger predictor than Psychological Safety. Interestingly, Model 3 presents the reverse situation, as Psychological Safety is a stronger predictor than age.

**Table 15**

*Regression Analyses for External Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (N = 58)*

| | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *B* | Std. Error | Beta | *t* | Sig. |
| 1 | (Constant) | –1.73 | .64 | | –2.70 | .009 |
| 2 | (Constant) | –1.75 | .65 | | –2.71 | .009 |
| 3 | (Constant) | –1.84 | .59 | | –3.12 | .003 |
| | Team Size | .00 | .01 | –.03 | –.27 | .791 |
| | Team Age | .05 | .02 | .39 | 2.87 | .006 |
| | Team Tenure | .00 | .01 | –.04 | –.30 | .764 |
| | PS | .74 | .22 | .40 | 3.35 | .001 |
| 4 | (Constant) | –1.85 | .59 | | –3.12 | .003 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Team Size | .00 | .01 | –.03 | –.22 | .826 |
| Team Age | .05 | .02 | .40 | 2.91 | .005 |
| Team Tenure | .00 | .01 | –.04 | –.33 | .745 |
| PBSA | –.07 | .12 | –.07 | –.60 | .550 |
| PS | .74 | .22 | .39 | 3.30 | .002 |

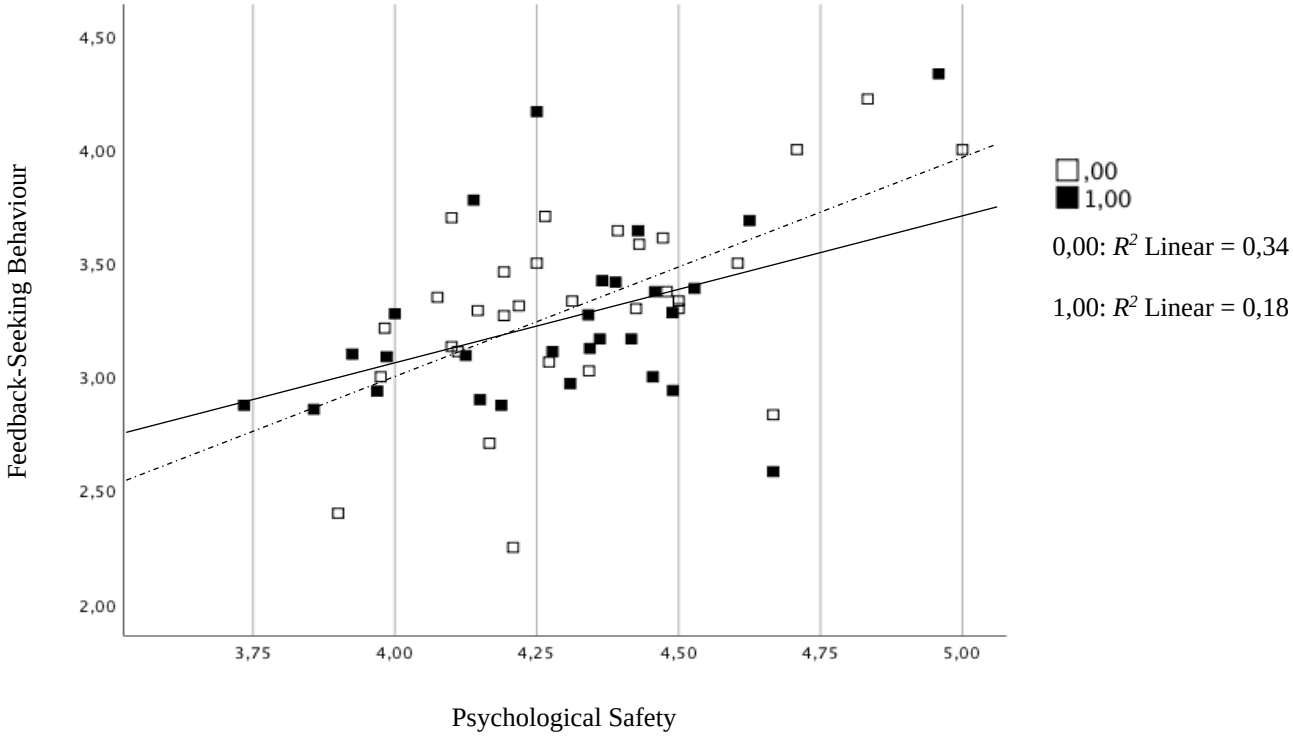
## 4.4 Moderation Analysis

This section will demonstrate the moderation analysis in order to test Hypothesis 2. The objective of this analysis is to find whether Psychological Safety has a moderating effect on the relationship between PBSA and FSB (both its internal and external dimensions).

The moderation analysis has been computed using PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2021). The moderation involved bootstrapping with 10,000 samples, and 95% percentile confidence intervals. The analysis showed that the interaction between PBSA and Psychological Safety is not significant, $B$ = -0.34, 95% C.I. (-1.07, 0.38), $p$ = .348. This indicates that the moderation effect is not present. Figure 4 showcases the moderation analysis.

**Figure 4**

*Moderation Effect Displayed on Scatterplot*


Feedback-Seeking Behaviour
4,50
4,00
3,50
3,00
2,50
2,00
3,75
4,00
4,25
4,50
4,75
5,00
Psychological Safety
,00
1,00
0,00: $R^2$ Linear = 0,34
1,00: $R^2$ Linear = 0,18

# 5 Discussion

This thesis aimed to find answers for two phenomena, namely (1) to what extent does the degree of performance shortfalls affect Feedback-Seeking Behaviour; (2) does psychological safety have a moderating effect on this relationship.

There was no evidence found to support Hypotheses 1 to 1b. The study concluded that the degree of team performance was found not to be associated with Feedback-Seeking Behaviour. The hypothesised positive relationship between PBSA and FSB, was therefore refuted. However, Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged from moderate to high on all variables, suggesting that the measurement has been well chosen. From a theoretical point of view, there is a strong assumption that with lower performance people are more inclined to take on risk, and therefore search for information – in the case of this study, this search was assumed to be reflected in feedback behaviour. Additionally, the literature from problemistic search provides solid theoretical arguments for claiming that once people reach low performance they will look for solutions to that problem. In other words, it is possible that the reasons for refuting Hypotheses 1 to 1b derive from the study design rather than theory. One such reason might be the fact that the literature about problemistic search and FSB has been previously applied to a major extent to individuals rather than teams.

Hypothesis 2, studied if Psychological Safety has a moderating role on the beforementioned relationship between performance shortfalls and feedback-seeking behaviour. The moderation analyses for Hypothesis 2 revealed no moderating effect of Psychological Safety on PBSA and FSB. As such, Hypothesis 2 has been refuted.

Similarly, Hypotheses 2a and 2b studied moderation and have further drawn on this relationship to find whether the presence of PS will enhance internal and external FSB. These

hypotheses were also refuted due to insignificant interaction between PBSA and Psychological Safety.

Overall, all the municipalities and teams have been characterized by a well-perceived performance. What is considered a performance shortfall in this study (performance below the average performance), might not be an actual low performance for the teams. It is reflected in the average performance - the recorded minimum average score for team performance per municipality is 3.89 out of 5, which indicates a relatively good score. Therefore the scores might be accounted for rejecting hypotheses H1 to H2b.

Despite finding contradictory results, this thesis reveals several meaningful findings that are worth discussing. Firstly, internal FSB has been found to be higher than external FSB in every analysed case, although not significantly. This could arise due to the aggregated nature of the data. This finding supports the theory of information search drawn from the literature of Strategic and Boundary Management. The theory implies that people tend to seek information nearby rather than distantly, as looking for information nearby requires less effort.

The control variables of age, team size and tenure were found not to influence the FSB. However, correlation and regression analyses revealed additional results. The correlation analysis uncovered that age is significantly and positively correlated with team size. Therefore, the data suggests that the older the people are, the bigger the teams in which they operate. For Hypothesis 2a, age was found to be a significant predictor for external FSB, meaning that older people tend to ask for external feedback more likely than their younger counterparts. This might be the case, as more mature people, with long experience, feel more comfortable seeking information outside of their environment.

Another important finding is the positive relationship between Psychological Safety and internal and external FSB. Psychological Safety was always positively associated with FSB

which supports the academic discussion about team learning within organisations.

## 5.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Despite not finding the evidence for the aforementioned hypotheses, the findings of this thesis put forward several meaningful implications.

First of all, this thesis distinguished two types of Feedback-Seeking Behaviour depending on the internal and external source of feedback, which has not been done previously. It was found that internal FSB was always higher than external FSB which finding supports the argument made by scholars studying problemistic search, who argue that people tend to look for information nearby. Social-welfare teams are designed to network and engage with external activities, therefore, if external FSB behaviour is relatively low in such teams, it is likely that other teams will engage with external feedback to an even lesser extent. It is valuable information for public managers to know that asking for feedback outside of the teams is not the most natural way for people to ask for help. If such activity is important for teams, feedback outside of the team should be promoted in a more proactive way.

Secondly, the thesis utilized a novel approach for measuring team performance. The measurement was based on the writings of Hood (1991) which measured performance as a set of values that are meaningful to New Public Management. This is an unconventional measurement as other studies rely on measuring team performance as effectiveness. Next to this, the degrees of team performance were compared based on social aspiration levels, providing a new angle for studying team performance. The measurement has been supported by Cronbach's alpha value, which varied from moderate to high. This implies that the measurement for this study was well chosen. The theoretical assumptions have therefore been approved by the statistical analysis.

Thirdly, it was found that Psychological Safety had no moderating effect on the FSB, however, it was a significant predictor of FSB (and its dimensions). This implies that people are more likely to ask for feedback whilst operating in a safe environment. This is a powerful finding that signals the importance of maintaining trust in the public sector. If organisations want to learn, they need to cultivate a working environment of safety and openness.

## 5.2 Limitations

This research does not go without certain limitations which require acknowledgement and will allow for more robust study in the future.

Firstly, this thesis is based on a cross-sectional study design that studies the responses of people at one point in time. The statistical analysis suffices the information regarding the relationship between the variables, however, it does not imply the cause and effect. The relationship between PBSA and FSB should therefore be interpreted as an association. Performing this study in a longitudinal manner might enhance the occurrence of the causal mechanisms.

Secondly, scores of certain variables have been high, close to their maximum value. Simultaneously, the variability for the key variables was low. Due to this phenomenon, we can speak of the ceiling effect being present. Particularly, the results for Psychological Safety could be affected. Due to the law on large numbers, this issue could be diminished if the dataset would be larger. This limitation is also extended to the fact that PBSA for the teams was relatively high, therefore might not reflect the real performance shortfalls. This issue might be minimalized if the study was conducted with teams that are less efficient and have a more diversified performance.

Lastly, although Cronbach’s alpha implies good measurement for PBSA, the binary dummy variable could affect the results. Perhaps, including a regular score of team

performance would bring more plausible results. Additionally, the PROCESS macro used for moderation could not have been adjusted for the dummy. The measurement might also be affected by the way moderation has been analysed.

## 5.3 Conclusions

This research aimed to answer the following research question: *To what extent does the degree of team performance relate to the internal and external Feedback-Seeking Behaviour within Dutch social-welfare teams, and what is the moderating role of psychological safety on the occurrence of such behaviour?* Largely drawing on the literature from the private sector and behavioural science, two main hypotheses have been put forward to test the relationship between the degree of team performance and Feedback-Seeking Behaviour as well as Psychological Safety as a moderator. The present findings refuted the tested hypotheses, however, the results provide evidence for the positive relationship between Feedback-Seeking Behaviour and Psychological Safety.

## 5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could take into account the following aspects. This study measured the results based on the perception of respondents as the study measured perception only. Future research could investigate not only the perception of the respondents but also compare those results with actual data. This could be done by incorporating questions in a survey in such a way that respondents will indicate the effect of their searched feedback. Future research therefore can focus on the quality of feedback, the way it has been conveyed as well as its positive and negative outcomes.

As Psychological Safety has been studied as a moderator, which was found not to be significant, further studies are encouraged to instead perform a mediation analysis of this

variable. Additionally, the context in which the study was placed is characterised by multidisciplinary and high efficiency. Performing this study in a different context could potentially bring reverse results.

Another avenue for future research is to expand on the different sources of feedback - internal and external. This thesis reveals that internal feedback is always higher and more present than external feedback, although not significantly. Future studies could further study this comparison by also adding the agent who was asked for feedback such as a fellow colleague or the leader. This would allow for combining the methodology of this research with the already existing findings on Feedback-Seeking Behaviour.

Lastly, the vast majority of the respondents within the studied teams were women. As this study did not control for gender, it would be interesting to compare the results from/of males and females, to find whether their perceptions regarding performance and feedback differ.

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# 7 Appendices

## Appendix A. List of Hypotheses

| No. | Hypothesis |
|---|---|
| H1 | Teams with Performance Below Social Aspirations (PBSA) are more prone to display Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (FSB) than teams whose perceived performance is above social aspirations. |
| H1a | Teams with PBSA are more likely to display internal FSB in comparison to teams whose perceived performance is above social aspirations. |
| H1b | Teams with PBSA are more likely to display external FSB in comparison to teams whose perceived performance is above social aspirations. |
| H2 | Psychological Safety moderates the relationship between teams with Performance Below Social Aspirations (PBSA) and the Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (FSB). Specifically, the relationship between teams with PBSA and the occurrence of FSB is stronger when Psychological Safety is present in the teams. |
| H2a | Teams with PBSA are more prone to display internal FSB when Psychological Safety is present in their team. |
| H2b | Teams with PBSA are more prone to display external FSB when Psychological Safety is present in their team. |

## Appendix B. Example of Feedback Scenario

**Example 1**: “You demonstrated good relations with the clients, however, I have seen you often delaying the tasks which cause delays to others. I want you to work on this skill as this might cause further problems for the teams. I have seen you in your best moments, I am confident you will improve in the following weeks.”

**Example 2**: “You demonstrated a good relationship with the clients; however, I have seen you often delaying the tasks which cause delays for others. I believe that your current workload is too high which causes a lack of time to deliver other tasks on time. You might want to decrease your workload by reporting to others who will be able to assist in completing tasks as well as prioritizing tasks and making a list of backlogs that you can work on. I am confident that working on your schedule in the upcoming weeks will help you to improve this skill until the next evaluation.”

In the first example, the employee is informed about the behaviour that needs to be improved and is encouraged to work on changing this situation. The second example also involves those actions, however, it goes one step further by defining a goal that the employee can work on and proposing a deadline. This combination of action points not only enhances the knowledge as to what can be improved by also *how*, stimulating “efforts, motivation or engagement” of the individual (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 82).

**Appendix C. Operationalisation Table**

| Variable | Dataset | Coded | Operationalisation Dutch | Operationalisation English |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PS | followers | PV_1 | In ons team kan je problemen of lastige kwesties naar voren brengen. | In our team you can bring up your problems or tricky issues. |
| | followers | PV_2 | In ons team is het gemakkelijk om anderen om hulp te vragen. | In our team it is easy to ask others for help. |
| | followers | PV_3 | In ons team is een vergissing maken geoorloofd. | In our team making a mistake is allowed. |
| | followers | PV_4 | In ons team worden ieders unieke vaardigheden en talenten gewaardeerd. | In our team everyone's unique skills and talents are valued. |
| FSB | followers | TL_4 | In ons team, verzamelen we feedback over de manier waarop we het werk aanpakken. | In our team we collect feedback on the way we approach the work. |
| | followers | TL_6 | In ons team, vragen we partijen waar we mee samenwerken om een terugkoppeling op ons werk. | In our team we ask parties we work with for feedback on our work. |
| PBSA | leaders | PR_RECHT_1 | Het team [Team naam] handelt bij vergelijkbare casussen hetzelfde. | My team acts the same in comparable cases. |
| | leaders | PR_RECHT_2 | Het team [Team naam] gaat altijd rechtmatig te werk. | My team always acts lawfully. |
| | leaders | PR_RECHT_3 | Het team [Team naam] communiceert open en transparent. | My team communicates openly and transparently. |
| | leaders | PR_EFF_1 | Het team [Team naam] levert waar voor haar geld. | My team delivers value for money. |
| | leaders | PR_EFF_2 | Het team [Team naam] opereert kostenbewust. | My team operates cost-consciously. |
| | leaders | PR_EFF_3 | Het team [Team naam] gaat efficiënt te werk. | My team works efficiently. |
| | leaders | PR_RESP_1 | Het team [Team naam] speelt adequaat in op veranderde omstandigheden. | My team responds adequately to changed circumstances. |
| | leaders | PR_RESP_2 | Het team [Team naam] reageert serieus op suggesties voor verbetering. | My team responds seriously to suggestions for improvement. |
| | leaders | PR_RESP_3 | Het team [Team naam] blijft haar werk goed doen in moeilijke omstandigheden. | My team continues to do its job well in difficult circumstances. |

**Appendix D. Operationalisation - PBSA**

| Nr | Operationalisation | Item | Value (Hood, 1991) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | My team acts the same in comparable cases. | Equality | |
| 2. | My team always acts lawfully. | Lawfulness | Theta |
| 3. | My team communicate openly and transparently. | Transparency | |
| 4. | My team delivers value for money. | Efficiency | |
| 5. | My team operates cost-consciously. | Efficiency | Sigma |
| 6. | My team works efficiently. | Efficiency | |
| 7. | My team responds adequately to changed circumstances. | Responsiveness | |
| 8. | My team responds seriously to suggestions for improvement. | Responsiveness | Lambda |
| 9. | My team continues to do its job well in difficult circumstances. | Resilience | |

**Appendix E. Simple Test of Hypothesis 1**

*Spit Between Teams Performing Below and Above Social Aspirations Divided per Municipality With Means of Internal and External Feedback-Seeking Behaviour and Psychological Safety*

| Municipality | N of teams | FSB (mean) | | PS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Internal | External | |
| Municipality A | Below social aspirations (12) | 3.44 | 3.13 | 4.31 |
| | Above social aspirations (10) | 3.54 | 3.05 | 4.36 |
| | Total: 22 | | | |
| Municipality B | Below social aspirations (10) | 3.44 | 3.00 | 4.25 |
| | Above social aspirations (12) | 3.64 | 3.20 | 4.34 |
| | Total: 22 | | | |
| Municipality C | Below social aspirations (1) | 3.72 | 3.13 | 4.52 |
| | Above social aspirations (3) | 3.42 | 3.27 | 4.19 |
| | Total: 4 | | | |
| Municipality D | Below social aspirations (4) | 3.38 | 2.98 | 4.43 |
| | Above social aspirations (2) | 3.53 | 2.84 | 4.30 |
| | Total: 6 | | | |
| Municipality E | Below social aspirations (2) | 3.24 | 2.72 | 4.09 |
| | Above social aspirations (2) | 3.19 | 2.90 | 4.31 |
| | Total: 4 | | | |

## Appendix F. ANOVA[a] Tables

### Table 1

*ANOVA[a] Table for FSB*

| Model | | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | .21 | 3 | .07 | .41 | .748[b] |
| | Residual | 9.39 | 54 | .17 | | |
| | Total | 9.60 | 57 | | | |
| 2 | Regression | .32 | 4 | .08 | .46 | .772[c] |
| | Residual | 9.28 | 53 | .18 | | |
| | Total | 9.60 | 57 | | | |
| 3 | Regression | 2.73 | 4 | .68 | 5.27 | .001[d] |
| | Residual | 6.87 | 53 | .13 | | |
| | Total | 9.60 | 57 | | | |
| 4 | Regression | 2.80 | 5 | .56 | 4.27 | .002[e] |
| | Residual | 6.80 | 52 | .13 | | |
| | Total | 9.60 | 57 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: FSB
b. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure
c. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure, PBSA
d. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure, Psychological Safety
e. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure, PBSA, Psychological Safety

**Table 2.**

*ANOVA[a] Table for Internal FSB*

| Model | | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | .26 | 3 | .09 | .51 | .679[b] |
| | Residual | 9.34 | 54 | .17 | | |
| | Total | 9.60 | 57 | | | |
| 2 | Regression | .376 | 4 | .094 | .512 | .727[c] |
| | Residual | 9.736 | 53 | .184 | | |
| | Total | 10.113 | 57 | | | |
| 3 | Regression | 3.254 | 4 | .814 | 6.288 | <.001[d] |
| | Residual | 6.858 | 5 | .129 | | |
| | Total | 10.113 | 57 | | | |
| 4 | Regression | 3.312 | 5 | .662 | 5.066 | <.001[e] |
| | Residual | 6.800 | 52 | .131 | | |
| | Total | 10.113 | 57 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Internal FSB
b. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure
c. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure, PBSA
d. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure, Psychological Safety
e. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure, PBSA, Psychological Safety

**Table 3**

*ANOVA[a] Table for External FSB*

| Model | | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 1.69 | 3 | .56 | 2.53 | .07[b] |
| | Residual | 12.01 | 54 | 2.22 | | |
| | Total | 13.71 | 57 | | | |
| 2 | Regression | 1.80 | 4 | .45 | 2.00 | .108[c] |
| | Residual | 11.91 | 53 | .23 | | |
| | Total | 13.71 | 57 | | | |
| 3 | Regression | 3.71 | 4 | .95 | 5.07 | .002[d] |
| | Residual | 9.91 | 53 | .19 | | |
| | Total | 13.71 | 57 | | | |
| 4 | Regression | 3.86 | 5 | .77 | 4.08 | .003[e] |
| | Residual | 9.85 | 52 | .19 | | |
| | Total | 13.71 | 57 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: External FSB
b. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure
c. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure, PBSA
d. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure, Psychological Safety
e. Predictors: (Constant), Team Size, Age, Tenure, PBSA, Psychological Safety