

Psychometric Investigation of the Workplace Social Courage Scale

Subjects: **Psychology**

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One such courage dimension relevant to most workplaces is social courage. Howard and colleagues created a scale for assessing social courage. The Workplace Social Courage Scale (WSCS) consists of 11 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree) and showed satisfactory psychometric properties in the validation study. The scale has been used to further investigate the nature of social courage.

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1. Introduction

During the course of one's life, anyone has had to deal with adverse and uncertain conditions, periods of transition, change and growth, painful events and problematic situations, contexts in which being able to make decisions is a very difficult task. In these circumstances, dominated by doubts and unpredictability, where certainty leaves space for unknown, security for precariousness or threat, mixed feelings such as fear and courage come forward. For these reasons, Rate et al. ^[1] consider courage to be the intentionality of action aimed at achieving a noble purpose, even in the presence of objective risk and feelings of fear. Challenging difficulties with courage do not mean acting unconsciously but thinking about the consequences of one's actions, pondering the different possible alternatives and taking the risk related to them.

Courage can be acted out in different contexts, such as everyday life ^[2], academic ^[3], military ^[4], family, social and workplace contexts ^[5]. The focus of this entry is a particular configuration of courageous actions in the workplace that Howard et al. ^[6] called workplace social courage, defining it as "an (a) intentional, (b) deliberate, and (c) altruistic behavior that (d) may damage the actor's esteem in the eyes of others" (p. 1). These authors demonstrated that workplace social courage is significantly related to personal and work outcomes, emphasizing its importance for both research and practice. Confirming his previous study, Howard ^[7] further underlines that social courage has positive relationships with organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), voice and well-being outcomes as well as negative relationships with counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), stress, anxiety and depression.

While research on social courage is growing, certain limitations prevent its further growth. Howard et al. ^[6] supported the psychometric properties and validity of their measure, but these attributes have not been replicated. Researchers may be interested in studying social courage, but they may also be uncertain regarding the validity of the sole scale to measure the construct. Furthermore, only the English-language version of the measure has been

investigated. Researchers in countries without English as a prevalent language are largely unable to study social courage, preventing the study of the construct for much of the modern world.

With the purpose of overcoming this gap—the lack of a validated instrument to assess workplace social courage in the Italian language—the current entry creates an Italian-language version of the WSCS. The studies presented aim to investigate the psychometric properties and validity of this translated scale. Specifically, researchers assess the Italian WSCS's internal consistency, factor structure, measurement invariance across gender, as well as convergent and concurrent validity.

Despite the fact that a previous study ^[8] established that the WSCS does not have a significant relationship with gender or femininity-masculinity, this result does not guarantee, however, that the WSCS functions similarly across genders; to address this possible concern, researchers verify the measurement invariance of the WSCS across gender to ensure that it is applicable in detailing the relations of workplace social courage for a sufficient range of participants.

In assessing the scale's validity, researchers analyze the relation of social courage with prosocial rule breaking behaviors (PSRB), satisfaction of basic needs, and performance—each of which provide substantive insights into the nature of social courage itself.

The relationship between social courage and well-being outcomes has been explored through the framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT; ^{[9][10][11][12]}), which is one of the most popular frameworks in explicating the antecedents and the mechanisms of subjective well-being, but it has yet to be applied in empirical research to understand courage—whether within or outside the workplace. Therefore, researchers propose the first attempt to understand the relation between social courage and well-being outcomes, verifying whether SDT is an effective framework for detailing the effects of social courage which can encourage future authors to utilize the framework for subsequent investigations into courage.

2. Review of the Existing Measures of Courage and Workplace Social Courage

Various types of courage have been proposed in the literature, and many attempts have been made to develop scales that can measure courage ^{[13][14][15][16][17]}. For example, Konter and Ng ^[18] developed the Sport Courage Scale (SCS), which evaluates courage in the sports field. Woodard and Pury ^[5] modified a scale originally created by Woodard ^[17] to develop the Woodard-Pury Courage Scale 23 (WP-23). Norton and Weiss ^[19] developed the Courage Measure (CM), which is composed of 12 items that evaluate courage as persistence despite fear. There is a shorter version of this scale ^[20] and an Italian validation ^[21]. Many important insights into courage were derived from these scale development efforts, but notable concerns were often observed in the measures (e.g., poor psychometric properties, questionable validity evidence) ^{[5][20]}. Subsequent authors suggested that a possible cause of these concerns was the focus on global or comprehensive measures of courage, and instead authors may benefit from developing scales for specific courage dimensions (e.g., social courage) ^{[6][22]}. One such courage

dimension is moral courage, but disagreements still exist regarding its definition and measurement. Sekerka, Bagozzi, and Charnigo [23] believe that moral courage is a managerial competence; while other authors [24] point out that it is a skill that can be observed when individuals face an ethical challenge. The Professional Moral Courage scale (PMC scale; [23]) is a five-dimensional scale which includes the dimensions of moral agency, multiple values, endurance of threats, going beyond compliance, and moral goals. The PMC scale includes a single second-order factor, labelled professional moral courage, but it is still unclear whether the PMC scale is truly representative of moral courage given present disagreements regarding its construct definition.

More recently, Howard and Reiley [22] developed the Physical Courage at Work Scale (PCWS). Physical courage is defined as “a courageous behavior in which the risks involved are to the actor’s physical well-being” [22] (p. 81). The authors suggest that courage is not a unidimensional construct [6][24] and the PCWS was shown to positively relate to organizational citizenship behaviors and social courage [22]. Despite these advancements, Howard and Reiley [25] also recognized that physical courage may not be relevant to all workplace environments, and instead noted that other courage dimensions may be beneficial more broadly.

One such courage dimension relevant to most workplaces is social courage. Howard and colleagues [6] created a scale for assessing social courage. The Workplace Social Courage Scale (WSCS) consists of 11 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree) and showed satisfactory psychometric properties in the validation study [6]. The scale has been used in several following studies to further investigate the nature of social courage. For example, Howard & Cogswell [26] used the WSCS to investigate the antecedents of social courage. The WSCS was also used to understand the relationships between social courage, workplace outcomes, and well-being outcomes [7] and to test the role of gender in social courage [12]. In all these studies the WSCS has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties and relations with associated outcomes. Among its most important relations was with prosocial rule breaking (PSRB), need satisfaction, and performance.

3. Workplace Social Courage and Prosocial Rule Breaking Behaviors

Conceptualizations of prosocial behavior typically refer to individuals going above and beyond the specific responsibilities that are assigned to them in an effort to aid others [27][28]. While prosocial behaviors are typically normative, Morrison [29] introduced the construct of PSRB to refer to rule breaking not motivated by negative intentions toward the organization. As highlighted by Bryant et al. [30], Morrison started from the concept of rule-breaking—conceptualized as a deviant or counterproductive workplace behavior deriving from employee hostility [31], social exclusion [32] or job dissatisfaction [33]—and defined PSRB as “any instance where an employee intentionally violates a formal organizational policy, regulation, or prohibition with the primary intention of promoting the welfare of the organization or one of its stakeholders” [29] (p. 6). This conceptualization legitimates the violations of organizational rules and policies if they are functional to the achievement of the scopes of the organization. In fact, PSRB is related to positive organizational outcomes [28][29][34] but, as Howard and colleagues [6] argued, employees may be reluctant to perform these behaviors because going against organizational policies implies the

possibility of conflict with supervisors or co-workers. In their study, Howard and colleagues found that social courage, which relates to positive behaviors despite social risk, is positively related to PSRB behaviors.

4. Workplace Social Courage and Satisfaction of Work-Related Basic Needs

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT; [8][9][10][11]) well-being and psychological health are maintained by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: (1) the need for autonomy, (2) the need for competence, and (3) the need for relatedness. The satisfaction of these needs is positively related to job resources [35][36][37][38] performance [39][40], job crafting [41][42][43] and organizational citizen behaviors [43][44]; moreover, need satisfaction is negatively related with negative affect, strain, and burnout [37][43][45]. However, some research has obtained conflicting results; for example, the need for competence was positively related to absenteeism and turnover intentions [43]. For this reason, Colledani et al. [46] highlight the need to propose new hypotheses and deepen research surrounding SDT.

The need for autonomy is defined as the desire to make one's own choices following one's freedom and will [8]. Some research has shown that work autonomy has an important role on in experience of stress, especially role stress, which refers to the inconsistencies of expectations associated with a role [47][48][49]. Specifically, autonomy can reduce stress [50]. Schilpzand, Hekman and Mitchell [51] developed a model of courage in the workplace based on qualitative research. Participants reported that some characteristics suggested that courageous action was appropriate, and among them was perceived autonomy. On the contrary, those who experienced low levels of perceived autonomy felt inhibited or worried about taking courageous action in the workplace.

The need for competence refers to the desire to develop new skills [8]. The need for competence also indicates the propensity to explore one's environment and engage in behaviors to extend one's skills. Courage allows for the determination to achieve one's goals [52], which can produce feelings of competence. The need for relatedness represents the desire to experience closeness and connection with others [8][53]. Workplace relationships can have strong effects on individuals [54][55]: for example, good workplace relationships are connected with achieving goals [56], they favor learning and, consequently, performances [57]. In a recent study, Howard and Cogswell [26] showed that social support in the workplace is positively related to behavioral social courage, indicating that courage is indeed associated with satisfying the need for relatedness.

5. Workplace Social Courage and Performance

Some empirical research supports the connection between social courage and various work outcomes including performance. Individuals faced with ethical challenges in the workplace can consciously and deliberately decide to act courageously [58]. When this occurs, according to Howard [7], socially courageous individuals persist in risky social situations to receive positive personal and organizational outcomes, such as performance. For the author, those who are endowed with courage in the workplace can, through a motivation approach, act and consider the

positive aspects of the action rather than remain helpless. From this perspective, therefore, it would seem that courage in the workplace is a stimulus to action.

Regarding academic contexts, it has been shown that, although a confidence orientation was more adaptive than courage, it can still be considered an effective response against fear and to predict performance [3]. Courageous individuals struggle with more determination to achieve their goals [6][59], and research of executive character strengths has shown that those who act with executive integrity, bravery, and social intelligence have long-term success, both individually and in terms of the organization [60]. Furthermore, Palanski et al. [61] demonstrated the important role of courageous behavior in mediating the effects of integrity on both executive performance and image. Finally, comparing employees at different organizational levels, Tkachenko et al. [62] highlighted that the effects of behavioral courage on job performance did not vary by organizational level.

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