Workplace courage: Good stories and good social science construct?

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Courage is one of the oldest and most ubiquitous concepts in the world. It has been written about extensively in philosophy, religion, and throughout the humanities. Yet, from a social science perspective, we still know incredibly little about “workplace courage” and, therefore, whether and how it might be a useful concept in organizational research. This is an important gap, as those who teach leadership know that students/practitioners are compelled by a lay belief that courage is linked to leader effectiveness. But, whether this is true, or what we might do to help leaders develop their courage if it is true, cannot meaningfully be addressed until we answer more basic and fundamental questions about workplace courage as a social science construct. In this talk I will therefore quickly review my motivations for studying workplace courage, the very limited extant literature, and then present results from several studies undertaken (using multiple methods and a total sample over 4,000) to begin shedding light on the construct of workplace courage and how this construct might be pursued in future organizational research and leader development programming.