

Workplace Relational Civility e Human Capital Sustainability Leadership per lo sviluppo sostenibile nelle organizzazioni

Evidenze empiriche

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Sommario

Il presente studio si è posto l'obiettivo di analizzare le relazioni tra *workplace relational civility* e *human capital sustainability leadership*, controllando per i tratti di personalità. A 215 partecipanti sono stati somministrati il *Big Five Questionnaire* (BFQ), la *Workplace Relational Civility Scale* (WRCS), la *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale* (HCSL). I risultati evidenziano che la *workplace relational civility* aggiunge una percentuale di varianza incrementale rispetto alla varianza spiegata dai tratti di personalità in relazione alla *human capital sustainability leadership*, offrendo future prospettive di ricerca e intervento per promuovere lo sviluppo sostenibile nelle organizzazioni nella cornice delle *healthy organizations*.

Parole chiave

Workplace relational civility, *Human capital sustainability leadership*, Tratti di personalità, Sostenibilità, Sviluppo sostenibile, *Healthy organizations*.

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Workplace Relational Civility and Human Capital Sustainability Leadership for sustainable development in organizations

Empirical Evidence

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Abstract

The present study aimed at analysing the relationships between workplace relational civility and human capital sustainability leadership, controlling for personality traits. Two hundred and fifteen participants were administered the Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ), the Workplace Relational Civility Scale (WRCS), and the Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale (HCSL). The results highlighted that workplace relational civility added a percentage of incremental variance regarding the variance explained by personality traits in relation to human capital sustainability leadership, offering future perspectives of research and intervention to promote sustainable development in organizations in the framework of healthy organizations.

Keywords

Workplace relational civility, Human capital sustainability leadership, Personality traits, Sustainability, Sustainable development, *Healthy organizations*.

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Introduction

Today's labour market is characterized by constant changes and transitions that can generate insecurity and instability for workers (Blustein, Kenny, Di Fabio, & Guichard, 2019; Peiró, Sora, & Caballer, 2012), threatening their health and well-being (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2019). In the 21st century, the sustainable development of human resources is therefore an increasingly urgent need in the healthy organizations framework (Di Fabio, 2017a; Di Fabio et al., 2020). Human Capital Sustainability Leadership (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) is a new higher order construct that allows us to offer and respond to this challenge of healthy organizations, considering the research area of the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio, 2017b; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018), which represents a research area within sustainability science (Dincer & Rosen, 2013; Rosen, 2009), enriching the transdisciplinary perspective through the use of a «Psychological lens». The creation of this current research area has increased the importance of the recognition and integration of psychology and the psychological perspective in the understanding of the processes associated with sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018). The psychological approach enables us to offer contributions to concretely implement processes of sustainability and sustainable development, increasing well-being and quality of environments, of lives of individuals, of community groups in environments and for environments, starting from the natural environment and including all other environments (Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018). The new research area introduces another fundamental difference in addressing the general theme of sustainability. The traditional perspective focused on the three E's (environment, economy and equity) (Harris, 2003) is based on verbs such as exploiting, exhausting and irreparably altering, while the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio, 2017a, 2017b; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018) overcomes this traditional framework by introducing an approach centred on the regeneration of resources according to a positive vision, associated with verbs such as promoting, enriching, growing, and changing in a flexible way. In this framework aimed at promoting sustainable development also in organizations, two promising constructs can be found in scientific literature: human capital sustainability leadership (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) and workplace relational civility (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016).

The construct of human capital sustainability leadership (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) is focused on healthy people as flourishing and resilient workers, and on healthy organizations as flourishing and successful environments characterized by the virtuous circle of well-being and long-term performance. Human capital sustainability leadership is a higher order construct that includes four

specific types of leadership (ethical, sustainable, mindful and servant). Ethical leadership «aims to engender fair and just aims, empower an organization's members, create consistency of actions with espoused values, and use behaviour to communicate or enforce ethical standards, fair decisions and rewards, kindness, compassion and concern for others» (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018, p. 3). Sustainable leadership creates and preserves lifelong learning, ensures success over time, supports the leadership of others, addresses issues of social justice, develops rather than depletes human and material resources, enhances diversity and environmental capacity, and is actively engaged in protecting the environment. Mindful leadership is a style «based on paying attention to the present moment, and recognizing personal feelings and emotions and keeping them under control, especially under stress; on awareness of an individual's own presence at a given time and its impact on other people» (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018, p. 3). Servant leadership sustains «the growth of the followers for their personal interest (not for the interest of the organization or the leader), recognizing their needs and helping them on the basis of a moral responsibility towards them» (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018, p. 3).

Workplace relational civility (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016) is another promising construct in the field of the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio, 2017a, 2017b; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018) and healthy organizations (Di Fabio, 2017a; Di Fabio et al., 2020). Workplace relational civility is defined as a «relational style characterized by respect and concern for self and others, interpersonal sensitivity, personal education and kindness towards others. It also includes civil behaviours such as treating others with dignity and respecting social norms to facilitate peaceful and productive cohabitation» (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016, p. 2). The construct of workplace relational civility includes three dimensions: Relational decency at work, in terms of relationships based on decency and characterized by respect for oneself and for others, the ability to freely express beliefs and opinions, assertiveness and tact; Relational culture at work, in other words courtesy, kindness and education; Relational readiness at work refers to speed in understanding the feelings of others and displays of proactive sensitivity, and ability to understand the emotions of others, delicacy, empathy and compassion (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016). The Workplace Relational Civility Scale (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016) is a mirror instrument (I towards others and others towards me), which allows for a broader and more balanced detection of interpersonal relationships, considering both the perspective of the individual and that of others they deal with in the workplace.

In literature, positive relationships have emerged between workplace relational civility and human capital sustainability leadership (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). The aim of the present study is to advance this research, confirming and

extending the analysis of the relationship between workplace relational civility and human capital sustainability leadership, controlling for personality traits. Specifically, the following hypotheses have therefore been formulated:

1. a positive relationship will emerge between workplace relational civility and human capital sustainability leadership;
2. workplace relational civility will add a percentage of incremental variance regarding the variance explained by personality traits in relation to human capital sustainability leadership.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and fifteen workers of public and private organizations in Tuscany participated in the study. Regarding gender, 45.85% were males and 54.15% were females (average age 36.40 years; $SD= 10.71$).

Measures

Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ). Includes 132 items on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = «Absolutely false» to 5 = «Absolutely true»), enabling detection of the Big Five personality traits: Extraversion (Cronbach's alpha = .81); Agreeableness (Cronbach's alpha = .73); Conscientiousness (Cronbach's alpha = .81); Emotional stability (Cronbach's alpha = .90); Openness (Cronbach's alpha = .75) (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Borgogni, 1993).

Workplace Relational Civility Scale (WRCS). It includes 26 items and two mirror parts (Part A — I towards others and Part B — others towards me), each comprising 13 items. The scale has three dimensions (Relational decency at work; Relational culture at work; Relational readiness at work) respectively for Part A and Part B. The questions for Part A concern the participants' perception of their relationship and behaviour towards others (colleagues and/or superiors) over the previous three months. The questions for Part B concern their perception of the relationship and the behaviour of others (colleagues and/or superiors) towards them over the previous three months. The answer modality is on a Likert scale from 1 = «Not at all» to 5 = «A great deal». Cronbach's alpha for Part A is .87 and for Part B is .92 (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016).

Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale (HCSLS). It comprises 16 items with a Likert scale format from 1 = «None» to 5 = «Very much». It enables the detection of the higher order construct of HCSL that includes four kinds of

leadership: ethical, sustainable, mindful and servant. Cronbach's alpha of the scale is .94 (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018).

Procedure

The questionnaires are administered in groups. Informed consent was required from participants. Italian privacy laws were respected as regards data processing. The sequence of questionnaires was counterbalanced during administration to keep the potential effects of the order of presentation under control.

Data Analysis

Data analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson's r correlations and hierarchical regressions performed using the SPSS Statistics program, version 25.

Results

Table 1 presents correlations among BFQ, WRCS and HCSSL.

Table 1

Correlations among BFQ, WRCS and HCSSL.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. BFQ E	-							
2. BFQ A	.31**	-						
3. BFQ C	.20**	.21**	-					
4. BFQ ES	.24**	.31**	.12	-				
5. BFQ O	.34**	.35**	.30**	.26**	-			
6. WRCS Part A	.19	.40**	.14	.47**	.36**	-		
7. WRCS Part B	.10	.32**	.15	.28**	.26**	.48**	-	
8. HCSSL	.21	.39**	.19	.20	.40**	.59**	.25**	-

N.B. N = 215. * < .05, ** < .01.

BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire

WRCS = Workplace Relational Civility Scale

HCSSL = Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale

Table 2 reports the results of hierarchical regression carried out using the HCSL as dependent variable and as independent variable, at the first step, personality traits (BFQ) and at the second step the WRC (Part A and Part B). Regarding the HCSL, at the first step, personality traits explain 19% of the variance; when the WRCS are added (Part A and Part B) at the second step, the model is significant and explains the 38% incremental variance. The total R^2 is .57.

Table 2

Hierarchical regression: contribution of personality traits (BFQ) and workplace relational civility (WRC) in relation to human capital sustainability leadership.

	β
Step 1	
BFQ Extraversion	.11
BFQ Agreeableness	.26**
BFQ Conscientiousness	.09
BFQ Emotional Stability	.10
BFQ Openness	.30**
Step 2	
WRCS Part A	.54***
WRCS Part B	.15
R^2 step 1	.19***
ΔR^2 step 2	.38***
R^2 total	.57***

Note. $N = 215$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire

WRCS = Workplace Relational Civility Scale

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine the associations between workplace relational civility and human capital sustainability leadership, controlling for personality traits. The hypotheses of the study were confirmed. With reference to the first hypothesis, a positive relationship emerged between workplace relational civility and human capital sustainability leadership, which

is also maintained by controlling for personality traits in relation to the second hypothesis. The WRC therefore explains a percentage of incremental variance regarding personality traits in relation to human capital sustainability leadership. It is emphasized that Part A of the WRC offers a contribution to human capital sustainability leadership. Workplace relational civility in terms of participants' perception of having a relational style characterized by respect and concern for others, interpersonal sensitivity, education, kindness and relational attention to others (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016) is associated with a leadership style focused on healthy people as flourishing and resilient workers (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). The perception of a greater relational civility towards others in the workplace seems to promote a leadership style attentive to sustainability and sustainable development.

Although the results of this study appear promising, there is a limitation regarding the fact that the participants are a group of workers belonging to certain organizations in Tuscany, who are not representative of the Italian situation in general. Future research could therefore extend the examination of the association between workplace relational civility and human capital sustainability leadership to workers from other geographical areas in Italy. It would also be interesting to replicate the study in other countries for cross-cultural comparison. Other variables could also be considered in relation to human capital sustainability leadership, such as emotional intelligence. Furthermore, human capital sustainability leadership as an independent variable could be studied in relation to both hedonic and eudaemonic wellbeing outcomes.

If future research confirms the findings of this study, it could open up a new scenario for leadership in terms of intervention in the framework of prevention and in particular of primary prevention (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016; Kenny & Hage, 2009; Hage et al., 2017) and *strength-based prevention perspectives* (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021). Differently from personality traits that emerged as substantially stable in literature (Costa & McCrae, 1992), workplace relational civility could be increased through specific interventions (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016).

Workplace relational civility could therefore represent a promising new variable for early promotion of human capital sustainability leadership skills by facilitating the awareness of the value and the development of meaningful and supportive relationships in the workplace. The attention to relational civility at work and to a leadership style aimed at the sustainability of human resources could contribute in this sense to promoting sustainable development in organizations (Di Fabio, 2016; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018) in the current framework of reference of healthy organizations (Di Fabio, 2016a; Di Fabio et al., 2020), to enhance positive circularity between healthy businesses and healthy workers.

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