

Impact of Workplace Social Courage on Self-Esteem through Mediation of Approach Motivation

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Abstract

Socially courageous employees are highly prone to relationship conflicts, which can ultimately influence their self-esteem. But the empirical literature linking these relationships is scant, especially from the context of developing countries. In this regard, a framework was developed based on reinforcement sensitivity theory (RST) to empirically investigate the association between these constructs. The data for the current study were collected from 377 middle-level management employees of a public university's workforce. The study reveals the positive association between social courage and self-esteem, while approach motivation mediates this relationship. The study also offers theoretical and practical implications

Keywords: Approach Motivation, Self-esteem, Social Courage, Pakistan, University.

Introduction

One of the serious threats to any corporation is the fear inside its walls, like dismay of making mistakes, embarrassment, challenges for offering ideas, raising voice, while relationship conflicts are the most common and dreadful of all. Relationship conflicts at the workplace can be depressing and painful as they can adversely affect the well-being and self-esteem of a person (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 2020). Although these conflicts are irrelevant to the work, they can discourage task performance (Boone et al., 2020), engagement and productivity (Benitez et al., 2018; Vaux & Kirk, 2018). The outcomes are universal and are observed in various parts of the world. For instance, Queensland Government research demonstrates that more than sixty-five percent of individuals' performance problems at the workplace are caused by strained relationships rather than low motivation or lack of skills (Business Queensland, 2020). It has also been observed that more than 400,000 employees resign every year because of workplace conflicts, costing £2.6 billion each year for the recruitment of new employees. Similarly, more than 800,000 employees take sick leaves due to conflicts that cost about £2.2 billion to their organizations (The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service [Acas], 2021). De Dreu and Vianen (2001) has demonstrated that relationship conflicts can even affect the health and well-being of workers. It has been seen that colleagues take medical leave due to stress at the workplace originating from a conflict with another worker. Many scholars believe that conflicts can affect the well-being and self-esteem of workers (Meier et al., 2013; Pawlak & Klein, 1997; Rashid et al., 2012; Sonnentag et al., 2013).

While looking at the cause of one's involvement in such conflicts, it has been observed one's social courage is one of the important determining forces. Out of various dimensions of courage, social courage is defined by Howard et al. (2017) as the courage that comprises risks that can ruin an individual's esteem in the perception of others. These risks are mostly related to harming an individual's social image and/or relationships (Howard, 2019). Socially courageous employees, consequently, are highly prone to relationship conflicts, and researchers have elaborated that conflicts at the workplace can affect the well-being (Meier et al., 2013; Pawlak & Klein, 1997; Rashid et al., 2012; Sonnentag et al., 2013), but how courage can influence self-esteem and how these outcomes can be integrated in a mechanism is an area that has not gained due attention, especially from empirical literature from developing countries.

Howard (2019) has examined the association of social courage and well-being through approach and avoidance motivation and called for examining the association of social courage with other variables like self-esteem. Up to the best of researchers' knowledge, there is a dearth of literature focused on the relationship and mechanism between them. In exploring this relationship, a new

framework is established to connect social courage with earlier theory, i.e. framework of approach-avoidance (e.g. Ferris et al., 2016; Hangen et al., 2019; Mascret et al., 2015).

The study aims to achieve two main objectives: first, investigate the relationship between social courage and self-esteem. Second, explore the mediating effect of approach motivation between social courage and self-esteem. The current study fills the research gap, simultaneously heed the prior call. Finally, the study framework helps to provide a better explanation of socially courageous behavior.

Theorization and Hypotheses Development

Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory

Reinforcement sensitivity theory (RST) is one of the premier biological models explaining the differences in learning, motivation and emotions. It also focuses on reinforcement processes and links them with personality domains. The initial work of this theory can be traced back to the work of Mowrer (reward, punishment and motivation) and Hans Eysenck (biology of personality traits). According to Eysenck personality (i.e. extroversion) is linked with the Ascending Reticular Activation System (ARAS), a brain area that regulates arousal and sleep. Furthermore, Eysenck further developed Neuroticism as yet another personality dimension based on the same lexical paradigm (Allport & Odbert, 1936; Raymond, 1943). Eysenck agreed that extroversion is linked with the emotional state (i.e. depression), and introvert individuals seem to feel more depressed.

Later on, Grey and McNaughton's (1982) work on the Bio-psychological theory of personality further predicted the personality and focused on Anxiety, approach motivation, avoidance motivation and Impulsivity (Matthews & Gilliland, 1999). Grey hypothesized three mental systems, including Behavioral Activation System (BAS), Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS), and Fight-Flight-Freeze System (FFFS). BAS focuses on approach behavior as an outcome of stimuli, FFFS regulates the avoidance behavior and mediate reactions to all punishment stimuli. BIS, on the other hand, mediates the conflict between BAS and FFFS, as these conflicts underlie anxiety. Thus, it predicts the actions one adopts in response to external stimuli (Corr, 2008; Grey & McNaughton, 1982).

Courage and Workplace Social Courage

The value of courage has been well-known throughout history. It can be traced back to Aristotle and Plato's work (Hobbs, 2000; Snyder et al., 2018). Plato described courage as the capability to assess value and fear, while Aristotle defined it as the propensity to behave appropriately in circumstances that include confidence and fear. Afterwards, different scholars defined courage in different

ways, for instance, Hemingway labelled courage “grace under pressure” (Lopez, O’Byrne, & Petersen, 2003). The most well-known definition developed by Rachman (1990) which considers courage as one’s ability and willingness to outlook a challenging situation in spite of existing psychophysiological disturbances and subjective fear (Clarke et al., 2007).

Courage can be identified by the involvement of risk with a specific action in place of contextual factors or the outcomes (Woodard & Pury, 2007). Many other researchers suggested dimensions of courage through different theoretical complexities (Geller & Veazie, 2009). It has been proposed that the facets of courage could be involved with social, emotional and physical risks (Woodard & Pury, 2007). Howard et al. (2017) defines social courage as the demonstration of courage that comprises risk, which can harm an individual’s esteem in the perception of others. It has been identified that social courage has been claimed to contribute to various work-related outcomes, e.g. organizational citizenship behaviours, whistle-blowing and feedback giving (Bhal & Dadhich, 2011; Dozier & Miceli, 1985; Geller & Veazie, 2009; Miceli & Near, 1988; Worline et al., 2002). Employees who work at any level may perform these behaviours in an organization.

After scrutinizing the qualitative investigations on courage, it can be indicated that social courage often comprises two actions. The first kind of action may harm an individual’s interpersonal relationships (Worline et al., 2002). When a worker, for example, provide remedial feedback to another worker and risks agitated the worker. An action that may harm interpersonal relationships has been referred to as organizational social courage. This is perceptible in the current informal interviews and qualitative investigations (Schilpzand, 2008; Worline et al., 2002). The second type of action may harm an individual and cause face loss which is also known as the social image (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Face loss costs may be influenced due to different reasons. For instance, if people request assistance on their assignments. Other people may think that they are incompetent or weak to handle the assignment. Therefore, their esteem could be lost in the eyes of others (Harbour & Kisfalvi, 2014).

Approach Motivation

Elliot (2006) states that the distinction of approach motivation from avoidance motivation has been discussed for over two millennia. The approach and avoidance difference were used in scientific psychology first time since its emergence. The term “approach–avoidance” was developed from the work of Kurt Lewin on Field Theory. Miller (1944) and McClelland et al., (1953) help popularize the approach and avoidance difference. The approach – avoidance framework proposes that human beings and other creatures possess a pair of

regulatory processes: one is to endeavor to fascinated stimuli or reward (approach) and to avert unfascinated stimuli or punishment (avoidance) (Elliot & Covington, 2001; Roth & Cohen, 1986).

Later on, it was observed that there was variance in the workplace aggression constructs, and approach and avoidance workplace aggression frameworks were identified (Ferris et al., 2016). Gable and Gosnell (2013) proposed a framework of avoidance and approach interpersonal motivation and conceptualized the social motivation in their study. That revealed the basic compulsion for individuals to instantaneously manage avoiding the threats and approaching the incentives in social relationships. They claim that social relationships are linked to well-being and health, and individuals are motivated to make and sustain interpersonal bonds. The goals and approach-avoidance social motives are associated with social outcomes (e.g. satisfaction and loneliness) through the mediating effect of cognitive, behavioural and affective processes (Bruning & Campion, 2018; Masselink et al., 2018). Individuals whose prime focus is on avoiding negative outcomes while failure to avoid them may harm their creativity, owing to threat appraisals, low intrinsic motivation, and anxiety (Hao et al., 2020). It might be challenging for individuals who are by nature avoidance motivated and in a state of affairs where potential losses and threats are prominent (Jeno et al., 2019).

Self-esteem

The term self-esteem was introduced by William James in 1890, where he stated it as the positive consideration about oneself, which establishes when people continuously achieve or excel the vital aims and objectives in their lives. The concept of self-esteem that James presented remains pertinent, like self-esteem is commonly viewed as an assessment of personal knowledge, which indicates the degree to which individuals trust their competence and like themselves (e.g., Brown, 1998; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). Gawronski and Payne (2011) highlighted explicit and implicit self-esteem as two types of self-esteem. They contended that implicit self-esteem is a person's tendency to evaluate himself or herself positively or negatively in an automatic, unconscious or unplanned way. Whereas an individual with explicit types are more aware and thoughtful in their self-evaluation. Higher the self-esteem higher the favourable consideration of the self. However, while lower self-esteem, the personal assessment is either indefinite or complete rejection (Campbell et al., 1996). Relatively high self-esteem may be proportionate with an individual's achievements and attributes of these state of mind of self-worth might have less to do with objective evaluation of the person. This is vital because self-esteem indicates opinion rather than reality (Zeigler-Hill, 2013). It has been observed that self-esteem is important determinant of various outcomes, e.g. students'

academic achievements (Topcu et al., 2018), employees' family satisfaction (Yang et al., 2018), and life satisfaction (Kong & You, 2013). On the other hand it has been observed that it can be predicted by one's social identification (Willis et al., 2019), leadership and organizational factors (Yang et al., 2018), and social support at work (Kong & You, 2013).

Social Courage, Approach Motivation and Self-esteem

Social courage is derived from the definition of social risk (Weber et al., 2002). It is a kind of courage that comprises risk that can harm an individual's esteem in the perception of others. Recognizing workers that might be more eager to perform these conducts in spite of risks could give huge organizational benefits (Howard, 2019). Social courage has been characterized by two conducts. Its first kind comprises those which may harm an individual relationship with others (Schilpzand et al., 2015; Worline et al. 2002), while the second kind comprises conducts that may harm an individual's communal impression (Gupta et al., 1996; Madzar 2001).

As characterized in this research approach and avoidance motivation framework is based on a number of theories presented by psychologists throughout history. In a general way, these theories suggest that a person's behavior is motivated toward wanted outcomes (approach) and dodge from unwanted outcomes (avoidance). Theories include Thorndike (1911), the "law of affect", Skinner's (1998) reinforcement theory, Gray's (1970) reinforcement sensitivity theory, and many more. These theories interpret the same idea can be desirably or undesirably motivated. While some individuals generally have a higher tendency to reward, others generally more tend to avoid punishment. The orientation these individuals have is the orientation of approach or avoidance. Based on the premise, we assume that the individuals with high social courage tend to express their thoughts even in the wake of risk (Weber et al., 2002). The courage would thus provide an intrinsic motivation to act and react. It is further expected that due to high courage, individuals would tend to be more approaching than avoiding, and thus the motivation would be high to do things differently.

It is further extended that courage would become the source of motivation, but in the presence of courage to take risk one may lose the social relations (Worline et al., 2002; Schilpzand et al., 2015). In such cases, one's communal expressions are further influenced (Gupta et al., 1996; Madzar, 2001), which becomes the basis of self-esteem or self-image. Thus I propose that social courage strengthens approach motivation boosting the self-esteem of the employees. In view of this thought, we accordingly hypothesize, approach motivation influence as a mediator between workplace social courage and self-esteem.

The said relationship can also be assumed on the basis of Grey and McNaughton's (1982) theory which proposes that BAS comes into existence when there is a stimulus. Here the social courage could be considered as a stimulus, and employees would tend to get motivation in response and feel self-esteem (Matthews & Gilliland, 1999). Thus the following hypotheses could be assumed:

H₁: Workplace Social courage has a positive association with self-esteem.

H₂: Approach motivation mediates the association between workplace social courage and self-esteem.

Table 1
Hypothesis Development

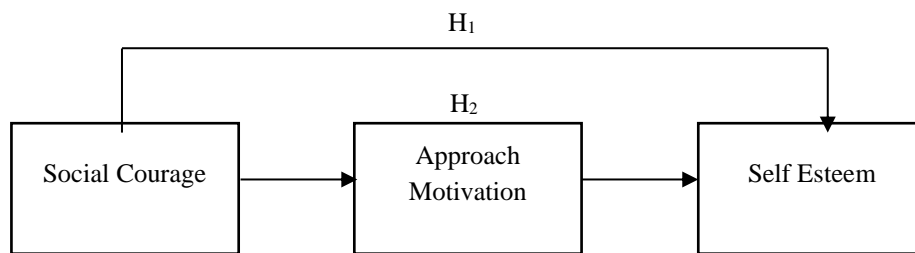


Figure 1 Conceptual model

Methodology

Samples and Methods

The unit of analysis was individual, and data was collected cross-sectional time dimension, one point in time horizon but in two-wave time-lagged. The respondents were 'A' Class administrative employees BPS-16 & 17 of University of the Punjab, Lahore. Total 496 questionnaires were distributed in two lags, all the branches and sections of the administrative block, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, Registrar Office, Human Resource Branch, Accounts Branch, Examination Branch, and all the academic departments of the University of the Punjab. Four hundred and fifteen (415) filled questionnaires were collected from all the branches and departments of the University of the Punjab, defining the 76% response rate. Due to incomplete responses, 38 questionnaires were excluded. The analyses were undertaken on the data collected from 377 completely filled questionnaires.

The Instrument and Measure

Each variable of the study was measured using already well-established scales. This study utilized the Workplace Social Courage Scale (WSCS) by Howard et al. (2017) was used to collect information related to workplace courage. The scale is comprised of eleven items, and it was measured on 5-point Likert's scale. The approach motivation tool by Ferris et al. (2013), which is based on the scale of

Johnson and Chang (2008), was utilized. It is based on 6 items each on 5-point Likert's scale. Rosenberg (1965) self-Esteem scale was utilized to evaluate self-esteem on a 5-point Likert scale. It comprises ten items to evaluate an individual's perception of his or her value and worth.

Results

After collecting the data, to move it into the expressive and meaningful form Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-22) was utilized. Additionally, the plugin PROCESS MODEL by Andrew Hayes was also used to examine the mediating effect of approach motivation between independent and dependent variables.

The study examined the reliability of the instruments for which Cronbach's alpha (α) was used. The results of both reliability and descriptive statistics are shown in table-1. The value of Cronbach's alpha social courage was .800, self-esteem .832, approach motivation .856. Every instrument was reliable for the analysis because their Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7. Furthermore, descriptive statistics of variables are displayed in the same table. The mean result of social courage is 3.54 (SD = .78032), and self-esteem is 3.4553 (SD =.83315), and the mean result for approach motivation 3.9107 (SD = .74624) showing the high mean score of the variable. After reliability and descriptive statistics, the correlation was carried out to test the relationship among variables of interest. Table-3 shows the association of workplace social courage with self-esteem, $r = .434$, $p < .05$ (.000), which is statistically significant and support the first hypothesis. Furthermore, workplace social courage has a positive linkage with approach motivation, $r = .434$, $p < .05$ (.000), which is statistically significant and support the fourth hypothesis.

Table 1
Reliability, Descriptive & Correlation Analysis

Variables	Items	α	Mean	Standard Deviation	SC	SE	AM
Social Courage	7	.800	3.5464	.78032	—		
Self-esteem	6	.832	3.4553	.83315	.434**	—	
Approach Motivation	6	.856	3.9107	.74624	.613**	.600**	—

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Regression Analysis

To examining the linkage between the variables, linear regression is carried out, results of which are shown in table-2. It is a statistical instrument utilized for examining the linkage between variables (Creswell, 2009). The table highlights that the social courage significantly and positively influences self-esteem ($B = .463$, $t = 9.327$, $p = .0001$) and achievement motivation ($B = .5861$, $t =$

15.0188, $p = .0000$). Similarly, achievement motivation also positively and significantly influences self-esteem ($B = .5965$, $t = 10.2593$, $p = .0000$) thus H1 is supported and all mediation paths (indirect) are significant. This helps proceed further with mediation analysis.

In this study, Hayes's PROCESS macro was used to investigate the mediating effect of approach motivation between workplace courage and self-esteem (Table-3). The results represented a partial mediation of approach motivation between workplace social courage and self-esteem association (Table 6). The direct effect path was statistically significant between workplace social courage and self-esteem at $p < 0.05$, $B = .0416$ and $CI = .2231 - .0044$. A 95% confidence interval indicated that the indirect effect path between workplace social courage, approach motivation, and self-esteem was entirely above zero at $CI = .4348 - .2639$, resulting in statistically significant partial mediation with $a.b = 0.1261$ (Kane & Ashbaugh, 2017).

The results of the mediation analysis express that workplace social courage (WSC) is associated with self-esteem (SE) directly and indirectly through its association with approach motivation (AM). It can be described as socially courageous individuals have strong approach motivation, which leads to self-esteem. Hence, the fourth hypothesis was supported.

Table 2
Regression Analysis

Variables	R	R-sq	Coeff.	T	P	ULCI	LLCI
WSC → SE	.4341	.188	.4630	9.3270	.0001		
WSC → AM (a)	.6129	.3756	.5861	15.0188	.0000	.6628	.5093
AM → SE (b)	.6055	.3666	.5965	10.2593	.0000	.7109	.4822

Table 3
Mediation Analysis Results

Direct Effect				
Path of Variables	Coefficient	p(Sig.)	Confidence Intervals	
			Upper	Lower
Direct Effects				
WSC → SE	.1137	.0416	.2231	.0044
Indirect Effects				
WSC → AM → SE	.3496	---	.4348	.2639

Discussion and Conclusion

The first objective was an attempt to find out the linkage of social courage with self-esteem. A hypothesis H_1 was developed to achieve the first objective. H_1 stated that workplace social courage has a positive association with self-esteem. The second objective was related to the mediating effect of approach motivation on the association of social courage and self-esteem. A hypothesis H_2 was established to attain the second objective. Hypothesis H_2 expressed that approach motivation mediates the association between social courage and self-esteem. Both hypotheses were discovered to be true, suggesting that socially courageous individuals most probably have high approach motivation. They are more likely to pursue reward or desired outcome, which results in increased self-esteem. Howard (2019) study supports our finding that socially courageous individuals have high approach motivation.

Socially courageous individuals are highly prone to relationship conflicts at the workplace. Many studies have presented that conflicts at the workplace can affect the self-esteem of workers. The relationship, therefore, between social courage and self-esteem needs to be empirically investigated. However, no comprehensive study has been carried out to present their relationship, and there is a call to examine this relationship. In this regard, a framework was developed based on reinforcement sensitivity theory (RST) to empirically investigate the association between these constructs. Thus, the purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of social courage on self-esteem and the mediating effect of approach motivation. Each study objective was achieved, finding out the positive association between social courage and self-esteem, approach motivation mediates this association.

Theoretical Contributions

Perhaps, this study has empirically supported the association of social courage with employees' self-esteem. It has theoretically contributed to the different fields of study. Positive Psychologists have frequently recognized the significance of courage in everyday interactions (Howard & Alipour 2014), and they utilize this framework in working adults. Other researchers have claimed the analysis of courage include sociology, philosophy, and anthropology (Harbour & Kisfalvi 2014). Our results are likely utilized in these fields. This study provides a comprehensive theoretical model for a better understanding of social courage. This model also helps other researchers to test the model with other variables to find their other relationships.

Practical Implication

This study will be helpful for the professionals who want to boost their careers without compromising their self-esteem. If they successfully cope with the difficult situations that demand social courage, it might help them in their professional advancement. An individual, for instance, is known for his or her remarkable performance. This study will also be helpful for managers and organizations to hire employees who are very beneficial for the organization. Howard (2017) believes that recognizing workers who might be more eager to perform courageous tasks despite risks could give huge organizational benefits. Finally, organizations can improve the self-esteem of their employees with the help of this framework. They can also enhance their employees' self-esteem by equipping them with social courage and can control the influence with the approach motivation mediator for the purpose.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

This study was undertaken in a Public Sector University of Pakistan. In future, researchers can replicate the study in a different organization or corporate sector or geographical location. The population of the current study was middle management employees. A new study can be carried out on lower-level or top-level management employees because only middle-level management employees were selected in this study. This study used the cross-sectional method for data collection. It is recommended that new researchers should use longitudinal studies to further validate the findings. This study demonstrated the direct relationship between social courage and self-esteem, likewise mediation effect of approach motivation. In the future, researchers could use other mediators or outcomes or moderators to explore these relationships with other variables.

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