DO WISE LEADERS ENCOURAGE EMPLOYEES TO SPEAK UP?

ABSTRACT

Scientific attention to practical wisdom (i.e., *phronesis*) remains scarce and quantitative empirical research in the domain of leadership is nearly nonexistent. Through a two-wave field study (Portugal), a three-wave field study (US), and a vignette-based experimental study (US and Brazil), we (a) operationalize leader-expressed practical wisdom as a core construct including three behavioral manifestations (reflecting, judging, and acting), and (b) show that leader-expressed practical wisdom predicts employees' speaking up behaviors through their perceived team psychological safety. Our findings may help management scholars and practitioners to better understand how the ancient virtue of practical wisdom can support leaders and their companies to do well and to do well.

Keywords: leader-expressed practical wisdom; virtues; psychological safety; speaking up behaviors

INTRODUCTION

A close look at the root causes of corporate misbehaviors such as VW's "dieselgate" (Ewing, 2017), the Enron debacle (Boje, Roslie, Durant, & Luhman, 2004), the Lehmann Brothers bankruptcy (Stein, 2013), the fall of Theranos (Carreyrou, 2018), and the Wells Fargo scandal (Edmondson, 2018) show a consistent organizational set up: employees who fear to speak up against all-powerful leaders. Consider, for example, VW's "dieselgate", which incubated for years under a corporate culture that allowed leaders to cultivate fear and reduced the employees' perception of psychological safety to speak up against the defeating menace (Ewing, 2017). In contrast, Anne Mulcahy, former CEO of Xerox, who is said to have saved the company from bankruptcy (Carroll, Buchholtz, & Brown, 2018), adopted the opposite view: "Executives must create a workplace where workers feel secure in giving honest, constructive feedback. They have to know that they won't be penalized for speaking up and that their bosses take their suggestions seriously" (Mulcahy, 2005). In a nutshell, while "killing the messenger" is problematic for both the leaders and the organizations, wise leaders nourish employees' speaking up behaviors.

Speaking up represents upward-directed and promotive verbal communication aimed at challenging "the status quo with the intent of improving the situation" (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, p. 853). These behaviors contribute to better organizational learning, better decision-making, greater attention to issues of concern, and the prevention of normalized deviance (Burris, Detert, & Romney, 2013; Cunha, Simpson, Clegg, & Rego, 2018). On the contrary, fear of speaking up may give rise to a dangerous organizational culture (Cunha et al., 2018; Detert & Burris, 2016), where challenging the

status quo or pointing out failures is discouraged, and where disasters are more likely to occur (Giustiniano, Cunha, & Clegg, 2016a, 2016b).

Leaders are especially well-positioned to encourage employees' speaking up behaviors (Edmondson, 2018). In this paper we consider that leaders who express practical wisdom toward employees foster speaking up behaviors because the employees feel psychologically safer. We build the operationalization of the construct of leader-expressed practical wisdom over three meta-components, originally articulated by Thomas Aquinas (2005): (1) *to see* (i.e., awareness and right thinking), (2) *to judge* (i.e., right comprehension and judgement), and (3) *to act* (i.e., right action).

Practical wisdom (i.e., *phronesis*, as articulated by Aristotle; *see* Meyer & Rego, 2019) has been described as a crucial component of outstanding leadership (Yang, 2011) and the *sine qua non* condition of becoming an excellent leader (Bachman, Habisch, & Dierksmeier, 2018), which has in turn triggered important theoretical (Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014) and applied discussions (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2011). Surprisingly, however, empirical research on leaders' practical wisdom is scarce, and quantitative studies are nearly nonexistent. This is understandable from both the theoretical and operationalizing points of view (see below), but also unfortunate. In today's business world, described as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA), the need for wisdom is now higher than ever (Weick, 2001). As it becomes more and more difficult to steer organizations through today's turbulent environment, "excellent judgment, insightfulness and character are needed in leaders" (McKenna, Rooney, & Boal, 2009, p. 177). There is no wisdom in a leader who "kills the messenger" and accepts, or even expects, employees' silence toward difficulties, and complex or problematic issues.

We therefore posit that by expressing practical wisdom, a leader appears (1) receptive to feedback, (2) open to employees' disagreements, and (3) welcoming of speaking up behaviors such as expressed concerns about decisions and actions carried out within the team, including those by the leader. Hence, we hypothesize (Figure 1) that a leader who expresses practical wisdom boosts employees' sense of psychological safety and, therefore, promotes their speaking up behaviors. By associating leader-expressed practical wisdom with employees' speaking up behaviors, we contribute to the understanding of how leaders may (a) prevent individual and organizational wrongdoing, and (b) reap the benefits resulting from employees expressing their opinions by speaking up when they feel that a plan or idea will not work, or by voicing concerns about unwise decisions.

Figure 1 about here

The paper is structured as follows. We start by discussing the meaning and the complex and context-dependent nature of practical wisdom. We debate the theoretical framework that backs up our operationalization of practical wisdom in leaders. Next, we present arguments supporting our hypothesized model, the methods, and the findings from the three empirical studies conducted in

Brazil, Portugal and the US. We finish by presenting ideas for future research and highlighting practical implications.

THE HIGHLY CONTEXT-DEPENDENT NATURE OF PRACTICAL WISDOM

The virtue of practical wisdom has been characterized differently by various authors. Sison (2003, p. 41), for example, defends that practical wisdom "permits one to form correct opinions over concrete, contingent issues". Kane and Patapan (2006, p. 711) defined practical wisdom as "the ability to make sound decisions under complex, ever-changeable conditions". At the core of these and other considerations (e.g., Moberg, 2007; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010) is the assumption that practical wisdom helps to elucidate what should be done in complex, idiosyncratic, and unpredictable situations. Practical wisdom enables individuals to act appropriately in particular cases, namely in situations where rules do not apply. Practical wisdom is, thus, highly context dependent. A decision may be considered wise in a specific situation, and unwise in another (McKenna et al., 2009).

From this perspective, practical wisdom is different from "cautionary self-interest," which considers "prudence" as a fruit of instrumental and self-interest calculations (Smith, 2002). Practical wisdom also differs from the Kantian perspective (Kant, 1948) that defends that impersonal moral laws may be deduced from pure reason, are independent of particular circumstances or possible consequences, and are therefore universally applicable to all rational individuals under any circumstances. Instead of simply following guidelines, instructions, or even deontological norms, practical wisdom is similar to a reflection-action process, which entails three interrelated stages (Naughton, 2017): to "see", to "judge", and to "act" (i.e., to proceed upon one's decision).

A "SLIPPERY CONCEPT"?

The definitional polyphony, the context-dependent nature, and the multifaceted and multidimensional nature of practical wisdom (Bachman et al., 2017; McKenna et al., 2009; Schwartz, 2011; Yang, 2011) make operationalizing and measuring the construct a complicated undertaking. Even some modern philosophers express reticence regarding practical wisdom (Osbeck & Robinson, 2005). Practical wisdom has been considered a "slippery concept" (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012, p. 2), or rather something close to a "sixth sense" (Malan & Kriger, 1998, p. 246), something which is by definition idiosyncratic to each person within specific circumstances, and thus, nearly impossible to "catch" and measure.

While we agree that the context-dependent nature of practical wisdom adds even more complexity to grasping the construct's nature properly, we consider that practical wisdom may be operationalized as a higher-order construct that explains why some leaders tend to act more wisely across different situations and contexts. We acknowledge that because "wisdom is domain-specific"

(McKenna et al., 2009, p. 183), a decision may be judged wise under certain circumstances and unwise under others. But we also defend that it is possible to measure the degree to which a leader *tends* to express wisdom *across different circumstances*.

Hence, this paper is based on the belief that even if practical wisdom is a thorny construct to study and measure, the need to deal with it and the possible positive outcomes of such an investigation will by far outweigh the negative aspects. We handle the challenges discussed above in a pragmatic way. Instead of (a) avoiding to study practical wisdom because of the theoretical and operational difficulties, or (b) trying to embrace all the complexity, multidimensionality, and context-dependent nature of it empirically, we (c) treat and operationalize it from the point of three meta-components articulated by Aquinas (*seeing*, *judging*, and *acting* wisely). Furthermore, considering that leadership is a relational process (Uhl-Bien, 2006), we study these three components from the perspective of their behavioral manifestations.

A THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF PRACTICAL WISDOM

This account of practical wisdom frames this virtue in a way similar to a reflection-action process, which includes three interconnected stages: to see, to judge, and to act (Naughton, 2017). The framework is also consistent with Beabout (2012, p. 419), who considers the interplay between deliberation (i.e., "deliberating about what to do while attending to relevant particularities"), judgment (i.e., "making in each instance a good judgment"), and execution (i.e., "carrying out such decisions in action"). In other words, practical wisdom describes a thoughtful person who has the capacity to gather information, assesses well, and is able to put his/her thoughts into action.

The fact that leadership is a relational phenomenon (Uhl-Bien, 2006), means that what matters most for the impact of leaders on their team members is what the leaders *convey* or express to them and not simply what the leaders are, feel, and believe (Rego et al., 2019a). Hence, we study these three components from the perspective of their behavioral manifestations (cf., Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013) and thus treat expressed practical wisdom as the expression or manifestation of three interrelated abilities. Specifically, we define expressed practical wisdom as follows: *An interpersonal characteristic that emerges in social contexts that connotes a displayed willingness and capacity (a) to explore, study and reflect upon the circumstances and realities that are at stake in decision-making, (b) to understand and judge the complexity of those circumstances and realities, and (c) accordingly, to make wary and sound choices and decisions.*

These three meta-components represent a formative higher-order construct influenced by a wide range of traits, competencies, and skills that have been proposed as characterizing wise individuals (see, e.g., Yang, 2011). Thus, practical wisdom can be understood as a kind of "synthetic skill" that

emerges as the "expression" of an "underlying psychological structure that reflects the integrated functioning of multiple psychological processes in a given context" (Moraitou & Efklides, 2012, p. 850). Expressed practical wisdom is the manifested "outcome of a dynamic interplay of cognitive, affective, and reflective personality characteristics" (Moraitou & Efklides, 2012, p. 850).

HYPOTHESIZED MODEL

The willingness of employees to speak up and to share their thoughts, suggestions, and ideas is crucial to improve decision-making processes. However, many employees are afraid to raise their voice to challenge the status quo and believe that the possible personal harm from raising their voice prevails over the potential benefit of doing so (Detert & Burris, 2016; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). They often prefer to remain silent, a choice with perverse consequences for organizational functioning. Considering their power and influence as both formal authorities and role models, leaders are particularly suited to foster employees' speaking up behaviors (Edmondson, 2018).

Several leadership behaviors and styles predict employees' speaking up, including transformational leadership (Dong, Bartol, & Zhang, 2017), authentic leadership (Hsiung, 2012), humble leadership (Lin, Chen, Herman, Wei, & Ma, 2017), servant leadership (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011), and trust in the leader (Madjar & Ortiz-Walters, 2009). However, researchers have overlooked practical wisdom in leaders as a predictor of employees' speaking up. This paper hypothesizes that leader-expressed practical wisdom promotes employees' speaking up behaviors through the employees' perceptions of team psychological safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Psychological safety represents the employee's "sense of being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). Considering that speaking up behaviors unfold mainly within teams, we focus on perceived *team* psychological safety: the extent to which the employee believes that it is safe for team members to take interpersonal risks within the team. The relationship with the leader is crucial in influencing such a belief because that relationship conveys key information to employees regarding support, consistency, trust, respect, and competence. This information influences an individual's assessment of the risks of speaking up (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Considering that leaders who express practical wisdom are more likely to show that they (a) are more aware of the complexities of situations, (b) open to information that contradicts their perspectives, (c) are willing to take into account the pertinent and concrete circumstances when taking a decision, (d) carefully consider different alternatives and the information available before making important decisions, (e) make decisions based on careful thought, and (e) understand that dissonant views and speaking up behaviors are crucial to nourish their thirst for information and knowledge

(Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010; Weick, 2001; Yang, 2011), it is likely that they encourage the employees' perceptions of team psychological safety. Thus:

H1. *Leader-expressed practical wisdom predicts employees' perceived team psychological safety*.

Because the perceptions of team psychological safety create the sense that taking interpersonal risks is encouraged, employees are more likely to feel that it is safe to speak up and challenge the current way of doing things (Edmondson, 2018; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that employees' perceptions of team psychological safety lead them to adopt more speaking up behaviors. Hence:

H2. *Employees' perceptions of team psychological safety predict their speaking up behaviors*.

Considering that a leader who expresses practical wisdom creates an environment in which employees perceive the team as psychologically safe, and that these perceptions lead them to speak up more, we expect that leader-expressed practical wisdom predicts employees' speaking up behavior through their perceptions of team psychological safety. A wise leader is aware that to foster employees' speaking up behaviors (seen as crucial to nourish his/her thirst for discernment that make him/her more able to make wiser decisions), it is imperative to make employees psychologically safer. Consequently:

H3. *The relationship between leader-expressed practical wisdom and employees' speaking up behaviors is mediated by employees' perceived team psychological safety*.

STUDIES OVERVIEW

We tested our hypothesized model through three studies. Study 1 is a two-wave field study carried out in Portugal. Study 2 is a three-wave field study carried out in the US. Study 3 is a vignette-based experimental study conducted in the US and Brazil, having been designed to establish causal inferences. Aguinis and Bradley (2014, p. 352) explained that such a methodology "enhances experimental realism and also allows researchers to manipulate and control independent variables, thereby simultaneously enhancing both internal and external validity." Variables were measured through six-point scales (1: "the statement does not apply to [me] my team leader at all"; 6: "the statement applies to [me] my team leader completely").

STUDY 1 METHOD

Sample and Procedures

We invited 1200 individuals (working for 134 different organizations) from one author's professional network to participate in the research. They were asked (Time 1, T1) to report their perceptions of leader practical wisdom (and leader integrity, for control). Two to three weeks later

(T2) the same 1200 individuals were invited to report their perceptions of team psychological safety and their own speaking up behaviors (considering anonymity, it was not possible to address only those who participated at T1). One hundred and forty-eight individuals (47.3% female; 49.3% being supervisors; M_{age}: 42.26 years, SD = 9.97) participated in both T1 and T2. Regarding schooling, 5.4% had between 9 and 12 schooling years, 33.1% an undergraduate degree, and 61.5% a master degree or higher. They performed a wide range of jobs (e.g., administrative clerk, maintenance coordinator, data analyst, commercial technician, purchase specialist, HR technician, and financial auditor). No significant difference was found between those who participated in both T1 and T2 versus those who participated only in T1 regarding leader-expressed practical wisdom and leader-expressed integrity.

Measures

Practical wisdom. Twenty-three items for measuring leader-expressed practical wisdom were generated from two sources. Twelve items were collected and adapted from the literature: (1) three items measuring the subcomponent "prudence" included in the HEXACO-60 (Ashton & Lee, 2009); (2) five items measuring the dimension of "prudence" included in the Leadership Virtues Questionnaire (Riggio, Zhu, Reina, & Maroosis, 2010), and; (3) four items measuring the component of "prudence" included in the Virtuous Leadership Questionnaire (Wang & Hackett, 2016). Although these authors use the term "prudence", they actually refer to "*phronesis*" or "wisdom". The other 11 items were worded specifically by the authors. After several iterations between the authors and three scholars with expertise in the field of virtues, seven items were removed because of redundancies, and adjustments were made in the 16 that remained. Exploratory factor analyses further suggest that, after removing five items, the remaining 11 items (see Appendix) represent the three factors mentioned above (see, below, section "Test of the measurement model").

Psychological safety and speaking up behaviors. Considering that teams represent the context in which most speaking up behaviors occur, we measured the employees' perceptions of team psychological safety. Seven items suggested by Edmondson (1999) were used (α = .78). Sample item is: "It is safe to take a risk on this team". Six items adapted from Premeaux and Bedeian (2003) were used to measure employees' speaking up behaviors (α = .83). Sample item is: "I speak up when workplace happenings conflict with my sense of what is appropriate".

Control variables. Employee education was included as control because more educated employees may have more confidence and ability to recognize problems and opportunities, thus having more ideas to voice (e.g., LePine & van Dyne, 1998). They also are probably more employable and therefore experience lower risks when speaking up. Being a supervisor versus not being a supervisor was included as control because individuals with higher positions have more status and power, and more information and latitude regarding acceptable job behaviors (LePine & van Dyne, 1998).

Therefore, they feel psychologically safer and may feel more obligated to engage in voice behaviors. Leader-expressed integrity was included as control because ethical leadership and leader integrity predict employee voice, both directly and through psychological safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Leader-expressed integrity was measured through five items (α = .94) adapted from Mayer and Davis (1999). Sample item is: "Sound principles seem to guide the behavior of my team leader".

Dimensionality of leader-expressed practical wisdom

We explored the dimensionality of the items measuring leader-expressed practical wisdom through an exploratory factor analysis upon the data of individuals who participated only in T1 (n = 149). After an iterative process and having removed five items, a three-factor solution (74.63% of explained variance) was found. One factor (variance explained: 22.64%), which includes three items (α = .79), was labelled "seeing wisely" (i.e., exploring, studying, and reflecting wisely). The factor includes items (all reverse coded) such as the leader "does not carefully consider all the information available before making an important decision". Another factor (variance explained: 34.28%) includes five items (α = .93) and was labelled "judging wisely" (i.e., understanding and deliberating wisely). The factor includes items such as the leader "grasps the complexity of most situations when making judgments". The third factor (variance explained: 17.71%) includes three items (α = .76), and was labelled "acting wisely" (i.e., choosing and acting wisely). A sample item is: the leader "does not allow his/her impulses to govern his/her behavior". This factor represents the capacity to avoid being impulsive and governed by the "feelings of the moment" in the decision-making processes.

Then**,** confirmatory factor analyses (CFA; maximum likelihood estimation), upon the data from individuals who participated in T2, tested the fitness of the three-factor model of leader-expressed practical wisdom. Findings show that this model (*RMSEA*: .06; *GFI*: .93; *CFI* and *IFI*: .98) fits the data better than (a) a two-factor model in which "seeing wisely" and "judging wisely" are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(2)}$ = 34.33; p < .01), (b) a two-factor model in which "judging wisely" and "acting wisely" are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(2)}$ = 50.36; p < .01), and (c) the single-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2_{(3)}$ = 60.04; p < .01). We consider leader-expressed practical wisdom as a core construct (α = .89; *RMSEA*: .06; *GFI*: .93; *CFI* and *IFI*: .98) built from the three factors/indicators (i.e., "seeing wisely", "judging wisely", and "acting wisely"). The three indicators, working together, reflect a decision-making process through which the leader (a) understands and judges the realities involving the decision, (b) studies, reflects, and consults before making decisions, and c) makes heedful choices to act wisely. We use this three-factor model to test the full measurement model.

Full measurement model

CFA tested if data measuring leader-expressed practical wisdom (three indicators), leader-expressed integrity (five items), perceived team psychological safety (seven items), and speaking up

behaviors (six items) represent different constructs. The three-factor model (e.g., *RMSEA*: .08; *GFI*: .81; *CFI* and *IFI*: .91) fits the data significantly better than the following models: (a) leader-expressed practical wisdom and leader-expressed integrity are merged (*RMSEA*: .09; *GFI*: .78; *CFI* and *IFI*: .87; $\Delta\chi^2_{(3)} = 72.09$; $p < .01$), (b) perceived team psychological safety and speak up behaviors are merged (*RMSEA*: .11; *GFI*: .70; *CFI* and *IFI*: .81; $\Delta\chi^2_{(3)} = 183.12$; $p < .01$), and (c) the single factor model (*RMSEA*: .17; *GFI*: .54; *CFI*: .58; *IFI*: .59; $\Delta\chi^2_{(6)} = 612.89$; $p < .01$).

STUDY 1 RESULTS

Leader-expressed practical wisdom correlates positively with perceived team psychological safety ($r = .43$, $p < .01$) and speaking up behaviors ($r = .16$, $p < .05$). Perceived team psychological safety and speaking up behaviors inter-correlate positively ($r = .46$, $p < .01$). To test the mediating effect of leader-expressed practical wisdom on employee speaking up through perceived team psychological safety, we conducted bias-corrected bootstrap analyses (5000 samples) with the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013; model #4). The findings (Table 1) show that (a) leader-expressed practical wisdom predicts perceived team psychological safety, and (b) perceived team psychological safety predicts speaking up behaviors. While the direct effect is not significant (*B*: -.07, $p = .40$; *SE*: .08; *LLCI*: -.23, *ULCI*: .09), the indirect effect is (*B*: .09, *SE*: .04; *LLCI*: .01, *ULCI*: .19).

Table 1 about here

STUDY 1 DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that, as hypothesized, a leader who is perceived by his/her employees as wise leads them to feel psychologically safer and, as a consequence, they adopt more speaking up behaviors. A limitation of the study is that perceived team psychological safety and speaking up behaviors were measured at a single time (a procedure that raises the issue of common method bias). Therefore, in Study 2 we collected data on perceived team psychological safety and speaking up behaviors at two different times. Moreover, to reinforce the unique predictive value of leader-expressed practical wisdom, Study 2 includes not only leader-expressed integrity for control, but also leader-expressed humility and leader-expressed balanced processing of information.

STUDY 2 METHOD

Sample and Procedures

Data were collected in three waves (T1, T2, and T3) from US employees (from a diverse range of industries) through Qualtrics, a third-party online survey administration company (examples of recent data collection using Qualtrics can be found in Rego et al., 2019a, and Yam, Christian, Wei,

Liao, & Nai, 2018). At T1, 360 individuals reported leader-expressed practical wisdom, leader-expressed integrity, leader-expressed humility, and leader-expressed balanced processing of information. Two weeks later (T2), those individuals were invited to report their perceptions of team psychological safety, and 211 individuals participated. Those who had participated in T2 were invited, two weeks later (T3) to report their own speaking up behaviors, and 164 participated. After having adopted several procedures to control the quality of the data (DeSimone, Harms, & DeSimone, 2015), 151 usable questionnaires from individuals who participated in all three waves were considered for analysis. Among these individuals (M_{age}: 50.89 years, *SD* = 13.36), 51.7% were female, and 33.1% were supervisors. Regarding schooling, 30.5% had no college degree, 45.7% had a bachelor degree, and 24.2% a Master degree or higher. No difference was found between the individuals who participated in all three waves versus those who participated in T1 only, regarding leader-expressed wisdom, leader-expressed integrity, leader-expressed humility, and leader-expressed balanced processing.

Measures

Practical wisdom. Eleven items emerging from Study 1 measured leader-expressed practical wisdom. The three-factor model (*RMSEA*: 0.09; *GFI*: .89; *CFI* and *IFI*: .96) fits the data better than models in which (a) the "see" and "judge" dimensions are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 221.84$; $p < .01$), (b) the "judge" and "act" dimensions are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 79.35$; $p < .01$), (c) the "see" and "act" dimensions are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 65.87$; $p < .01$), and (d) a single factor model is considered ($\Delta\chi^2_{(3)} = 65.87$; $p < .01$). These three dimensions are considered as indicators of a second-order factor model ($\alpha = .88$).

Psychological safety and speaking up behaviors. Perceived team psychological safety ($\alpha = .80$) and speaking up behaviors ($\alpha = .79$) were measured with the items used in Study 1.

Control variables. Employee education, being a supervisor versus not being a supervisor, and leader-expressed integrity (five items used in Study 1; $\alpha = .95$) were included for control (see explanation for Study 1). Leader-expressed humility (T1) was also included because humble leaders foster team psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018). This variable was measured through nine items (Owens et al., 2013) representing: (1) willingness to view oneself accurately (sample item: "The team leader actively seeks feedback, even if it is critical"), (2) appreciation of others' strengths ("The team leader takes notice of others' strengths"), and (3) teachability ("The team leader is willing to learn from others"). Following Owens et al. (2013), leader-expressed humility was treated as a core construct ($\alpha = .96$). Leader-expressed balanced processing, a component of authentic leadership (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011), was also included for control because this variable shares commonalities with the "seeing wisely" component of leader-expressed practical wisdom. This variable was measured through

four items (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011; α = .95). Sample item is: "My leader objectively analyzes relevant data before making a decision".

Full measurement model

CFA tested if data measuring leader-expressed practical wisdom, leader-expressed integrity, leader-expressed humility, leader-expressed balanced processing, perceived team psychological safety, and speaking up behaviors represent different constructs. The six-factor model (*RMSEA*: 0.07; *GFI*: .80; *CFI* and *IFI*: .94) fits the data better than models in which (a) leader-expressed practical wisdom and leader-expressed integrity are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(5)}$ = 54.55; p < .01), (b) leader-expressed practical wisdom and leader-expressed humility are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(5)}$ = 35.36; p < .01), (c) leader-expressed practical wisdom and leader-expressed balanced processing are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(5)}$ = 29.97; p < .01), (d) leader-expressed integrity, leader-expressed humility, and leader-expressed balanced processing are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(9)}$ = 133.75; p < .01), (e) the four leadership "styles" are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(12)}$ = 165.10; p < .01), (f) perceived team psychological safety and speaking up behaviors are merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{(5)}$ = 311.890; p < .01), and (g) the four leadership "styles" are merged to represent a single factor, and perceived team psychological safety and speaking up behaviors are merged to represent another single factor ($\Delta\chi^2_{(14)}$ = 479.63; p < .01).

STUDY 2 FINDINGS

Leader-expressed practical wisdom correlates positively with perceived psychological safety (r = .58, p < .01). Perceived team psychological safety and speaking up behaviors inter-correlate positively (r = .26, p < .01), the relationship being stronger for Study 1 (r = .46, p < .01), in which these variables were measured at a single time. To test the mediating effect of leader-expressed practical wisdom on employee speaking up through perceived team psychological safety, we conducted bias-corrected bootstrap analyses (5000 samples) with the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). Considering the very high correlations between leader-expressed integrity, leader-expressed humility, and leader-expressed balanced processing, and the corresponding multicollinearity problems (VIFs higher than 5.0), these variables were controlled separately in different analyses. Multicollinearity ceases to be a concern when leader-expressed practical wisdom is included together with each of those three control variables (VIFs lower than 2.9, 3.1, and 2.9 when integrity, humility, and balanced processing are included, respectively). The findings (Table 2) show that regardless of the leader "style" considered as control: (a) leader-expressed practical wisdom predicts perceived team psychological safety, and (b) perceived team psychological safety predicts speaking up behaviors. While the direct effect is not significant, regardless of the leader-expressed behavior considered as control (integrity: *B*: -.02, p = .78; *SE*: .09; *LLCI*: -.19, *ULCI*: .14; humility: *B*: .02, p = .79; *SE*: .09; *LLCI*: -.15, *ULCI*: .20; balanced processing:

B: .4, *p* = .67; *SE*: .09; *LLCI*: -.13, *ULCI*: .21), the indirect effect is (*B*: .04, *SE*: .03; *LLCI*: .003, *ULCI*: .11; *B*: .06, *SE*: .03; *LLCI*: .02, *ULCI*: .15; *B*: .07, *SE*: .03; *LLCI*: .002, *ULCI*: .15).

Table 2 about here

STUDY 2 DISCUSSION

The findings from Study 2 (methodologically more robust than Study 1) confirm that leader-expressed practical wisdom predicts employees' speaking up behaviors through their perceptions of psychological safety. Being carried out in two distinct cultures, the two studies allow some optimism about the unique value of leader-expressed practical wisdom as a new construct. The correlational nature of the study, however, does not allow us to establish causality. We handle this issue in Study 3.

STUDY 3 METHOD

Sample and Procedures

A sample of 150 full-time US employees (53.3% female; M_{age} = 35.8, *SD*: 8.34) from a diverse range of industries was collected again through Qualtrics. Regarding schooling, 54.6% had no college degree, 28.7% had a bachelor degree, and 16.7% a Master degree. A sample of 83 full-time Brazilian employees (47.0% female; M_{age} = 42.81, *SD*: 9.85) was also collected from members of the professional (non-academic) network of one author (250 individuals were asked to participate). Regarding schooling, 15.7% had an undergraduate degree, 83.1% had a master degree, and 1.2% had a PhD. In our initial contact with the participants, we provided a general overview of the research (e.g., a leadership study), but did not disclose any specific research hypotheses.

Manipulations

Three vignettes/scenarios were created to represent three conditions: low expressed practical wisdom, control, and high expressed practical wisdom. The participants, who were randomly ascribed to one of the scenarios, were asked to read their assigned vignette carefully, and then to imagine themselves working with the leader described (whose name is John; João in Portuguese). To manipulate leader-expressed practical wisdom, we described the leader with items adapted from the measure used in Study 1. For example, in the leader-expressed practical wisdom condition we told participants that before making an important decision, John seeks out information from a variety of sources (so the best decision can be made – studying/reflecting), assesses requirements demanded by the situation (understanding, judging), and makes decisions based on careful analysis and does not allow his impulses to govern his behavior (choosing/acting wisely). We used transactional leadership in the control condition (van Dierendonck, Stamn, Boersma, de Windt, & Alkema, 2014), because

transactional leadership is neutral in terms of practical wisdom. Similar manipulations have been used in other studies (Rego et al., 2017, 2019b).

Measures

Following the manipulations, individuals were asked to report their perceptions of team psychological safety (α = .77 and .72, for the US and the Brazil samples, respectively). Thus, we asked participants to imagine how they would feel and behave if they were to work in the team led by the leader described. Sample item is: "If John were the team leader, it would feel safe to take a risk in his team". Next, individuals were asked to report how likely it is that they would adopt speaking up behaviors (α = .79 and .74) in the team led by John. Sample item is: "If I worked in the team led by John, I would speak up when workplace events conflicted with my sense of what is appropriate".

Manipulation Check

At the end of the study we asked participants about the extent to which they thought John is wise. As expected, participants (US: *n* = 49; Brazil: *n* = 26) in the high leader-expressed practical wisdom condition reported that John has a higher level of wisdom (US: *M* = 5.76, *SD* = 1.16; Brazil: *M* = 5.50, *SD* = 1.45) compared to participants (US: *n* = 52; Brazil: *n* = 30) in the control condition (US: *M* = 4.37, *SD* = 2.06: *t* (99) = 4.14, *p* < .01; Brazil: *M* = 3.73, *SD* = 1.81: *t* (54) = 3.98, *p* < .01) and participants (US: *n* = 49; Brazil: *n* = 27) in the low leader-expressed practical wisdom condition (US: *M* = 2.51, *SD* = 1.93: *t* (96) = 10.09, *p* < .01; Brazil: *M* = 1.89, *SD* = 1.19: *t* (51) = 9.94, *p* < .01). These findings suggest that our manipulation was successful.

STUDY 3 RESULTS

Participants in the high leader-expressed practical wisdom condition reported a higher level of perceived psychological safety (US: *M* = 4.41, *SD* = .82; Brazil: *M* = 4.57, *SD* = .90) compared to participants in the control condition (US: *M* = 3.54, *SD* = .98, *t* (99) = 4.83, *p* < .01; Brazil: *M* = 3.40, *SD* = .89, *t* (54) = 4.82, *p* < .01), and in the low leader-expressed practical wisdom condition (US: *M* = 3.11, *SD* = .69, *t* (96) = 8.43, *p* < .01; Brazil: *M* = 3.00, *SD* = .82, *t* (51) = 6.63, *p* < .01). In addition, a bias-corrected bootstrap analysis (5000 samples) with the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) was carried out (schooling and being a supervisor versus not being a supervisor included as control, see arguments above) to test if the effect of leader-expressed practical wisdom on employee speaking up behaviors was mediated by perceived psychological safety. Because the findings are similar for both samples, they were merged (country included as a dummy variable). The findings (Table 3) suggest that (a) leader-expressed practical wisdom predicts perceived psychological safety and (b) perceived psychological safety predicts speaking up behaviors. While the direct effect is not significant (*B*: -.15, p = .07; *SE*: .08; *LLCI*: -.30, *ULCI*: .02), the indirect effect is (*B*: .35, *SE*: .06; *LLCI*: .24, *ULCI*: .47).

Table 3 about here

STUDY 3 DISCUSSION

The findings are consistent with those found in the two correlational studies and support our hypothesized model. The similarity between the empirical evidence found in two different cultures (US and Brazil) reinforces the validity of the study. Overall, by triangulating the findings of Studies 1 and 2 that have modest internal validity (but higher external validity) with those of this experimental study that does have strong internal validity (although more modest external validity), and adopting procedural remedies (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012) to reduce the risks of common method bias in Studies 1 and 2, we provide compelling support for our hypothesized model.

OVERALL DISCUSSION

As hypothesized, our research suggests that leaders who express practical wisdom toward employees are more likely to create an environment in which employees perceive the team as psychologically safe, and that these perceptions lead them to speak up more. Note that literature has suggested that psychological safety fosters team learning and team performance (Edmondson, 2018; Edmondson & Lei, 2014) and that speaking up behaviors contribute to better team/organizational learning, better decision-making, and the prevention of normalized deviance (Burris et al., 2013; Cunha et al., 2018). Therefore, our research may help scholars and practitioners to better understand how the ancient virtue of practical wisdom can support leaders and their companies to do good and to do well (Meyer, 2015).

To the best of our knowledge this is the first time that leader-expressed practical wisdom has been operationalized and measured. We acknowledge that other models may be adopted (e.g., Ardelt, 2004; Moberg, 2007) and future studies must compare the unique predictive power of our measure regarding other measures operationalized according to those of other models. Our measure is, however, parsimonious (a principle whose observance is crucial for carrying out good and rigorous research), and thus empirically more manageable than frameworks including dozens of qualities representing practical wisdom (e.g., McKenna et al., 2009; Yang, 2011). Our measure is also theoretically rooted. Other researchers may carry out studies building the nomological network of leader-expressed practical wisdom.

Limitations and Future Studies

Our research is not exempt from limitations. First, all data were collected from the same source. Although the risks of common method were handled through collecting data at different moments (Study 1 and Study 2), future studies should consider collecting data about leader-expressed practical wisdom versus perceptions of psychological safety from different employees, and employees'

speaking up behaviors may be measured through data collected from the leader. Second, one dimension of leader-expressed practical wisdom is measured through items worded in a negative sense. Future studies may include some items worded positively. Third, future studies may be carried out at the team level to explore if different perceptions within the team about the leader-expressed practical wisdom weaken the influence of the leader in the team (Rego et al., 2017, 2019a). Fourth, although the vignette-experimental study has internal validity, the fictitious nature of the scenarios may not be realistic enough to evoke the realities that employees experience when working with a concrete leader under real circumstances. Therefore, future studies could adopt more realistic experiments (Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2019). Fifth, our hypothesized model includes only a mediating and a dependent variable. Future studies could include other mediators (e.g., team knowledge sharing, individual and team reflexivity, individual and team learning) and dependent variables (e.g., individual and team creativity and effectiveness) resulting from the leader-expressed practical wisdom. Sixth, future studies may investigate how leader-expressed practical wisdom interacts with other leader-expressed virtues (e.g., courage, humility) in predicting leadership effectiveness. Finally, future studies may investigate boundary conditions of leader-expressed practical wisdom. For example, is practical wisdom in leaders more relevant within VUCA and stressful contexts?

CONCLUSION

Companies usually try to avoid corporate misbehavior by introducing rules and regulations, and employees typically have to agree to abide by those policies, procedures, and regulations. However, the succession of some recent business scandals shows that rules and regulations are of limited value. Our research indicates that by cultivating and expressing practical wisdom, leaders can effectively create the right work environment (i.e. psychologically safe) to foster employees' speaking up behavior, thereby helping companies to stop misbehavior before it starts. Team members, organizations, and even society as a whole may reap economic, social, and moral benefits from selecting wise leaders and helping leaders to express higher levels of practical wisdom.

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APPENDIX

Items measuring leader-expressed practical wisdom (Study 1)

Practical wisdom: exploring, studying, reflecting ("to see" wisely)

- My team leader does not carefully consider all the information available before making an important decision. (R) (2)
- My team leader does not seek out information from a variety of sources so the best decision can be made. (R) (2)
- My team leader takes decisions without considering the concrete realities that each decision entails. (R)

Practical wisdom: understanding, deliberating ("to judge" wisely)

- My team leader efficiently and effectively assesses requirements demanded by any given situation. (1)
- My team leader grasps the complexity of most situations when making judgments. (2)
- My team leader usually seeks out and understands the pertaining facts before taking a decision.
- My team leader is a rational and deep thinker.
- My team leader usually correctly interprets complex realities.

Practical wisdom: choosing, acting (to "act" wisely)

- My team leader makes decisions based on the feeling of the moment rather than on careful thought. (R) (3)
- My team leader makes a lot of mistakes because he/she doesn't think before he/she acts. (R) (3)
- My team leader does not allow his/her impulses to govern his/her behavior. (3)

Notes: (R) Reverse coded; (1) Adapted from Wang & Hackett (2016); (2) Adapted from Riggio et al. (2010); (3) Adapted from Ashton & Lee (2009).

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Hypothesized model

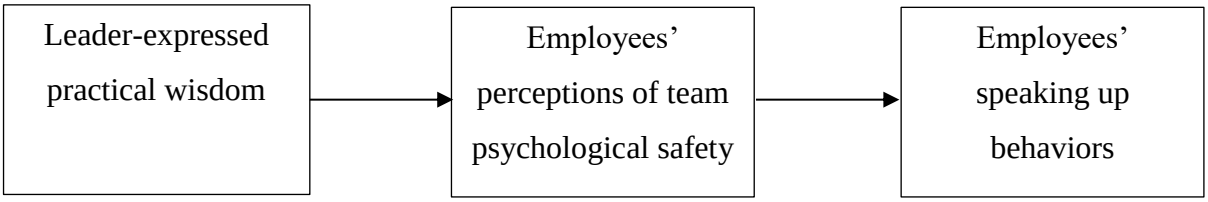

Table 1. Bootstrap regression analysis to predict speaking up behaviors through perceived team psychological safety (Study 1)

	Perceived team psychological safety			Speaking up behaviors		
	B	*SE*	Bias corrected 95% CI [LLCI, ULCI]	*B*	*SE*	Bias corrected 95% CI [LLCI, ULCI]
Employee education (a)	-.14	.08	[-.30, .01]	.06	.07	[-.08, .20]
Being vs. not being a supervisor (b)	.12	.12	[-.12, .37]	.40**	.11	[.19, .62]
Leader-expressed integrity	.13	.08	[-.02, .28]	.07	.07	[-.06, .20]
Leader-expressed practical wisdom	.23*	.09	[.05, .41]	-.07	.08	[-.23, .09]
Perceived team psychological safety	-	-	-	.38**	.07	[.24, .53]
F	11.24**			11.65**		
R^2	.24			.29		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

(a) 1: 12 schooling years or less; 2: undergraduate degree; 3: Master degree; (4) PhD

(b) Being vs. not being a supervisor (1 vs. 0)

Table 2. Bootstrap regression analysis to predict speaking up behaviors through team psychological safety (Study 2; 1st/2nd/3rd line: integrity/humility/balanced-processing controlled)

	Perceived team psych. safety			Speaking up behaviors		
	B	*SE*	[LLCI, ULCI]	*B*	*SE*	[LLCI, ULCI]
Employee education	-.02	.07	[-.15, .12]	.11	.07	[-.04, .26]
(a)	-.02	.07	[-.17, .12]	.12	.07	[-.03, .27]
	-.02	.07	[-.16, .13]	.12	.07	[-.03, .27]
Being vs. not being a	.27*	.13	[.01, .52]	.11	.14	[-.17, .38]
supervisor (1 vs. 0)	.30*	.13	[.04, .56]	.11	.14	[-.16, .38]
	.31*	.13	[.05, .57]	.11	.14	[-.16, .38]
Leader-expressed	.26**	.07	[.12, .39]	-.01	.08	[-.16, .14]
integrity	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-	-
Leader-expressed	-	-	-	-	-	-
humility	.15*	.07	[.003, .29]	-.07	.08	[-.22, .08]
	-	-	-	-	-	-
Leader-expressed	-	-	-	-	-	-
balanced processing	-	-	-	-	-	-
	.11	.07	[-.03, .26]	-.08	.07	[-.23, .06]
Leader-expressed	.18*	.08	[.02, .33]	-.02	.08	[-.19, .14]
practical wisdom	.27**	.08	[.11, .43]	.02	.09	[-.15, .20]
	.30**	.08	[.14, .46]	.04	.09	[-.14, .21]
Perceived team	-	-	-	.22**	.09	[.05, .40]
psychological safety				.23**	.09	[.06, .40]
				.23**	.08	[.07, .40]
F	25.90**			2.88*		
	22.04**			3.04*		
	21.45**			3.15**		
R^2	.42			.09		
	.38			.10		
	.37			.10		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

(a) 1: no college degree; 2: bachelor degree; 3: Master degree; (4) PhD

Table 3. Bootstrap regression analysis to predict speaking up behaviors through perceived team psychological safety – Study 3

	Perceived team psychological safety			Speaking up behaviors		
	B	SE	Bias corrected 95% CI	B	SE	Bias corrected 95% CI
Country (a)	.01	.14	[-.28, .29]	-.26	.14	[-.52, .01]
Employee education (b)	-.02	.04	[-.11, .06]	.10	.04	[.02, .18]
Being vs. not being a supervisor (1 vs. 0)	-.10	.19	[-.48, .28]	.05	.18	[-.32, .41]
Leader-expressed practical wisdom (c)	.70**	.07	[.56, .84]	-.15	.08	[-.30, .02]
Perceived team psychological safety	-	-	-	.50**	.06	[.37, .62]
F	24.57**			15.86**		
R^2	.30			.26		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

(a) Being versus not being from US (1 vs. 0)

(b) 1: 12 schooling years or less (no college degree, for the US sample); 2: undergraduate degree (bachelor degree); 3: Master degree; (4) PhD

(c) -1, 0, and 1, for low PW condition, control condition, and high PW condition, respectively.