

## PROFESSIONAL MORAL COURAGE TO COMBAT ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN THE WORKPLACE

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“**Ethics**” has been considered one of the most important and desired professional competence amongst the Workforce. The organizations prefer employees who have courage to deal with ethical issues. But unfortunately, the scams and scandals across the Globe is the loud evidence of lack of Professional moral courage (PMC) amongst employees. The lack of PMC causes moral distress due to value-conflict, impacting the employee’s efficiency. The current paper intends to analyze the validity of the Professional Moral Courage scale in the Indian context and to identify the Professional Moral Courage of the Indian professionals and also the impact of Individual’s Personality, age, gender and the type of organization on Professional Moral Courage. The findings reveal that the personality has impact on professional moral courage and hence to enhance it, the interventions to modify personality aspects like ‘openness’ is the key. The study is the first research on ‘Professional Moral courage’ in Indian context.

*Keywords:* Ethics, moral agents, moral values, goals, personality, professional moral courage, value-conflict.

### 1. Introduction

“**Ethics**” has been considered one of the most important and desired professional competence amongst the Workforce. The organizations prefer employees who have courage to deal with ethical issues (Maddi,2007; Sekereka et al 2009). Though desirable, ethical decision making is an intricate process which always leads to the ethical dilemma. Resolving ethical dilemmas require moral courage and lack of this can be noticed in the scams and scandals across the Globe. Ethics Resource Centre (2012) claims that Workplace Ethics is plummeting at accelerated pace. Courage is an important trait required to exhibit ethical behaviour at workplace. (Sekereka et al,2009; Verschoor,2003; Pears,2004) which is evident from the news headlines featuring the unethical practices at the workplace be it Satyam or Enron. India is expected to become number three economic power within 15 years and Goldman Sachs report (2007) has forecasted India to reach number one position by 2050 (<https://www.innovations.harvard>). But to paint this beautiful canvass

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of success, we need to closely monitor the hurdles on the way to the pinnacle and one of the biggest challenges is soaring corruption. In 2015, India was ranked 85th out of 175 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Hence, to combat corruption, moral courage to take right and ethical decision at workplace becomes crucial. Ethics and morality are contrasted as, "Ethics most often refers to a domain of inquiry, a discipline, in which matters of right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice, are systematically examined. 'Morality', by contrast, is most often used to refer not to a discipline but to patterns of thought and action that are actually operative in everyday life. In this sense, morality is what the discipline of ethics is about. And so business morality is what business ethics is about" (Goodpaster, 1992). A matter of fact is that, people are ethical but they cannot muster courage to stand up against the wrongdoing of the higher authorities (Milliken et al., 2003), which was also proved by the laboratory experiment of Bocchiaro et al (2012). The employee experiences value-conflicts, causing moral distress at the workplace (Edmonson, 2010). The moral distress affects the job satisfaction and the efficiency and performance of the employee (Levi et al, 2004; Coles, 2010; Baqutayan et al, 2014). The organization need to manage this by developing professional moral courage amongst its employee, so that, they can combat the value-conflict and moral distress.

The current paper intends to analyze the validity of the Professional Moral Courage scale in the Indian context and to identify the Professional Moral Courage of the Indian professionals and also the impact of Individual's Personality, age, gender and the type of organization on Professional Moral Courage. There is no research in the area of PMC available in Indian context.

## **2. Literature review**

The notion of 'Work Ethic' was introduced by Max Weber, a sociologist who considered that the capitalism and Protestant Ethics have causal relation and coined the term "Protestant Work Ethics" (PWE) which emphasized on the commitment towards the work (Chusmirand Koberg, 1988; Hill and Petty, 1995; Hirschfeld and Field, 2000; Kalberg, 1996; Ness, 2010). But it has been observed that the work-commitment is decreasing and the workforce does not give importance to the work (Hirschfeld and Field, 2000; Miller et al, 2002), thereby diluting workplace ethics. However, to exhibit workplace ethics an individual must have courage to work ethically and to curb the unethical practices observed at workplace.

## **3. Moral Courage**

Different philosophers have defined courage. "Courage is the balance between Cowardice and rashness and it is required to attain all other virtues" (Aristotle 350BC). Courage is a personal trait which supports the virtuous behaviour. Lachman (2007) defines moral courage as, "the individual's capacity to overcome fear and stand up for his or her core values. It is the willingness to speak out and do that which is right in the face of forces that would lead a person to act in some other way. It puts principles into action". Gibbs

etal (1986) studied the relation between morally courageous actions and Moral judgement and states that moral decision making requires actions freighted with courage. Furnham (2002) opines that the managers need to show moral courage and hence courage is termed as management virtue (Srivastava and Cooperrider, 1998). Sekerka and Bagozzi (2007) discusses about moral courage as the ability to act based on intrinsic values prioritizing the good for others over the self. As a professional, one is supposed to behave according to the profession's ethics. As discussed above, ethical actions require moral courage. Professional courage is required to encourage the individuals to follow right course of action, as per their profession's ethics (Harris, 1999).

#### **4. Professional Moral Courage (PMC)**

Although Moral courage has been studied by many researchers but most of these studies are in the frame of Healthcare sector (Lachman, 2007; Gallagher, 2010; Hogenson, 2015). But the literature is silent about the moral courage amongst professionals other than those engaged in healthcare sector. Sekerka et al. (2007) used the term Professional Moral courage for the first time. "Moral courage is a means to triumph over fear through practical action. Knowing professional obligations and personal values is not the same as communicating and acting on those obligations and values. The space between knowing and acting is bridged by moral courage." (Lachman, 2007). This kind of courage can be termed as PMC. PMC is "a competency exercised in the workplace as managers face ethical challenges with a moral response" (Sekerka et al., 2009). Professionals though are aware about the moral action but require PMC to apply this to behavioural disposition and should behave with virtue even when they confront moral challenge (Sekerka et al., 2009; Sekerka et al., 2007). "This form of courage is an applied capability of ethical strength and has been described as having the intention to engage in moral action in the course of doing one's job. Demonstrating professional moral courage means that, despite the potential for adverse personal consequences (including negative emotions, risk, difficulty or threat to self) an employee displays fortitude to pursue a moral path when faced with a dilemma" (Sekerka and Godwin, 2010).

Sekerka & Godwin (2010) argues that 'morality is a muscle that can be exercised, trained and toned' hence Sekerka et al. (2011) discusses about the four core personal skills that build PMC as 'moral muscles'. The four moral muscles are emotional signalling, reflective pause, self-regulation and moral preparation. Emotional signalling refers to encryption of internal emotional cues about unethical circumstances. Reflective pause is to taking time out to consider the cause of emotions, identifying ethical issues and discerning options. Self-regulation implies regulating or controlling the timing and the way to act and Moral preparation is practicing a thought to overcome ethical challenges. The 'moral muscles' or 'personal skills' infers that individual's personality is the mediator of PMC.

#### **5. Moral Courage & Personality**

The researchers studied virtues and their relationship with personality (Moberg, 1999;

Cawley et al, 2000). Dispositional variables have an important role in developing PMC. The researchers have used different personality models like Five-Factor Model, type A and B to understand individual's personality type. Moberg (1999) studied the relationship between four cardinal virtues: temperateness, courage, justice, and wisdom and five factor model of Personality. The study shows that courage is positively correlated with extraversion. The person would be able to stand up for the wrongdoings and muster the courage to confront unethical practice, if he/she can candidly express himself/herself. Gibbsetal (1986) studied moral judgments and moral courage to relate it with "Type A" or "Type B" personality and concluded that "Type B" personality "is conducive to socially independent and ethically ideal action (e. g. moral courage)."

Osswald et al. (2008) investigated the effects of different personality variables on moral courage and their experiment proved that people with high openness to experience and empathy have high moral courage whereas moral courage has a very meager and insignificant relation with agreeableness.

The factors like self-assurance, self-efficacy, social competence and empathy are important to exhibit moral courage. (Kuhl, 1986; Hermann and Meyer, 2000; Labuhn et al, 2004). Kuhl (1986) posits that high self-assurance affects the perception of difficulty of the situation and hence facilitates moral courage. Hence, a variety of dispositional variables have been shown to play a role in moral courage.

The moral courage for different professionals has been studied by researchers. Plaisance et al (2004) studied the virtuous actions of the journalists and identified that 'personality traits and idealism are linked with concerns of justice, harm and professional autonomy'. Although values and intentions determine moral courage but Personality has a mediating role.

Although there has been a discernible movement, in both ethical theory (Flanagan & Rorty, 1990; Taylor, 1989) and moral development (Blasi, 2005; Hart, 2005; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004) to draw a tighter connection between moral agency and personality but literature review shows that there is no study conducted to find the relationship between PMC and personality traits. The current study would contribute towards this uncharted field.

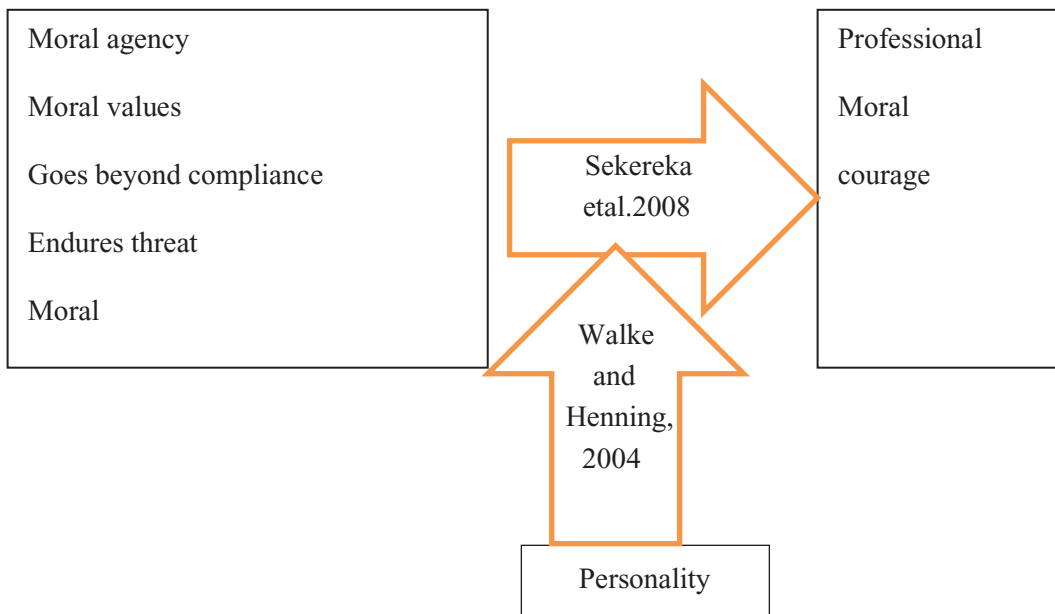
## 6. Conceptual Framework

The available literature argues that values that an individual possess affect the intent to act and finally result in PMC as a behavioural outcome. But individual's personality act as a mediating variable in mobilizing the values to the intent to act and also intention to action in the form of behavioural outcome. The individual cannot exhibit moral courage despite a righteous value system and intent to act thereof, if his/her personality is not supportive enough to be courageous to express and also confront the unethical practices. (Refer figure 1).

## 7. Hypothesis

**On the basis of the literature, following hypotheses are formulated:**

- a. The conceptual model is not a good fit.**
- b. There is no significant difference on PMC between public sector professionals and private sector professionals.**



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework

- c. There is no significant relation between PMC on basis of gender.**
- d. There is no significant relation between PMC and Personality traits.**

## 8. Methodology

### Sample

The research has been conducted in India and the data has been collected from the working professionals. The data is collected from 166 professionals out of whom 73 are males and 93 females. The sample includes professionals like HR Head, Teachers, software developers, consultants, research associates, and marketing manager. The data is collected through a questionnaire which has three sections: Biographic details, Professional Moral Courage scale (Sekereka et al, 2009) and Big-5 Personality scale (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The data has been analyzed through different statistical methods like independent sample t-test, reliability test with cronbach’s alpha, and validity through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The Model fit has been analyzed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

The Cronbach Alpha for all the 59 items is .79 which is considered ‘good’. Also the Cronbach Alpha of each item is more than .7 which shows the reliability of all the items used for survey. KMO is more than 0.5 and the Barlett’s testis also significant which implies that sample is adequate.

### Sec I Biographic Details

Under Biographic details the following details about the participant were taken Name(optional), Age, Work experience, Gender, Name of the organization, designation.

## Sec II Dimensions of PMC: Represented by Five Themes

Sekerekaetal. (2009) developed PMC Scale which has five themes namely moral agency(MA), Multiple values(MV),Endures threat (ET), Goes beyond compliance (GB) and Moral Goals(MG) and there are three statements per theme adding upto 15 statements. Each statement has to be marked on scale of 1-7 where '1' stands for 'Never true' and '7' stands for 'Always true'.

Moral Agency (MA) *refers to the inclination to behave morally and to be determined to act as a moral agent.*

Multiple Values(MV)*is the skill of referring to the different value sets during the process of moral decision making and does not succumb to external pressures.*

Endures Threat (ET) *is to confront the difficulty of raising moral issues with fortitude.*

Goes Beyond Compliance (GB) *means the ability to go beyond compliance to support right, just and appropriate.*

Moral Goal (MG)*is achieving the end through virtuous means.*(Sekereka etal, 2009)

## Sec III Big Five Personality traits

The Big Five Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992) consists of 44 items aggregately measuring five independent dimensions. Extraversion has 8 items, of which 3 are reverse-scored. Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are each represented by 9 items, including 4 reversals, for each scale. Neuroticism has 8 items, with 3 reversals; Openness has 10 items, 2 reversed.

The five factor model of personality focuses upon those behaviors that one expresses while dealing with people, changing circumstances and the environment. The two remaining behavioral dimensions relate to work and depression situations. The five big personality tests measure intensity of one's behaviors in these five areas.

Extraversion (E)*refers to one who is social, talkative, energetic and gregarious.*

Agreeableness (A)*is the trait which relates to the extent to which one agrees with other's viewpoint. People with low agreeableness may challenge status quo.*

Conscientiousness (C)*relates to the one who is organized, dependable and trustworthy.*

Neuroticism (N)*is the abnormality in behavior which is related to anger and depression and leads to emotional stability.*

Openness to Change (O)*is the ability of person to initiate and accept change.*(Sharma, 2014)

## Hypothesis testing

### a. The conceptual model is not a good fit.

The hypothesis is rejected as the conceptual model is a good-fit which is evident from Table 1.

### b. There is no significant difference on PMC between public sector professionals and private sector professionals.

The hypothesis has been accepted as Independent t-test shows that there is no significant difference on PMC between public sector professionals and private sector

professionals (see Table 3).

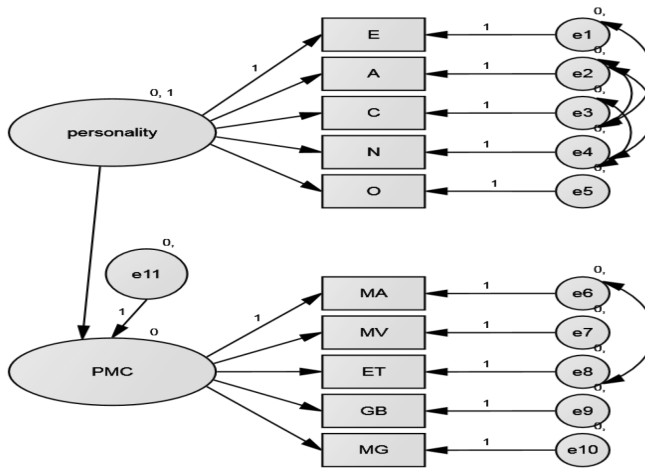
**c. There is no significant relation between PMC on basis of gender.**

The hypothesis has been accepted as Independent t-test shows that there is no significant difference on PMC on basis of gender (see Table 4).

**d. There is no significant relation between PMC and Personality traits.**

The hypothesis is rejected as the correlation between PMC and Personality traits is significant (see Table 5).

**Findings**



**Figure 2: CFA Model**

**Table 1: The CFA results**

Action	SRMR	CMIN/DF	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable limit (Schreiber et al. 2006)	≤ .05/.08	<3	> .90	> .90	> .90	≤ .05 .06-.08
Default model	.16	6.702	.557	.418	.547	.186
Error variances related	.07	1.8	.976	.960	.975	.05

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
E	27.90	4.293
A	32.84	4.655
C	32.65	4.650
N	21.72	4.507
O	34.15	3.981
MA	16.45	2.743
MV	15.28	2.854
ET	14.73	2.947
GB	14.83	2.732
MG	14.83	2.790

Table 3: PMC for Public sector and private sector where 1 stands for Public and 0 stands for Private Sector Company: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper		
MA	Equal variances assumed	1.415	.236	-1.566	164	.119	-.928	.593	-2.098	.242		
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.372	30.115	.180	-.928	.676	-2.309	.453		
MV	Equal variances assumed	8.121	.005	-.983	164	.327	-.609	.619	-1.831	.614		
	Equal variances not assumed			-.720	27.511	.478	-.609	.845	-2.341	1.124		
ET	Equal variances assumed	1.285	.259	-1.015	164	.312	-.649	.639	-1.911	.614		
	Equal variances not assumed			-.868	29.685	.392	-.649	.747	-2.176	.878		
GB	Equal variances assumed	.190	.664	.062	164	.951	.037	.595	-1.137	1.211		
	Equal variances not assumed			.056	30.755	.956	.037	.656	-1.302	1.376		
MG	Equal variances assumed	.476	.491	-.029	164	.977	-.017	.607	-1.216	1.182		
	Equal variances not assumed			-.029	33.624	.977	-.017	.596	-1.228	1.194		
PMC	Equal variances assumed	.002	.962	-.948	164	.344	-2.166	2.284	-6.675	2.343		
	Equal variances not assumed			-.890	31.503	.380	-2.166	2.434	-7.127	2.795		



**Table 4:** Independent Samples Test: PMC and Gender where 1 stands for female and 0 stands for male

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
MA	Equal variances assumed	.036	.849	-.459	162	.647	-.200	.435	-1.059	.660
	Equal variances not assumed			-.458	150.269	.647	-.200	.436	-1.060	.661
MV	Equal variances assumed	.055	.815	2.109	162	.036	.928	.440	.059	1.796
	Equal variances not assumed			2.111	151.215	.036	.928	.440	.059	1.796
ET	Equal variances assumed	3.113	.080	-.544	162	.587	-.254	.466	-1.175	.667
	Equal variances not assumed			-.531	135.101	.596	-.254	.478	-1.199	.691
GB	Equal variances assumed	2.472	.118	.820	162	.413	.352	.429	-.495	1.198
	Equal variances not assumed			.831	157.426	.407	.352	.423	-.484	1.187
MG	Equal variances assumed	2.979	.086	.898	162	.371	.397	.442	-.476	1.271
	Equal variances not assumed			.917	159.832	.361	.397	.433	-.458	1.253
PMC	Equal variances assumed	.621	.432	.736	162	.463	1.223	1.662	-2.059	4.505
	Equal variances not assumed			.730	146.459	.466	1.223	1.674	-2.086	4.532



**Table 6:** ANOVA (Age and PMC)

		<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
E	Between Groups	1065.467	44	24.215	1.484	.048
	Within Groups	1974.991	121	16.322		
	Total	3040.458	165			
A	Between Groups	1168.387	44	26.554	1.335	.111
	Within Groups	2407.541	121	19.897		
	Total	3575.928	165			
C	Between Groups	1108.269	44	25.188	1.239	.181
	Within Groups	2459.466	121	20.326		
	Total	3567.735	165			
N	Between Groups	1043.892	44	23.725	1.244	.177
	Within Groups	2307.361	121	19.069		
	Total	3351.253	165			
O	Between Groups	1118.379	44	25.418	2.055	.001
	Within Groups	1496.856	121	12.371		
	Total	2615.235	165			

In the current research Personality is the independent variable which impacts Professional Moral Courage(PMC). The rectangles indicate the observed variables. The reliability and validity of both scales used to measure two latent variables (Personality and PMC)has been analyzed on the given sample population. Hence, the validity of PMC scale in Indian context is observed.

The cronbach's alpha to test the internal consistency of the scale for all the variables are good at PMC (.80) and Personality(.70) and overall (.80) (Nunnaly,1978;Santos etal, 1998). The construct validity has been tested through Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) by analyzing the scale items of both the scales through Principal Axis factoring and Maximum likelihood. The Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test measure of sampling adequacy was used to examine the appropriateness of Factor Analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity at 95% confidence interval is significant with p-value (Sig.) of .000 < 0.05, supporting the case for Factor Analysis and also reflecting that there may be statistically significant interrelationship between the variables. The KMO statistic of 0.80 is also significant proving the sample adequacy (Kaiser, 1970; Cerny and Kaiser, 1977; Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974; Tabachnick&Fidell,2001).The EFA results show that all the three scales are valid on the given sample (Refer Table 1).The Maximum-Likelihood 's goodness of fit test also supports the construct validity with non-significant value of chi-square with different variables: PMC(factors=5)with chi square (chi-square(61.64) p(.016), and Personality(factor=5) with Chi-square(1093.5) p(.000) but it increased when Maximum likelihood with four factors was tested which was reported as Chi-square (1198.9)p(0.00), hence the five factor model for Personality was accepted.

The conceptual model was then tested through Confirmatory Factor analysis (CFA). The default model was not a good fit with the deviation from the acceptable limits of the

indices like SRMR (.16), CMIN (6.7), IFI(.55), TLI(.41) and CFI(.54). The Modification Indices table reflected the high correlation in the error terms. So, to attain model fit, the correlated measurement errors are set as a “free parameter” and analysed the new measurement model (Schreiber et al, 2006). The error variance across the items could be high because of the similar wordings of the item. Hence, the error variances were fixed, which improvised the model fit with all the indices falling under acceptable limit with SRMR (0.7), CMIN (1.8), IFI(.976), TLI(.96), CFI(.975) and RMSEA (.05), showing the good-fit of the model.

The PMC of the Indian professionals is above average (Mean=76) but not high. The PMC score of 90 and above is considered high and 45 and less is considered very low.

Out of all the PMC variables Moral agency (Mean=16.45) has the highest scoring, followed by multiple values (Mean=15.28), Goes beyond compliance (Mean=14.83) and Moral goal (Mean=14.83), endures threat (Mean=14.73). The mean shows that the PMC variables are above average which can be interpreted as the fact that the professionals have intent to behave morally but they are not very good at actually putting their intent to action. (Mean high for them is above 18 and less is less than 12) (Table2)

The Big5 variables are related to PMC. The Correlation between PMC and the Big 5 variables is positive except neuroticism. Agreeableness (.26), Conscientiousness (.25) and openness(.44) have significant correlation which supports the existing literature (Oswald et al,2008).

## 9. Discussion

Professional Moral Courage needs attention in today’s corporate life, where the corruption is spiralling. But it has been noticed that not all professionals are equally courageous. The current article is the first attempt to identify the PMC of the Indian Professionals. PMC in the surveyed sample is above average (Mean=76 on the maximum of 105), with a scope of improvement. The study shows that most of them have willingness to be a moral agent and an inclination to behave morally. This could be because of the culture and the value system that they imbibe right from the childhood. The Indian professionals are able to take the holistic view of the issue before taking decision and hence are being able to apply multiple value sets to resolve the problem, which also increases their endurance towards threat. Despite having intent and endurance the professionals choose not to go beyond compliance, and find it easier to comply by the rules whether right or wrong, good or bad. This could be because of the job demand. This raises the question: What makes people act differently despite being in the same environment? Rest (1986) claims that ‘overt moral action is a function not only of interpretive and evaluative processes but also of variables involved in the implementation of one’s decision, such as ego strength’, which implies the role of individual’s predisposition and they form the personality type. The study reverberates the findings of previous studies with respect to ‘Openness’. ‘Openness’ is the personality variable which is found to have strong relation with moral courage. An individual high on openness have high PMC and hence, openness could be good predictor of PMC. Openness to new experiences and a broad mind facilitate and adapt with different

ways of life and of persons from other countries and cultures and hence they tend to stand against discrimination and to show moral courage. One of the deviant results of the study is the strong relation of the 'agreeableness' with PMC. Hence, the personality could be a good predictor of the PMC as has been proved through ANOVA. The paper suggests that the interventions to modify personality to make an individual courageous enough to stand up for unethical issues at workplace should be executed. This could probably resolve the issue of corruption and unethical happenings at workplace. The future research can consider the other mediating and moderating variables, which could enhance PMC.

### Conclusion

The Professional Moral Courage is important to arrest the wrong happenings at the workplace. The professionals should have courage to bring to the fore any illegal and unethical practices of the organization and the colleagues. Individual's personality shape decisions to act with moral courage and hence affect the PMC. PMC is important to increase the organizational performance and channelize the organizational resources in right direction. The optimal solution of ethical challenges is possible only if the PMC is high as it develops the capability of an individual to confront value-conflict and hence reduces moral distress. The current study shows that PMC amongst Indian Professionals is not high rather is only average and hence, it is highly recommended to have some organizational interventions to boost PMC amongst the professionals.

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