

Facing Ethical Challenges in the Workplace: Conceptualizing and Measuring Professional Moral Courage

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ABSTRACT. Scholars have shown renewed interest in the construct of courage. Recent studies have explored its theoretical underpinnings and measurement. Yet courage is generally discussed in its broad form to include physical, psychological, and moral features. To understand a more practical form of moral courage, research is needed to uncover how ethical challenges are effectively managed in organizational settings. We argue that professional moral courage (PMC) is a managerial competency. To describe it and derive items for scale development, we studied managers in the U.S. military and examined prior work on moral courage. Two methods were used to measure PMC producing a five dimensional scale that organized under a single second-order factor, which we termed overall PMC. The five dimensions are moral agency, multiple values, endurance of threats, going beyond compliance, and moral goals. Convergent and discriminant validity are analyzed by use of confirmatory factor analysis procedures. We conclude by presenting a framework for proactive organizational ethics, which reflects how to support PMC as a management practice.

KEY WORDS: moral decision-making, positive organizational scholarship, professional moral courage, proactive organizational ethics, positive ethics

Organizational ethics scholars have recognized the need to encourage the development of moral strength in the workplace and that this will require more than a reinvention of programs, policies, and penalties (Verschoor, 2004). Some suggest we ought to instigate a behavioral shift, calling for a “revolution of character and a reintroduction of personal conscience, responsibility, and values” (Gates, 2004, p. 493). Given that character development can extend the worth of an organization, it is unfortunate that ethics education and training in organizational

settings continues to focus on exacting regulation and enforcing compliance controls rather than building moral strength. It remains all too common that a prevention orientation is standard, where the operational baseline is secured via rules and legal standards to influence decisions and behavior (Sekerka and Zolin, 2005).

Such efforts, driven by values of command and control, are designed to contribute to security and stability. Yet they can be myopic, narrowly focusing solely on the constraint of wrongdoing (Handelsman et al., 2002). This does little to develop the capacity of the organization or to teach managers how to engage in virtue excellence; more specifically, how to engage in their daily task actions with professional moral courage (PMC). If a different pattern of behavior is desired, a different approach to ethics must be considered. Rather than trying to merely achieve the absence of unethical action, why not also cultivate the presence of moral strength? For years, scholars have suggested that for organizational ethics to be effective, a values-based approach must be integrated with classic compliance-based initiatives (Stansbury and Barry, 2006; Weaver and Treviño, 1999). While there has been recognition of this concern, organizations continue to train primarily for the latter, but do little to cultivate the former. We believe this represents an underestimation of organizational members and it also reflects an organizational value of sheer task accomplishment rather than performance coupled with virtues in action.

Positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship have moved to address this issue by explicating character strengths (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) and virtue-based ethical performance (Cameron et al., 2003). Courageous actions are an amalgamation

of character strengths to include bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality (Peterson and Seligman, 2004); a strength that promotes “the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal” (p. 199). The strength of will is needed to face and resolve ethical challenges and to confront barriers that may inhibit the ability to proceed toward right action (Sekerka and Bagozzi, 2007). We know that managers must demonstrate moral courage in their daily tasks, despite pending failures (Furnham, 2002) and that such actions require virtue strength that is both practical and accessible (Walton, 1986).

The practice of courage is an important trait for organizational members (Verschoor, 2003) and a quality or attribute necessary for ethical behavior in organizational settings (Hesselbein, 2005; Pears, 2004). Courage has been described as a management virtue (Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1998), with professional courage depicted as an attribute that motivates and enables individuals to take the right course of action, given the ethics of their profession (Harris, 1999). While this type of behavior is expected of management, establishing the desire to act, exercising moral action, and practicing its regular use is left to the individual. Employers assume that the managers they hire will exercise moral principles in accomplishing their performance goals. But each manager must determine how to establish the will to act and maintain that willingness as they traverse their management decisions with virtues in action; or, as we refer to it, PMC. We argue that if organizations expect managers to proceed with PMC as a part of their role, we must explain, describe, and measure this ability.

Although courage has been depicted in multiple forms of bravery (mental and physical), perseverance, authenticity, and zest (Peterson and Seligman, 2004), we take a narrower view of the construct for management application. The construct of courage has recently been explored, with measurement described in broad terms (Woodard and Pury, 2007). However, our interest is in the type of moral courage needed for moral action, specifically what is necessary if managers are to tackle their daily ethical challenges with moral strength. Some suggest that this may not be moral courage, but moral conduct. We argue that there are countless influences in the moral decision-making path that can derail one’s intent to act, including competing values, social

norms, emotions, and higher-order decision-making processes (Sekerka and Bagozzi, 2007; Steenhaut and Van Kenhove, 2006). Managers do indeed act with PMC if they traverse this path with moral strength. Psychologist James (1897) emphasized personal choice, suggesting that the will to choose what is right is the essence of moral courage. Thus, the will to engage in moral courage is a value and capability that must be honed and managed.

We argue that PMC is needed to be effective within the field of management. But to better understand this competency, we ask: What factors contribute to managers’ ability to respond to ethical challenges with moral strength? Answering this question will inform how we describe and measure PMC, or what helps managers move toward a moral response and to sustain the will to behave ethically in facing external and internal influences. We begin with a description of PMC to form a measurement tool, developing two scales and then testing them for convergent and discriminant validity, ultimately deriving a unidimensional scale. This research supports the utility of a proactive approach to organizational ethics intended to help foster PMC as a management practice. In so doing, we articulate an expanded organizational ethics framework that moves to integrate compliance- and value-based approaches.

PMC as a competency

In this work the term, *professional* (in PMC), is applied broadly to the profession of management. A central theme of professionalism in management involves understanding formal, informal, stated, and expected standards of ethical conduct. Given that more specific professional roles may inadvertently obscure people from moral responsibility (Wolgast, 1992), we do not target one particular role. Rather, we view PMC as a managerial competency that can be applied more generally in a variety of occupations. Because morally courageous efforts are virtues in action (Peterson and Seligman, 2004), they represent a range of behaviors described as having trait-like qualities that are generalizable and relatively stable over time and place. We consider these qualities as features of one’s personal character that can be developed in most people.

Competencies are general descriptions of skills needed to successfully perform within a particular work context. A managerial competency is an “underlying characteristic that may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge” which the person uses to accomplish their job (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 21). More than personal traits, competencies are aggregates of capabilities that bear sustainable value and broad applicability (Gallon et al., 1995). Accordingly, core competencies are harmonized, intentional constructions. Taken together, we describe PMC as a competency exercised in the workplace as managers face ethical challenges with a moral response.

We believe that the features of PMC are manifested in a range of behaviors driven by personal character traits that have the potential to be developed. As a competency, PMC is an applied protracted effort – a dynamic and unfolding event – involving a continued application of moral strength. Managers impact the worth of the organization as they actualize this behavior in their professional roles and incorporate PMC in their day-to-day decision making and behaviors. Their practices in response to ethical challenges shape workplace routines and thus the ethical culture of the organization. By explaining PMC as a feature of managerial performance, organizations can better prepare, educate, support, and reward organizational members (Askanasy et al., 2006). In so doing, leaders can be influential in building the worth of their organization and the strength of their ethical culture.

Solomon (1998) suggests that moral courage can be observed when individuals face an ethical challenge. By examining how managers establish and sustain their will to proceed with moral action, we have a useful means to explicate PMC. An ethical challenge is a situation where (1) there is recognition of an ethical or moral issue; (2) personal actions regarding this issue have consequences for others; and (3) a choice is presented that engages personal volition (Velasquez and Rostankowski, 1985). In accordance with Rest’s moral decision-making model (1986), the essential starting point is the acuity to recognize the ethical issue in the first place. From there, managers must have the will to address it, form a moral judgment, and ultimately proceed with a moral response. As applied to the profession of management, the person perceives some difficulty in

proceeding with or determining right action. This may appear in a variety of ways, such as having uncertainty about what the right action should be, how to acquire the motivation to proceed, when to take action, and a variety of other concerns that vary according to the person or situation (Treviño, 1986) and the moral intensity of the issue (Jones, 1991). Forming an intention to act requires that the manager distinguish alternatives and parse them by moral priorities, which contributes to a moral response that may be to take action, take no action, or to delay either or both.

Although moral courage is needed in everyday tasks, we tend to spotlight those who speak out against ethical wrongdoing. This features unethical behavior or injustice as the focal point for inquiry (Miceli and Near, 1984; Near and Miceli, 1995; Nielsen, 1989; Treviño and Victor, 1992). Indeed, acts of valor such as whistleblowing require moral courage (Grant, 2002), but we want to explore PMC as a practical action (Walton, 1986), a capability that managers apply in daily activities. Such an approach to understanding everyday courage is essential if we hope to cultivate its application in routine work performance (Worline et al., 2002).

Military context

Given that the military is a highly regulated organization with an emphasis on control to affect ethical behavior, it is characterized by a prevention orientation that is designed to curtail unethical practices (Sekerka and Zolin, 2005). But military managers, or officers, are also trained to assume a professional role that incorporates moral courage as a part of their job, providing them with the mental strength to do what is right, even in the face of personal or professional adversity (U.S. Navy Core Values). Taken together, this population is of particular interest in the study of PMC as a management competency.

While virtue in action is an assumed aspect of management duty, there is also a high value placed on readiness, mission accomplishment, “zero-defect” operations, and having a “can-do” approach toward leadership commands (Sekerka et al., 2005). With the proliferation of rules, occasions may arise where rules and goals conflict, especially when compliance and orders are not congruent.

Competing values may generate internal strife (Cameron and Quinn, 2006), requiring PMC in forming moral judgment and the intention to act. But no matter how difficult this may be, the organization relies upon its officers to activate professional strategies that enable them to achieve their goals with moral courage. This can be especially challenging for military managers who face pressures to establish camaraderie, be team players, and to bolster command morale in hierarchical power structures.

Ethics scholars suggest that morality emerges from our ever-changing relationships with individuals, groups, and our social networks (Jackall, 1988). Manifest in informal norms and group processes, these relationships may or may not support ethical behavior. Despite peer pressure and social norms, military managers are held accountable for sustaining a high moral standard, demonstrating PMC in their persona, decisions and actions – both in and out of uniform. To make PMC an explicit competency for managerial awareness and development and to contribute to a conceptual and behavioral shift in organizational ethics, this research moves to create and test a scale that measures PMC. To do so, we study military managers who engage in moral action and the existing literature on moral courage in the workplace.

Part 1: scale development using PMC themes

Our research is part of a longitudinal study sponsored by the U.S. Naval Supply Corps, a three-year program designed to develop ethics education in the military. We began this effort with critical incident interviews (Flanagan, 1982), asking officers to think of a time when they faced an ethical challenge at work and to describe their response. A qualitative coding process was used to identify themes associated with PMC and from them we developed statements to serve as a basis for a scale to be tested on another sample of officers (Sekerka, *in press*). We state and describe the themes arising from the critical incidents and the associated statements derived below. The themes and statements were developed by one author of this paper. The items derived under the critical incident procedure by this author serve as one method in the empirical analyses presented below. A second author developed items based on

an analysis of moral content in the courage literature. The items derived by this author serve as a second method in the empirical analyses. In sum, the two sets of items presented herein constitute independent methods for measuring PMC, and form the basis for the validation study presented at the end of the paper. Five themes were identified as a basis for item generation.

Moral agency

The first theme reflects a predisposition toward moral behavior and persistence of the will to engage. Moral responders are primed for engagement and show a consistency in striving toward right action. These managers describe their immediate involvement and are primed to address the issue upon awareness. This does not mean immediate action, but it indicates a quick assumption of responsibility to manage the issue. This capacity of responsibility and ownership of the issue demonstrates a readiness to pursue moral decision making as a matter of course, suggesting that these managers may be more likely to perceive ethical issues. Because they view themselves as moral agents, they do not spend time trying to determine whether or not they should engage – they assume it. Taking ownership of the challenge automatically, seemingly as a matter of course, little time and energy is expended upon whether or not to engage, as they move swiftly to commence the process of forming moral judgment.

This theme reflects an ability to be primed for engagement, possessing an automatic readiness to address the ethical challenge, and a presumption of moral agency. It is represented by the following statements: *I am the type of person who is unfailing when it comes to doing the right thing at work; When I do my job I regularly take additional measures to ensure my actions reduce harms to others; and My work associates would describe me as someone who is always working to achieve ethical performance, making every effort to be honorable in all my actions.*

Multiple values

Ethical codes are often superficially grafted onto a profession or organizational role without attending

to their application (Potts and Matuszewski, 2004). But managers who respond to ethical challenges adopt a variety of values as ascribed by multiple identities. Personal values can be complemented by professional and organizational values, extending one's value system (Rokeach, 1977). While managers in the military are expected to incorporate professional and personal values into their decision-making rubric, moral responders demonstrate an ability to petition a variety of value sets, and to combine and reconcile them.

To navigate this activity, moral responders use cognitive and emotional schemas (Abelson, 1981; Gioia and Poole, 1984) that contribute to the formation of internal scripts. Managers who proceed with a moral response demonstrate an ability to draw upon value sets, such as those associated with their role as a manager, and their identity as a subordinate, friend, team member, husband, father, and son. In the process of proceeding toward right action, they often encounter social norms or pressures to conform, which go against some of their value-identities. Thus, managers who proceed with a moral response have the ability to sort out and determine value priorities and to hold firm to these principles despite external pressures.

Taken together, this theme reflects the ability to draw on multiple value sets in moral decision making and to effectively sort out and determine what needs to be exercised, and to hold firm to previously held beliefs despite external concerns or demands. It is represented by the following statements: *I am the type of person who uses a guiding set of principles from the organization as when I make ethical decisions on the job; No matter what, I consider how both my organization's values and my personal values apply to the situation before making decisions; and When making decisions I often consider how my role in the organization, my command, and my upbringing must be applied to any final action.*

Endurance of threats

PMC is reflected in managers who face difficulties, both perceived and real danger or threat, with endurance. While ethical challenges do not typically require physical bravery, to the extent that PMC poses a threat to self, they do require moral bravery. Moral responders are aware that their position, identity, or character may be at risk; however, they deal with this

concern as they manage negative emotions that may accompany this circumstance (such as fear, anxiety, or doubt). Interestingly, managers often acknowledge that their initial response may *not* be to take action. Yet, consciously or unconsciously, they apply self-regulation that helps them proceed despite a potential reluctance to do so.

As managers balance their desire to proceed with moral action with other competing instincts to survive (e.g., keep one's job), they bolster their motivations to proceed. It is likely that routine efforts to maintain this willingness to proceed come from regularly exercising self-regulation to fortify PMC (Sekerka and Bagozzi, 2006). In this way, moral responders build up their will to act, and thus making the trait more durable over time. Acting in the face of threat or fear can be particularly relevant in hierarchical organizations like the military, where principles of duty include adherence to upper-level command. As appropriately described by Rate et al. (2007), a person who exercises a moral response is unlikely to be fearless, but knows how to endure threat. Managers who proceed with a moral response seem to expect that their effort will "cost" them something (loss of status, social connections, etc.) and accept this from the onset. In short, they appear to have previously determined that the value of PMC outweighs a pending personal sacrifice (Goud, 2005; Hannah et al., 2007).

Taken together, the following statements are suggested for the scale: *When I encounter an ethical challenge I take it on with moral action, regardless of how it may negatively impact how others see me; When my job record may be affected negatively, I am unlikely to get involved with an ethical challenge* (to be reverse scored); and *I am the type of person who wants to keep things subdued, not raise issues, or put myself or others in jeopardy by bringing a moral issue forward* (to be reverse scored).

Going beyond compliance

Managers who proceed with a moral response have a proactive approach to workplace ethics. Rather than focusing merely on the prevention of unethical action, they demonstrate a promotion orientation, one that leverages their moral aspirations. Taking this perspective appears to support the will to engage in values-driven achievement, while also attending to the intent of regulations designed to prevent

wrongdoing. Moral responders incorporate concerns about compliance but also move to achieve ethical ideals. These managers not only consider the rules, but also reflect upon their purpose, going beyond compliance-based measures to consider what is right, just, and appropriate.

We represent this theme with the following statements: *My coworkers would say that when I do my job I do more than follow the regulations, I do everything I can to ensure actions are morally sound; When I go about my daily tasks I make sure to comply with the rules, but also look to understand their intent, to ensure that this is being accomplished as well; and It is important that we go beyond the legal requirements but seek to accomplish our tasks with ethical action as well.*

Moral goals

Managers who engage in a moral response are driven by more than task accomplishment. They use virtues (e.g., prudence, honesty, and justice) throughout the decision-making process to achieve a virtuous outcome. This involves the use of goal setting strategies to achieve a solution that serves, helps, or benefits the greater good. This typically involves a consideration of one's peers, subordinates, the boss, their organization, and some larger entity (e.g., the constitution, taxpayers, or environment). Moral responders have goals that go beyond self-serving interests that influence the formation of their moral judgment. This desire to "do good" often extends the issue itself; that is, the manager views the challenge as part of a larger constellation of concerns. Moreover, moral responders seem to understand the importance of how they respond over time is as part of their responsibility. We found that moral responders reflect intentions that show respect and consideration for others and the larger whole, which transcends self-interest. This suggests that the goal is based on a more substantive application of virtues in action.

This final theme is expressed by these statements: *It is important for me to use prudential judgment in making decisions at work; I think about my motives when achieving the mission, to ensure they are based upon moral ends; and When engaged in action, I do not typically consider how virtuous my motives are as I move to accomplish objectives (to be reverse scored).*

Part 2: scale development using existing literature

To develop items for a second scale measuring the themes emerging from the critical incident analysis, we scrutinized the literature on courage, moral decision making, and virtue excellence in organizations. A second author of this paper analyzed the literature and used the five categories derived from the critical incident study.

Moral agency

Professional moral courage in the workplace, specifically the kind needed by managers facing daily ethical challenges, is a process not synonymous with rash or overconfident behavior in response to danger. Rather, it is a self-directed effort that works "toward the good" (Harris, 2000) or "at what is right and moral" (Pury et al., 2007). Woodard and Pury (2007) suggest that courageous efforts have a purpose or a goal to do what one thinks is right or necessary. If the manager is motivated to do good, such behaviors are exemplified in their daily actions (Gioia and Poole, 1984); in other words, the person models moral strength in their work routines. Harris (2000) suggests that practicing and modeling courageous behavior are important for the development of courage in organizations. In addition, Kidder (2005, p. 214) explicitly identifies "modeling and mentoring" as one of the modes of learning and teaching in his paradigm for moral courage. This supports the inclusion of the following statement as an aspect of PMC: *Others can rely on me to exemplify moral behavior.*

In this same vein, PMC is not a resource that one occasionally draws on in a rare or difficult situation, but is a sustained effort that conveys an ongoing sense of seeking (Harris, 2000). Kidder (2005, p. 172) emphasizes that our intuition can be improved through practice, so that the "spontaneity of our gut impulse [i.e., initial inclination to do what is right] grows increasingly sure-footed and reliable." In fact, "practice and persistence" constitute another aspect of this paradigm (p. 214). Taken together, this suggests the following statements: *I am determined to do the right thing and Engaging in principled action is an ongoing pursuit for me.*

Multiple values

Managers must apply principles of right and wrong to determine what action is appropriate (Carlson et al., 2002). Hence, the determination of what is “right” involves values; but whose values? Managers will naturally draw on personal values; in fact, courageous actions move to affirm truths about one’s self and one’s beliefs (Woodard and Pury, 2007). However, the values of those around us must also be considered. While some values and the relative importance attached to them can vary across demographic and geographic boundaries (Kidder, 2005), others, such as honesty, fairness, respect, responsibility, and compassion have nearly universal appeal. Moreover, the professional role and organization where one works can foster specific values associated with one’s role and institution. We see how ethical behavior can be inspired by a variety of value sets, but to be applied they must be grounded in one’s view of morality (Higgins and Currie, 2004). This suggests that an organization can promote PMC by reminding managers of their obligation as organizational members and management professionals, along with their responsibility to the larger community (Harris, 2000).

The above concerns are summarized by McBeath and Webb (2002), who state that recognizing virtue is not as simple as following a system of rules but rather involves a “grasping of the interplay between self, others, and environment.” Taken together this literature informs the following statements: *I draw on my personal values to help determine what is right; I draw on the values of those around me to help determine what is right; and I draw on my professional values to help determine what is right.*

Endurance of threats

Woodard and Pury’s (2007) description of courageous behavior suggests that it is far more complex than a simple characterization of a response to a threat faced by an actor. That said, it is generally accepted that courageous people require hardiness and determination (Woodard, 2004) to achieve their goal. For example, a person may have to go against social norms or expectations (Woodard, 2004) or face an element of social disapproval (Woodard and Pury, 2007). This ability to endure despite fear (Rachman, 1990) is particularly important in hierarchical organizations,

where principles of duty include adherence to upper-level command. Another possibility, perhaps the most obvious challenge to moral courage, is that one may lose something essential, important, or desirable such as a job, esteem, or their self-respect. Kidder (2005) makes this point by posing the following question: “How many employees [in] global firms that have endured moral implosions ... had to choose between paying their bills and sounding the alarms [to their superiors]?” (p. 135). These concerns stimulated the following statements: *I hold my ground on moral matters even if there are opposing social pressures; I act morally even if it puts me in an uncomfortable position with my superiors; and I am swayed from acting morally by fear and other negative feelings* (to be reverse scored).

Going beyond compliance

While rules and regulations set forth by the manager’s profession and organization serve as a guide for ethical behavior in task actions, they are not sufficient to inform PMC. Solomon (1998) argues that moral psychology is not limited to “bloodless [legal] concepts of obligation, duty, responsibility, and rights,” while Higgins and Currie (2004) assert that organizations and their members must meet ethical obligations to clients, investors, and the community at large. McBeath and Webb (2002) argue that compliance may even create impediments in the path of moral decision making, explaining that: “the current trend in public agencies [is] to engage in defensive decision making. This [entails] the least risky option that can be thoroughly accounted for in terms of laid-down procedures.” Kidder (2005) explicitly describes how one public official conceded that “the right thing to do was, technically, the illegal thing to do.” Taken together, this forms the basis for the inclusion of the following statement: *I consider more than rules and regulations in deciding what is right.*

As previously stated, we view PMC as a process of virtues in action, but we also believe that the traits that support such behavior have the potential to be developed in most people. While Solomon (1998) does not frame courage as a character trait, he supports the notion of moral courage entailing concrete actions and Harris (2000) affirms this notion by similarly describing courage in the workplace as a path from thought to action. Kidder (2005) describes this thought-action in competency-like terms when he states that a person

must “go out of his [or her] way to be responsible [and exhibit moral courage],” (p. 197) explaining that courage in the workplace calls us to “step firmly up to the decision-making process rather than duck responsibility” (p. 251). This provides the motivation for the following statements: *I proactively aspire to behave morally* and *For me, doing what is right is the same as avoiding what is wrong* (to be reversed scored).

Moral goals

Virtue excellence in the workplace is the aspiration to achieve and the condition of virtuousness, as manifest by accomplishing some form of greater good (Bright et al., 2004). It is a form of unconditional regard that can generate heightened moral awareness. But what drives a person to want to engage in moral action? Perhaps it is based on some deep-rooted impulsion, described by Kidder (2005) as the firmness of a moral principle, one’s duty, private convictions, a desire to reject evil conformity, to denounce injustice, or to defy immoral orders. Such desires are driven by virtuous motives, not self-serving ones. Even if self-serving motives creep in, such as relieving one’s own conscience, when PMC is “exercised in conjunction with other virtues such as wisdom and justice” (Harris, 2000), self-serving motives can be countered (Solomon, 1998).

Woodard (2004) observes that courage requires more than acting despite a perception of vulnerability; it involves grace, nobility, credibility, sensibility, practicality, or meaningfulness. McBeath and Webb (2002) add that virtue is often linked to the phrase “doing the right thing” because those with PMC are likely to have a conscience about what they should do when constraints imposed by weaker values or reasons actually oppose or thwart the action informed by virtue. Taken together, these considerations inform the final items presented in our second scale, stated as: *When I act morally, my motives are virtuous*; *I act morally because it is the right thing to do*; and *When I act morally, I like being praised and recognized for it* (reverse scored).

Validation study

Respondents and procedure

The sample ($N = 199$) consisted of 74.7% male (25.3% female), and 27.2% were other than Caucasian

in ethnicity. The mean age was 27.64 ($SD = 4.77$). Participants were officers in the U.S. Naval Supply Corps, 40% with prior enlisted experience. The study was conducted at a military installation in the south-east U.S. Participants responded to items at two points in time: before and after attending an ethics and education and training session. Only responses obtained at the second point in time were used in the analyses, as these were expected to better represent well-formed verbalizations of each person’s thoughts about PMC as it applied to them personally.

Measures

The statements derived from the critical incident qualitative analysis and the analysis of the literature were transformed into items and presented on two questionnaires to respondents (scales 1 and 2; respectively). Seven-point unipolar items were used to record responses: 1 = “never true” to 7 = “always true,” with 4 = “sometimes” as a mid-point. Respondents were asked to read each item and indicate to what extent it pertained to “you at work.” The items can be found in the Appendix. All respondents provided answers on items from both methods (scale 1 is method A; scale 2 is method B). Because respondents answered the negatively phrased items inconsistently, with a number of people apparently not realizing the inverted wording, 3 items in each of the 15-item questionnaires were omitted from the analyses. For each dimension of moral courage, items were averaged to yield a measure of that dimension. Because we have two methods, these provide two measures for each dimension.

Methods of analysis

To investigate construct validity (Bagozzi, 1993; Bagozzi et al., 1999), while partitioning variance due to the true-scores, error variance, and method variance, we investigated the additive trait-method-error CFA model. Formally, this model may be summarized as follows:

$$\mathbf{y} = [\mathbf{\Lambda}_T \mathbf{\Lambda}_M] \begin{bmatrix} \boldsymbol{\eta}_T \\ \boldsymbol{\eta}_M \end{bmatrix} + \boldsymbol{\varepsilon}$$

$$\boldsymbol{\Sigma} = \mathbf{\Lambda}_T \boldsymbol{\Psi}_T \mathbf{\Lambda}_T' + \mathbf{\Lambda}_M \boldsymbol{\Psi}_M \mathbf{\Lambda}_M' + \boldsymbol{\theta}_\varepsilon$$

where \mathbf{y} is a vector of observed measures for the five dimensions, $\boldsymbol{\eta}_T$ is a vector of factors corresponding

to the 5 dimensions (“traits”), η_M is a vector of method factors corresponding to the two questionnaires (Methods A & B), Λ_T is the factor loading matrix relating measures to dimensions, Λ_M is the factor loading matrix relating measures to “methods,” Ψ_T and Ψ_M are variance-covariance matrixes for traits and methods, respectively (where Ψ_T is a 5×5 matrix corresponding to the variances for and covariances between the five traits, and Ψ_M is a 2×2 matrix corresponding to the variances for and covariance between the two methods), Σ is the implied variance-covariance matrix for γ , ϵ is a vector of residuals, and θ_ϵ is a diagonal matrix of unique variances for the residuals. The program, LISREL, can be used to estimate parameters and test models (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1999). Background and illustration of this model can be found in Bagozzi et al. (1991, 1999).

To test for construct validity, we examined first a CFA model hypothesizing that variation in measures can be accounted for by five trait factors plus five error variances (termed, the trait-error CFA model). This model assumes that no method effects occur and serves as a baseline for comparison to the trait-method-error CFA model described above. Then we examined the full trait-method-error CFA model. Finally, we investigated the hypothesis claiming that the five trait factors can be explained by a single second-order factor. See Bagozzi et al. (1991) for an outline of construct validity procedures.

Results

The findings for the trait-error CFA model show a mixed fit with two unacceptable fit indexes (i.e., $\chi^2(25) = 61.37$, $p = 0.00$, and $RMSEA = 0.09$) and three acceptable fit indexes ($NNFI = 0.97$, $CFI = 0.99$, and $SRMR = 0.04$). These results suggest that there may be some method bias contributing to the mixed fit. The trait-error CFA model does not take into account method bias.

We then ran a trait-method-error CFA model, which does model method bias explicitly, and found a satisfactory fit on all five fit indexes: $\chi^2(15) = 23.01$, $p = 0.08$, $RMSEA = 0.05$, $NNFI = 0.99$, $CFI = 1.00$, and $SRMR = 0.02$. In this model, the correlation between the two method factors was constrained

to zero, because the correlation was nonsignificant ($r = 0.06$), and multitrait-multimethod matrix CFA models have been shown to be more stable with nonsignificantly correlated method factors (e.g., Marsh and Bailey 1991).

Table I presents the parameter estimates for the trait-method-error CFA model. Notice first that the factor loadings are all high in value and statistical significant. This means that the true-score or trait variance for the five moral courage dimensions are substantial, and the correspondences between the 10 measures and their respective factors are very strong. Indeed except for one measure, the measure of beyond compliance by method B (analysis of the literature), the trait variances for the remaining nine measures range from 52% to 77% (trait variance equals the square of factor loadings). The minimum standard is generally acknowledged to be 50%; that is, at least 50% of measure variance is desired to reflect trait variance (Bagozzi et al., 1991). The measure of beyond compliance achieved a level of trait variance of 37%. These high levels of trait variance suggest that the measures of the five dimensions of moral courage achieve satisfactory convergent validity. This is all the more impressive, given that these levels were attained while controlling for method bias and measurement error.

A second finding of note in Table I is the relatively low levels of method bias. Two of five measures of the moral dimensions by method B (analysis of the literature) and three of five measures by method A (qualitative analysis) have no significant method bias. The method bias for three measures of the moral dimensions by method B range from 5% to 25%, with the latter value corresponding to the low convergent validity for the measure of beyond compliance (again, method variance equals the square of factor loadings). The method bias for two measures of the moral dimensions by method A (qualitative analysis) range from 7% to 14%. All these values of method bias are relatively low in magnitude.

Table I also shows that measurement error (see error variance), which is usually interpreted as random error, is relatively low. The error variances range from 29% to 46% for method B and from 20% to 42% for method A. Overall both methods measure the 5 moral courage dimensions well. Method A yields somewhat greater trait variance and somewhat less method bias and random error than

TABLE I
Parameter estimates for trait-method-error confirmatory factor analysis model

Measures	Factor loadings							
	Moral agency	Multiple values	Threat endurance	Beyond compliance	Moral goal	Method A	Method B	Error variance
Method A qualitative analysis								
Moral agency	0.80***					0.39*		0.20 ^b
Multiple values		0.85***				0.26*		0.22***
Threat endurance			0.83***			-0.13		0.29***
Beyond compliance				0.88***		0.16		0.21***
Moral goal					0.76***	0.00		0.42***
Method B literature analysis								
Moral agency	0.80***						0.15	0.33***
Multiple values		0.72***					0.16	0.46***
Threat endurance			0.77***				0.34***	0.29***
Beyond compliance				0.61***			0.50***	0.38**
Moral goal					0.72***		0.22*	0.43***
Correlations among moral courage dimensions								
Moral agency	1.00							
Multiple values	0.82(0.05) ^a	1.00						
Threat endurance	0.83(0.05)	0.80(0.05)	1.00					
Beyond compliance	0.89(0.04)	0.78(0.06)	0.82(0.05)	1.00				
Moral goal	0.89(0.05)	0.76(0.06)	0.88(0.05)	0.96(0.05)	1.00			

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

^aStandard errors in parentheses.

^b $p < 0.07$.

method B, but both pass accepted standards for convergent validity.

The bottom panel of Table I shows the correlations among the five moral courage dimensions. When inspecting the correlations, it is important to realize that they represent corrections for measurement error, and the raw Pearson product-moment correlations, which are based on observed scores, are significantly lower than these correlations. In other words, the correlations shown are between true-scores because of corrections in attenuation of observations. Two procedures combine to yield the correlations in Table I. First, by averaging items to form measures, as done in the present study, some measurement error will be smoothed. Second, the estimation of the CFA model gives estimates for correlations based on the measures. Thus, one would expect high correlations because of both the corrections for measurement error inherent in the statistical model and estimation procedure and the

expectations that dimensions of moral courage should be positively correlated at a substantial level.

The findings in Table I indicate that of 10 possible pairs of correlations between the dimensions of moral courage, only one fails to be significantly < 1.00 (i.e., the confidence interval is $0.86 \leq 0.96 \leq 1.00$). As a consequence, the measures of the five dimensions can be seen to demonstrate discriminant validity except in the case just mentioned. Further, because the procedures used to implement tests of construct validity are rather stringent, it appears that the measures of the 5 dimensions can be used to study moral courage in business and social science research.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the items measuring moral courage derived from two different methods (analysis of the literature and qualitative analysis of critical

incidents) and performed by two different researchers (the combination termed “methods” herein) achieve construct validation, and thus supporting evidence exists for five dimensions of moral courage.

Although the empirical analyses demonstrate that the measures derived from the items from the two methods can be considered measures of five dimensions of moral courage, this might not be so in all settings or contexts. In work contexts where norms or expectations are unwritten, unstated, or vague, we might expect it difficult to find discriminant validity for measures across the five dimensions. When work conditions differentially emphasize one or more of the five dimensions, it would be expected that the measures of the five dimensions would achieve strong discriminant validity, and, one would see a multidimensional representation of PMC such that the five factors correlate amongst themselves at levels significantly below 1.00. Similarly, as a function of socialization and psychological development processes or individual differences, categories of people may exhibit differences amongst the five dimensions to different degrees.

For users of the items studied herein, we would recommend that at least two items per dimension be used in future research, which would allow for the modeling of separate factors for the dimensions and the computation of reliabilities. The modeling of separate factors permits one to test for the effects of the dimensions as independent or dependent variables. This means that at least 10 items should be used if one prefers a shortened scale. By the same token, if one were to choose which scale to use in research, assuming it was not feasible to employ all items from both scales, we would recommend that measures from method A (Scale 1) be used, as its psychometric properties were slightly superior to that found for measures from method B (Scale 2). If only using

Scale 1 (method A), given the above recommendation, the component *Endures Threat* will then only have one item. In this case we recommend that item #7 from Scale 2 be included as well (*I hold my ground on moral matters, even if there are opposing social pressures*).

Future research in terms of scale validation should consider two extensions. It would be desirable to conduct a study where people responded to the items developed herein as well as items from similar scales so as to ascertain a different form of convergent validity from that studied herein (cf., Greitemyer et al., 2007; Woodard and Pury, 2007).

Conclusion

If we hope to reach the highest levels of organizational performance, we must understand the factors that foster people’s abilities to respond to challenges with courage and to inspire others to broaden their capacity for moral agency (Worline et al., 2002). This research was an attempt to start addressing this concern. But for PMC to be developed as a managerial practice, the features of moral strength must be applied in daily routines. To sustain this behavior, individual actions must also be supported by organizational processes, policies, and norms; otherwise there will be limited incentive to pursue PMC in daily action. If expanded aims to develop moral strength are to be achieved, organizational leaders must be willing to relinquish control, to risk releasing the moral capacity of their people, to trust that employees will do the right thing if given the chance (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997).

To cultivate proactive organizational ethics, leaders can expand their views to include PMC as an achievable goal. A framework for this approach (see Table II) depicts how managers need to go beyond the moral minimum to demonstrate PMC.

TABLE II
Proactive organizational ethics

Moral weakness	Moral minimum	PMC
Noncompliance disobedience/punishment Does harm	Obedience/control compliance Does no harm	Values-driven achievement Does good for others
Non-adherence to legal baseline	Adherence to legal baseline	Aspires to moral ideal
Avoidance orientation	Prevention orientation	Promotion orientation

Treating moral decision making and action as a practical ideal, organizations can influence management norms, which can ultimately affect how others will respond to ethical challenges in the workplace. While managers are responsible for developing their will to proceed and acting with PMC, establishing contexts that encourage people to exercise their character strengths must be bolstered through education and training. Describing, measuring, and tracking PMC as a workplace competency may be a viable start to promote a more proactive approach to organizational ethics. The scales herein provide a basis for conducting research in this regard.

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Appendix

PMC Scale 1: items derived from qualitative analysis (Method A in Table I)

Theme 1: moral agency

_____ 1. I am the type of person who is unfailing when it comes to doing the right thing at work.

_____ 2. When I do my job I regularly take additional measures to ensure my actions reduce harms to others.

_____ 3. My work associates would describe me as someone who is always working to achieve ethical performance, making every effort to be honorable in all my actions.

Theme 2: multiple values

_____ 4. I am the type of person who uses a guiding set of principles from the organization as when I make ethical decisions on the job.

_____ 5. No matter what, I consider how both my organization's values and my personal values apply to the situation before making decisions.

_____ 6. When making decisions I often consider how my role in the organization, my command, and my upbringing must be applied to any final action.

Theme 3: endurance of threats

_____ 7. When I encounter an ethical challenge I take it on with moral action, regardless of how it may pose a negative impact on how others see me.

_____ 8. When my job record may be affected negatively, I am unlikely to get involved with an ethical challenge.*

_____ 9. I am the type of person who wants to keep things subdued, not raise issues, or put myself or others in jeopardy by bringing a moral issue forward.*

Theme 4: going beyond compliance

_____ 10. My coworkers would say that when I do my job I do more than follow the regulations, I do everything I can to ensure actions are morally sound.

_____ 11. When I go about my daily tasks I make sure to comply with the rules, but also look to understand their intent, to ensure that this is being accomplished as well.

_____ 12. It is important that we go beyond the legal requirements but seek to accomplish our tasks with ethical action as well.

Theme 5: moral goals

_____ 13. It is important for me to use prudential judgment in making decisions at work.

_____ 14. I think about my motives when achieving the mission, to ensure they are based upon moral ends.

_____ 15. When engaged in action, I do not typically consider how virtuous my motives are as I move to accomplish objectives.*

PMC Scale 2: Items derived from literature analysis (Method B in Table I)

Theme 1: moral agency

- _____ 1. I am determined to do the right thing.
- _____ 2. Others can rely on me to exemplify moral behavior.
- _____ 3. Engaging in principled action is an ongoing pursuit for me.

Theme 2: multiple values

- _____ 4. I draw on my personal values to help determine what is right.
- _____ 5. I draw on the values of those around me to help determine what is right.
- _____ 6. I draw on my professional values to help determine what is right.

Theme 3: endurance of threats

- _____ 7. I hold my ground on moral matters, even if there are opposing social pressures.
- _____ 8. I act morally even if it puts me in an uncomfortable position with my superiors.
- _____ 9. I am swayed from acting morally by fear and other negative feelings.*

Theme 4: going beyond compliance

- _____ 10. I consider more than rules and regulations in deciding what is right.
- _____ 11. I proactively aspire to behave morally.
- _____ 12. For me, doing what is right is the same as avoiding what is wrong.*

Theme 5: moral goals

- _____ 13. When I act morally, my motives are virtuous.
- _____ 14. I act morally because it is the right thing to do.
- _____ 15. When I act morally, I like being praised and recognized for it.*

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