La civiltà relazionale nei luoghi di lavoro: attualità nella ricerca e nella misurazione
Un focus sulla discriminazione

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Sommario

Questo contributo si concentra sul costrutto di *Workplace Relational Civility,* includendo l'attualità nella misurazione e nella ricerca. Per quanto riguarda l'attualità nella misurazione, la *Workplace Relational Civility Scale* è descritta come un'innovativa misura mirror multidimensionale. Per quanto riguarda l'attualità della ricerca, vengono presentati studi recenti *Workplace Relational Civility* condotti in Italia e in altre parti del mondo. Viene inoltre offerto un focus sulla ricerca sulla civiltà relazionale e sulla discriminazione. Per rispondere all'attuale sfida critica di promuovere la civiltà relazionale contro la discriminazione, viene introdotta la cornice della psicologia della sostenibilità e dello sviluppo sostenibile. In *strength-based prevention perspectives* e anche nella prospettiva della prevenzione primaria, la civiltà relazionale sul posto di lavoro ha un valore preventivo cruciale come risorsa per combattere la discriminazione, promuovendo lo sviluppo sostenibile.

Parole chiave

Workplace Relational Civility, Workplace Relational Civility Scale, Strength-based prevention perspectives, Prevenzione primaria, Psicologia della Sostenibilità e dello Sviluppo Sostenibile.

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Relational Civility in the Workplace: Actuality in Research and Measurement
A Focus on Discrimination

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Abstract

This contribution is focused on the workplace relational civility construct, including actuality in measurement and research. Regarding actuality in measurement, the *Workplace Relational Civility Scale* is described as an innovative multidimensional mirror measure. With regard to actuality in research, recent studies in relation to workplace relational civility conducted in Italy and in other parts of the world are presented. Furthermore, a focus on research about relational civility and discrimination is offered. To respond to the current critical challenge of promoting relational civility against discrimination, the framework of the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development is introduced. In strength-based prevention perspectives and also in a primary prevention perspective, workplace relational civility has a preventive crucial value as a resource for fighting discrimination and promoting sustainable development.

Keywords

Workplace relational civility, *Workplace Relational Civility Scale,* Strength-based prevention perspectives, Primary prevention, Psychology of sustainability and sustainable development.

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Introduction

The definition of civility regards respect, courtesy, and a general awareness of the rights of other people (Elias, 1982; Carter, 1998; Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a). However, most researchers state that as people's interactions become more complex and more frequent, the need for civility increases (Carter, 1998; Chen & Eastman, 1997; Goffman, 1967; Elias, 1982; Liu et al., 2020; Porath et al., 2015). Paraphrasing Blustein (2006), civility is intrinsically relational (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a). On these premises the new «mirror» construct of relational civility as «a form of relational style characterized by respect and concern for the self and others, interpersonal sensitivity, personal education, and kindness toward others» was developed (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a, p. 2). It embraces civil behaviours such as handling others with dignity and respecting social norms to promote peaceful and fruitful coexistence. The workplace relational civility construct was operationalized (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a) and for the first time in the scientific literature the scale to detect it was available as a mirror scale.

By examining the scientific literature on the dark side of the processes related to civility in the workplace, we mainly find studies about the Workplace Incivility Scale, with the most widespread version by Cortina et al. (2001). In the Italian context, the psychometric properties of the scale (Di Fabio & Ghizzani, 2010) are available. Workplace incivility is «low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms of mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others» (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). It is characterized by «violence, aggression, bullying, tyranny, harassment, deviance, and injustice» (Cortina et al., 2001, p. 64). It is physical or psychological forms of aggression at the workplace that deliberately produce damage (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Glomb, 1998; Griffin, 2010; Schilpzand et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2022).

So, to put it in short, workplace incivility represents traditional studies on the topic whereas workplace relational civility (using a mirror scale) (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a) represents the innovation, on the one hand, highlighting the transition «from the dark side to the positive side» in organizations and, on the other hand, placing the person inside the process, underlining the value of prevention including the attention also due to primary prevention.

Actuality in measurement

The *Workplace Relational Civility Scale* (WRCS; Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a) regards a relational style characterized by respect and concern for the self and others, interpersonal sensitivity, personal education, and kindness towards others at

the workplace. The WRCS enables three dimensions to be detected: relational decency, relational culture and relational readiness. Relational decency in terms of «decency in relationships, respect for the self and others, assertiveness, ability to express convictions, relational capacity» (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a, p. 3). Relational culture in terms of «politeness, kindness, high, level of education, courteousness» (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016, p. 3). Relational readiness in terms of «sensibility towards others, ability to read the emotions of others, concern for others, delicacy, empathy, compassion, and attention to the reactions of others» (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a, p. 3). As reported above, the novelty lies in the fact that it is also a mirror measure. The items are 26 (response format 5-point Likert-type scale 1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal), 13 for Part A and 13 for Part B. Participants are initially asked about their relationships with others (Part A), and then they respond to statements, with the same content, describing the relationships of others with them (Part B) (over the past three months). So, the scale consists of two specular sections: Part A — Me with Others (example of item «I was generally kind toward others»); Part B — Others with me (example of item: «Others were generally kind toward me»). The mirror modality allows us to detect the perception of our own workplace relational civility and, at the same time, the perception of the workplace relational civility of others towards us, enabling, through administration, on the one hand, an increase in the awareness of any existing discrepancies and, on the other hand, an increase in the awareness that everyone is actively involved in the process, considering both what is put in and what is received. The *Academic Relational Civility Scale* (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2018) is also available, to be applied in the academic context, with the same structure and the same contents but in a context different from the work context: the university context for students. The *Workplace Relational Civility Scale* (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a) is widespread in other countries: Spanish version (Rodríguez-Cifuentes, 2023), Malaysian version (Seok et al., 2022), Chinese version (Zhang & Liu, 2023), and studies in the USA (Malka & MacLennan, 2023; Smith et al., 2023).

Actuality in research

Research on workplace relational civility was primarily conducted in the two research and interventions laboratories at the University of Florence (Italy), where the new construct and scale were developed. It was mainly focused on well-being and leadership in organizations.

Both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being were studied considering the life domain as well as specific contexts (well-being at work and at study). In relation to well-being in life domain, research showed that, controlling for personality traits, WRC Part B (Others with me) was mainly associated with eudaimonic

well-being in the life domain (Meaning in Life and Flourishing) but also with hedonic well-being (Life Satisfaction). WRC Part A (Me with others) was also mainly associated (but to a lesser extent) with eudaimonic well-being in the life domain (Meaning in Life and Flourishing) but also with hedonic well-being (Life Satisfaction) (Di Fabio et al., 2016a). The same pattern of relationships was found for workplace relational civility in relation to both hedonic well-being at work (job satisfaction) and eudaimonic well-being at work (Meaning and flourishing at work) (Di Fabio, 2018, 2019). Furthermore, WRC Part B (Others with me) mediated the relationship between predisposition to change, a dimension of the Acceptance of Change Scale (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016b) and hedonic well-being at work in terms of job satisfaction (Gori & Topino, 2020). Regarding academic relational civility for the relationship with both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, the same pattern of relationships was found (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2018). Moreover, academic relational civility is seen as a resource for positive and sustainable university environments (Rosen & Di Fabio, 2023). In this regard, in the study by Bucci et al. (2019), trait emotional intelligence was related, controlling for personality traits, to both Part A (Me with others) (above all TEIQue Well-being dimension of trait emotional intelligence) and Part B (Others with me) (above all TEIQue Self-control dimension of trait emotional intelligence). Furthermore, the contribution of trait emotional intelligence was higher for Part B (Others with me) compared to Part A (Me with others) to academic relational civility.

Concerning leadership, studies were focused on both traditional current models such as transactional leadership (Burns, 1978) and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) and on the innovative human capital sustainability leadership construct and scale (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). Transactional leadership (Burns, 1978) underlines that the relationship between leader and follower is developed and maintained through a mutual exchange of significant resources. Transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) no longer describes leader behaviours only in terms of leader-follower relationships, recognizing the needs of followers, and stimulating and creating experiences of learning in collaborators. Controlling for personality traits, WRC Part B (Others with me) was mainly associated with transformational leadership but also with transactional leadership (Di Fabio & Pesce, 2018); furthermore, to a lesser extent, WRC Part A (Me with others) was mainly associated with transformational leadership but also with transactional leadership (Di Fabio & Pesce, 2018).

Human capital sustainability leadership (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) is a higher order construct that includes ethical, sustainable, mindful, servant leadership. It is «centered on healthy people as flourishing and resilient workers, on healthy organizations as thriving and successful environments characterized by the positive circle of long-term well-being and performance» (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018, p. 3). For this reason, it constitutes a particularly promising current construct and

scale, capable of responding both to the challenges of sustainable development in organizations (Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2023) and to the perspective of accountability in reference to administration (Whiston, 2001) as well as the most recent parsimonious perspective (Duffy et al., 2023). Human capital sustainability leadership emerged associated to WRC Part A (Me with others), and also to WRC Part B (Others with me) but to a lesser extent (Di Fabio, 2019; Di Fabio & Gori, 2021).

In addition to the studies conducted within the two international research and intervention laboratories at the University of Florence (Italy), workplace relational civility research is also present in other international studies. In Malaysian workers, the relationship between the caring dimension of positive relational management (Di Fabio, 2016) and WRC (total score) was mediated by the change seeking dimension of acceptance of change (inverse effect) (Bee Seok et al., 2022). In Chinese workers, workplace relational civility (total score) mediated the association between health-promoting leadership and employment engagement (Zhang & Liu, 2023). In workers from the United States, a high level of relational decency (Part A + Part B) and relational readiness (Part A + Part B) emerged associated with a high level of social inclusion; on the contrary, relational culture (Part A + Part B) was not associated with social inclusion (Malka & MacLennan, 2023). In another study from the USA, WRC (total score) moderated the relationship from decent work to relatedness and competence (self-determination needs) (Smith et al., 2023). Furthermore, the systematic review and meta-analysis (Peng, 2023) identified desirable correlates of WRC (positive relationships) in terms of organizational commitment, job satisfaction and mental health; undesirable correlates of WRC (negative relationships) in terms of intention to quit, emotional exhaustion and physical symptoms. These findings emphasized that promoting civility at work can have significant benefits, such as improving employees' mental and physical health, and reducing burnout and absenteeism (Peng, 2023). Furthermore, promoting civility at work not only improves organizational health, but also increases cost efficiency and effectively prevents the loss of human and economic capital (Peng, 2023).

WRC also introduced a psychological prevention perspective for promoting relational civility at work, including primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention (Caplan, 1964; Hage et al., 2007). Following strength-based prevention perspectives (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021), including the primary prevention perspective (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016, 2019, 2022), the focus is on building strengths through specific training for promoting relational civility. The value of prevention is underlined, enhancing the positive perspective focused on resources and early interventions as a form of prevention to promote healthy organizations (Di Fabio, Cheung, & Peiró, 2020). WRC therefore constitutes a critical ingredient for sustainable development in organizations (Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023).

WRC acquires even more relevance considering results of studies on the dark side: workplace incivility. A review of the literature and the agenda for future research (Schilpzand et al., 2016) showed the following outcomes of different aspects of workplace incivility. Regarding experienced incivility: emotional exhaustion, negative affect, sadness, anger, fear, and psychological distress; regarding witnessed incivility: less health satisfaction, less creative performance, less citizenship behaviours, more work withdrawal, more dysfunctional ideation, more negative affect and more emotional exhaustion; regarding instigated incivility: being excluded and being mistrusted. A meta-analytic review on the relationship between workplace incivility and turnover intention (Namin et al., 2021) showed a positive relationship between perceived incivility and turnover intentions in employees. This relationship emerged stronger in the academic sector than in other industries; and stronger in the United States than in other countries.

A focus on discrimination: some recent results

Focusing attention on discrimination, the results of some recent studies were presented. The research by Daniels and Thorton (2020) showed that cyber incivility mediated the relationship between race and perceived discrimination. Moreover, the use of technology and cyberspace generate subtle forms of discrimination for non-White employees. It emphasizes the necessity for organizations to eliminate injustice in the workplace and enable workers to avoid the negative effects of experiencing injustice in the workplace. Furthermore, a framework is provided to increase workers' confidence on disability (Lindsay et al., 2019). Many workers lack confidence in how to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce, which can conduce to stigma and discrimination. A qualitative thematic analysis was carried out through 35 semi-structured interviews (18 employers who hire people with disabilities; 17 workers with disabilities). Themes included the following categories: «disability discomfort (i.e. lack of experience, stigma and discrimination); reaching beyond comfort zone (i.e. disability awareness training, business case, shared lived experiences); broadened perspectives (i.e. challenging stigma and stereotypes, minimizing bias and focusing on abilities); disability confidence (i.e. supportive and inclusive culture and leading and modeling social change)» (Lindsay et al., 2019, p. 40). Disability confidence among workers is important for strengthening the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. Continuing, a systematic review about LGBTQ+ in the workplace (Maji et al., 2023) highlighted that LGBTQ+ individuals face multiple negative experiences at work. Two forms of discrimination are experienced by LGBTQ+ people: «proximal (hiring discrimination and housing discrimination); distal workplace discrimination (unsafe work climate, microaggressions and harassment)» (Maji

et al., 2023, p. 1). It leads to work stress and also enforces control over sexual identity and dress. This work stress affects work and family outcomes, job satisfaction and career-related decisions. Over the past decade, the world has given equal space to sexual minorities. This has emerged in a second wave of decriminalization of homosexuality in various countries. So, organizations should also step up to ensure equal and inclusive spaces for sexual minorities. This study attempts to address this issue by elaborating on the existing literature on the workplace experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals. The takeaways of the systematic review are as follows:

1. Cultural differences are evident in the publication of empirical studies addressing the workplace experiences of sexual minorities. Most empirical studies are based in Western societies, particularly the US, and few studies have been published in Asian countries.

2. There is a significant bias in the representation of LGBTQ+ individuals (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer). Seven out of 101 articles (6.9%) focus exclusively on transgender individuals; while only two studies (1.9%) focus exclusively on lesbian individuals.

3. There is a lack of specialized journals and numbers of experts addressing key areas of diversity management (except the Journal of Homosexuality); there is also a lack in mainstream organizational psychology or management journals (except the Journal of Vocational Behaviour).

4. Based on a synthesis of existing empirical literature, an integrative model has been developed. The model emphasizes that LGBTQ+ individuals face both formal and interpersonal discrimination.

5. The integrative model also underlines that workplace discrimination tends to affect the career outcomes of sexual minorities. Occupational options for LGBTQ+ people are diminishing; this effectively impacts to horizontal occupational segregation.

6. The negative work experience of sexual minorities can only be addressed by offering a safe working environment through effective diversity management programmes.

A current critical challenge

The psychology of sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio, 2017a, 2017b; Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018, 2023; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018, 2020; Peiró, Svicher, & Di Fabio, 2023; Rosen & Di Fabio, 2023) is a relatively new current research and intervention area within the transdisciplinary domain of sustainability science. It enhances its transdisciplinary perspective, aiming to open the black box of psychological processes to preserve

the planet for the future and to promote human well-being (Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018). The psychology of sustainability and sustainable development offers contributions for enhancing well-being in relation to natural and other kinds of environments (natural, personal, social, organizational, community, digital, cross-cultural, [...] global environment/s) (Di Fabio, 2021). Internal psychological processes «involved in decision-making and behaviors, alone and in relation with external processes, deserve to be studied in depth, considering processes within individual(s), within environment(s), between/among individuals, between/among environments, between/among individuals and environments, and between/among living beings and the natural world/universe, from the past, in the present, and into the future» (Rosen & Di Fabio, 2023, p. 20) promoting harmonization and gaining generativity (Di Fabio & Tsuda, 2018), as well as eco-generativity (Di Fabio & Svicher, 2023a, 2023b). In the framework of the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development in organizations (Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023), workplace relational civility (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a) is configured as a promising resource for sustainable and inclusive healthy organizations (Di Fabio et al., 2020), healthy workers and healthy business (Di Fabio, 2017a).

Conclusions

In strength-based prevention perspectives (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021) and in a primary prevention perspective (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016, 2019, 2022), workplace relational civility (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a) has a preventive value for fighting discrimination in the direction of sustainable development in organizations (Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023). The Office of the Equality Councillor of the Metropolitan City of Florence exists not only to facilitate the respect of what is legally protected but also to nourish proactive processes against any form of discrimination in strength-based perspectives for sustainability and sustainable development at work. In this regard, the Office of the Equality Councillor of the Metropolitan City of Florence (Italy), organized the conference RE.A.DY (the National Network of Regions and Local Authorities to prevent and overcome homotransphobia) on the theme «Relational civility in the workplace in relation to non-discrimination of LGBTQIA+, disabled people and minorities, and discrimination in an absolute sense» on December 6th, 2023, in the Sala Luca Giordano, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Metropolitan City of Florence (Di Fabio, 2023). We need to collaborate very closely: researchers, policy makers, stakeholders, and all people interested in active citizenship processes, to give increasingly more and more relevance in different contexts to research, interventions and awareness on the social and economic costs of discrimination in organizations.

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