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## The Impact of Wisdom and Courage on Presencing and Absencing at Work: The Mediating Role of Mindfulness

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The Impact of Wisdom and Courage on Presencing and Absencing at Work: The Mediating Role of Mindfulness

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### Abstract

**Background and Objective:** Wisdom and courage are positive psychological capacities. Presencing and absencing at work are novel employee attitudes and behaviours. The objective of this paper is to explore the impact of wisdom and courage on presencing and absencing at work, while also considering possible mediation through mindfulness.

**Methods:** This paper hypothesises that wisdom has a positive impact on presencing and a negative impact on absencing, while courage has a negative impact on presencing and a positive impact on absencing. We expect mindfulness mediates the aforementioned relationships. An analysis is performed on a sample of 274 employees in Slovenia by applying structural equation modelling.

**Results:** The test results have shown that wisdom has a negative impact on absencing at work, while courage has a positive impact on absencing at work. These impacts are mediated through mindfulness. The major weakness of this research design is a low sample size and the weak construct reliability of wisdom and courage.

**Conclusions:** Wisdom and courage have opposing effects on presencing and absencing at work. Mindfulness is an important mediator.

**Contribution/value:** This research contributes to positive organisational behaviour by showing that positive psychological capacities (i.e., wisdom, courage, mindfulness) are important predictors of employee presencing and absencing.

**Keywords:** Positive organisational behaviour, Human virtues, Presencing, Absencing, Mindfulness

**JEL classification:** I31, M59

### Introduction

In order to understand what brings well-being, positive psychology researches positive emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive individual traits are mostly studied through a framework of human strengths and virtues developed by psychological processes (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The human virtues are wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. They are universal, abstract and conceptual, and difficult to measure (Wright & Goodstein, 2007). Character strengths are the psychological ingredients that define the virtues. They offer a level of specificity that has a rich psychological content and can be measured.

Luthans (2002) brought the positive psychology movement to the organisational behaviour field. Positive organisational behaviour studies “positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (p. 59). Psychological capacities such as self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism construct psychological capital (Luthans, Youssef et al., 2007). Psychological capital significantly influences employees’ attitudes, behaviours, and work performance.

Human virtues and character strengths represent another important category of psychological capacities, which also influences employees’ attitudes, behaviours, and work performance. They impact job

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satisfaction (Harzer & Ruch, 2015; Peterson et al., 2010), person-job fit (Huber et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2010), work-related stress (Harzer & Ruch, 2015), work engagement (Huber et al., 2020), ethical decision-making (Crossan et al., 2013), well-being and flourishing (Park & Peterson, 2006), and leader-member relationship (Thun & Kevin Kelloway, 2011). They also predict organisational performance (Cameron et al., 2004).

Research has shown that among all human virtues and character strengths, wisdom and courage have the greatest impact on employees' attitudes, behaviours, and work performance (Huber et al., 2020; Konorti & Eng, 2008; Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1998). Thus Luthans (2002) said wisdom and courage should be studied in the domain of positive organisational behaviour to understand their effects. This is a sparse, but emerging line of research. Wisdom improves work engagement (Huber et al., 2020), transformational leadership (Konorti & Eng, 2008), and creativity as well as reduces stress (Avey et al., 2012). Courage also improves transformational leadership (Konorti & Eng, 2008), increases work meaningfulness and well-being (Deeg & May, 2022), and improves coping behaviour (Magnano et al., 2017) and work performance (Magnano et al., 2022).

Presencing and absencing at work are novel job-related attitudes and behaviours (Scharmer, 2009; Senge et al., 2005). The concept of presencing is broader than the concept of work engagement, though it includes elements of work engagement. Presencing can be treated as a job-related attitude and behaviour that facilitates awareness-based organisational change (Koenig et al., 2021). Awareness-based organisational change transforms the awareness of employees in order to implement positive changes such as inclusiveness, justice, and equality (Koenig et al., 2022). The concept of presencing was developed by scholars at the MIT Organizational Learning Center, who later founded the Presencing Institute ([www.presencing.org](http://www.presencing.org)) to promote presencing and facilitate a global movement, U-theory, through the U-lab community with the purpose of creating more innovative, inclusive, just, and equitable organisations and society (<https://www.u-school.org/>). Research has shown that presencing has a positive impact on moral conduct, well-being, thriving, work engagement, organisational commitment, innovativeness, and creativity (Peschl & Fundneider, 2014; Scharmer, 2009; Scharmer & Yukelson, 2015).

However, there is no research on antecedents of presencing and absencing at work, for instance on how psychological capacities such as wisdom and courage determine presencing and absencing behaviour at work. The purpose of our study is to

address this research gap. Specifically, our research question is how wisdom and courage impact presencing and absencing at work.

Mindfulness is an important psychological capacity as well (Luthans et al., 2015). Mindfulness refers to a state of consciousness in which employees attend to ongoing events and experiences at work in a receptive and non-judgmental way (Hülshager et al., 2013). In the domain of organisational behaviour, mindfulness is a well-researched phenomenon (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Sutcliffe et al., 2016). In general, mindfulness amplifies positive attitudes and reduces negative attitudes (Kiken & Shook, 2011), which is important for presencing and absencing at work. How mindful one will be is also determined by wisdom (Cook-Greuter, 2005) and courage (Sisti et al., 2014). Thus, we also examine whether the impact of wisdom and courage on presencing and absencing is mediated through mindfulness.

The paper contributes to the field of organisational development (OD). Presencing and absencing at work are elements of awareness-based organisational change, which is a novel territory in the OD field promoted by the Presencing Institute. The paper also contributes to positive organisational behaviour by relating wisdom and courage to mindfulness and how this combination impacts job-related attitudes (in our case presencing and absencing at work). The paper contributes to the field of HRM by providing guidelines on how to accommodate hiring processes and employee development processes if the organisation would like to promote presencing with the purpose of facilitating awareness-based organisational change.

In the next section, we first present the concepts of presencing/absencing at work and delineate them from work engagement/disengagement. Then we examine the literature on wisdom, courage, and mindfulness to propose a conceptual framework. The second part presents the research methodology we used to test the hypotheses. In the third section, we present the results. In the last section, we discuss the results as well as present the implications and limitations of the research.

## 1 Theoretical framework and literature review

### 1.1 Presencing and absencing vs work engagement and disengagement

Presencing/absencing and work engagement/disengagement refer to properties of human functioning at work. However, they are also distinctively different concepts in terms of focus: interior vs exterior and stability vs change.

Presencing describes human functioning at work from the perspective of the quality of attention. Scharmer (2009) identifies four field structures of attention: (1) *I-in-me* denotes perception based on habitual ways of seeing and thinking; (2) *I-in-it* denotes perception with an open mind; (3) *I-in-you* denotes perception from another person's perspective with an open mind and open heart; and (4) *I-in-we* and *I-in-now* denotes perceptions characterised by what wants to emerge when attending with an open mind, open heart, and open will.

An open mind, open heart, and open will are attitudinal indicators of presencing. An open mind means stepping back from habitual ways of knowing and looking for new explanations, views, understandings. Open heart means acting with compassion, empathy, and the willingness to emotionally connect with others. Open will means acting from courage, taking risks, and being willing to let go of old beliefs, mindsets, identities and let come novel insights and identities. In the process of presencing, the person needs to move their attention from fields (1) and (2) to fields (3) and (4). At attentional level (4), the person functions with an open mind, open heart, and open will and becomes capable of "'pre-sensing' and bringing into presence . . . [their] highest future potential" (Senge et al., 2005, p. 220).

Presencing is about connecting the smaller (egoic, localised) self to the bigger (generative, floating true, preferred, higher, best) self (Senge et al., 2005). This happens at attentional level (4). When the connection is established, "identification with the 'localized self' diminishes, and a broader and more generative sense of self begins to arise" (Senge et al., 2005, p. 100). This connection causes an identity shift. Furthermore, the locus of awareness moves from narrow (ego) awareness to expanded (eco) awareness (Scharmer, 2009). In ego awareness, "the world is perceived as a set of things that are separate from myself," while in eco-awareness, perception is expanded also into an invisible social field that is "sensing and seeing itself and continues to emerge – through me" (Scharmer, 2009, p. xxxv).

Thus, presencing is about relating to the invisible social field (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Senge et al., 2005). The social field consists of social exchanges between people (leader–members, co-workers, and stakeholders). It can be split into a visible and an invisible part. The visible social field can be observed (what people do and say). The invisible social field is constructed from the quality of awareness brought to social exchanges between people. High-quality social exchanges are characterised by people operating from an expanded (eco) awareness. Such social exchanges become generative in nature because "people move

from defending their viewpoints to inquiring into the viewpoints of others and speaking from seeing themselves as part of the system" (Scharmer, 2009, p. 272).

Presencing is not only a state but also a process that unfolds on an individual and collective level (Scharmer, 2009; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). On an individual level, presencing consists of seeing, sensing, presencing in the narrow sense, crystallising, prototyping, and performing. On a collective level, presencing is a set of collective activities: co-initiating, co-sensing, co-presencing, co-creating, and co-evolving. The outcome of presencing is positive personal, relational, and institutional inversion and transformation (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013).

Presencing is associated with work engagement. Work engagement has many definitions, yet most studies apply Kahn's early definition of work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Work engagement is "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). The core attributes of work engagement are: working out of the "preferred self", connection with others, and personal presence. These are also attributes of Scharmer's presencing, yet he explains them from perspective of awareness. The preferred self, connection with others, and personal presence would look distinctively different if practised from ego-awareness rather than eco-awareness. Kahn's "preferred self," though engaged, could still be an egoic, smaller self with a fixed identity. For Scharmer's presencing to occur, the "preferred self" should be expressed in terms of the bigger (generative, higher, best) Self and floating identity. Kahn's connection to others is not qualified in terms of the quality of awareness one brings to social exchanges. For presencing to occur, a person should apply high-quality (eco) awareness to connections with others. Kahn emphasised a personal presence that is physical, cognitive, and emotional in nature. Physical presence is characterised by vigour, cognitive presence by dedication, and emotional presence by absorption (Bakker et al., 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002). In a state of presencing, cognitive presence is characterised by an open mind, emotional presence by an open heart, and physical presence by an open will. Furthermore, presencing leads to personal change and transformation, which is not an attribute of work engagement. To sum up, Scharmer's concept of presencing explains the interior dimension of work engagement from the perspective of awareness. Furthermore, Scharmer emphasises that the outcome of presencing is an identity shift and awareness-based change.

Scharmer (2009) also studied the phenomena of “absencing,” though less thoroughly. While presencing is a constructive process of change, absencing is a deconstructive process of change. While presencing is about operating from an expanded (eco) awareness and generative Self, a connection with an invisible social field, and an identity shift, absencing refers to a process of operating from a narrow (ego) awareness with a narrow self, fixed identity, established beliefs and habits of thought, a disconnection from different others (and invisible social field), and a tendency to protect one’s identity by amplifying prejudice, ignorance, hate, and fear.

The attitudinal indicators of absencing are a closed mind, closed heart, and closed will. A closed mind is indicated by ignoring discrepant information and acting from old habits of thought. A closed heart is indicated by a disconnect from different others, blaming others, and being angry at them. A closed will is indicated by taking action out of fear, a lack of courage, and a lack of risk-taking.

Absencing as a process on an individual level consists of downloading and denial (not seeing), de-sensing, absencing in a narrow sense, deluding, and destroying (Scharmer, 2009; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). “Downloading” means reverting to the habitual patterns of the past. “Denial” means not seeing what is going on, blinding oneself, and being unable to recognise anything new (a closed mind). “De-sensing” means that the person is not able to connect and empathise with others (a closed heart). The person is stuck inside the boundaries of their own physical, mental, and emotional body. Absencing in a narrow sense means that the person shuts down the capacity to relate to others, to the invisible social field, and to the future that wants to emerge through a person. One is also incapable of connecting to the bigger (generative, higher, best) Self. “Deluding” means the person gets stuck in one intention, one identity, one worldview, one truth, rejecting anything that does not fit these concepts. This eventually leads to the destruction of oneself and others. “Absencing” is the destructive pattern of change that is distinct from a constructive pattern of change through presencing.

Absencing and work disengagement are even less similar than presencing and work engagement are. Work disengagement is “the simultaneous withdrawal and defense of a person’s preferred self in behaviors that promote a lack of connections, physical, cognitive, and emotional absence, and passive, incomplete role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p. 701). Core attributes of work disengagement: withdrawal and defence of the “preferred self,” a lack of connection to others, and personal (physical, cognitive, and emotional) absence. Kahn does not discuss the

qualities of these attributes of work disengagement from the perspective of awareness, while Scharmer’s concept of absencing provides exactly that. In the absencing mode, there is no withdrawal from the preferred self, but the person functions out of a narrow egoic self and fixed identity that the person wants to preserve. In the absencing mode, a lack of connection means the person is incapable of social cognition (recognise how others think and feel, what their motives are, and what the interest that drives that thinking is) and incapable of connecting with the invisible social field. Personal (physical, cognitive, and emotional) absence in Scharmer’s narrow terms means acting with a closed mind, a closed heart, and a closed will with the aim of protecting established beliefs, worldviews, ideas, identities, truths, etc. Absencing explains the interior dimension of work disengagement, yet it is broader than work disengagement because it also leads to strong work engagement with the aim of protecting established beliefs, ideas, and identities.

Both presencing and absencing are state-like concepts. When working, a person can be in a slight absencing mode in the morning, then shifts to the presencing mode in the afternoon. On average, over time, a person can have a stronger tendency for presencing than absencing (or vice versa), but both phenomena together can better describe their job-related attitudes than only one phenomenon. When presencing and absencing are performed on an individual level, we refer to inner presencing and inner absencing.

## 1.2 Wisdom

Wisdom is known as “wise reasoning” (Kross & Grossmann, 2012). It includes judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct, and soundness of judgment in the choice of means and ends (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). It represents all cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and application of knowledge (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and lead to good judgment and advice about important but uncertain matters of life (Sternberg, 1985). As such, it represents intellectual humility, compromise, and consideration of other perspectives and broader contexts (Grossmann, 2017). It also includes recognition of one’s limits of knowledge, awareness of context, perspective-taking, and the attempt to integrate different perspectives together (Basseches, 1984). Wisdom is also a practice that reflects the “developmental process by which individuals increase in self-knowledge, self-integration, nonattachment, self-transcendence, and compassion, as well as a deeper understanding of life. This practice involves better self-regulation and ethical choices, resulting in



a greater good for oneself and others” (Trowbridge, 2011, p. 150).

Wisdom is an attribute of the post-conventional stages of adult development (Cook-Greuter, 2005; Hy & Loevinger, 1996; Kegan, 1982, 1994). Adults in post-conventional stages hold deep knowledge of subject matters; recognise that objects and events have different meanings for different observers; are capable of reflective judgment, especially when dealing with ethical dilemmas, change, and uncertainties; are aware of their own limits to knowledge, consciously scrutinise their own beliefs and assumptions; take multiple perspectives and integrate them across time and space; are aware that identities are socially constructed, flexible, and subject to change; and focus on being and feeling and on the present instead of the past and future (Cook-Greuter, 2005; Hy & Loevinger, 1996). They also apply cross-paradigmatic dialectical thinking to handle paradoxes and contradictions; and are capable of self-reflection, self-authorship, self-regulation, and self-formation (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

Laboratory experiments have shown that adults who occupy conventional stages of adult development (i.e., students) can also become capable of wise reasoning when they hold an ego-decentring mindset (Grossmann, 2017; Kross & Grossmann, 2012) and when they include social environment as part of the self (Grossmann et al., 2012). When the sense of self is disconnected, independent, and distinct from one’s social environment, the person practises less wise reasoning (i.e., exhibits less intellectual humility, is less willing to recognise uncertainty and change, less willing to consider others’ perspectives and search for a compromise) (Grossmann et al., 2012).

Researchers thus argue that how a person relates to the social context represents an important predictor of wise reasoning (Baltes & Staudinger, 1996; Jonas et al., 2014). A person can relate to the social context with a first-person perspective or a third-person, observer perspective (Grossmann, 2017). Experiments have confirmed that when adopting a first-person viewpoint in a problematic social situation, the person is more likely to process information in a hot fashion, focusing only on the few core features of the social context, and thus reasoning more unwisely (Kross et al., 2005). In contrast, a person is capable of wise reasoning when the problematic social situation is viewed from the third person. The person then processes information in a cold manner and is able to access a wider range of meaning structures, possibilities, and solutions for a given situation.

People ranking highly in wisdom can more frequently operate from Scharmer’s eco-awareness (take multiple perspectives into account), have high-

quality social exchanges, have a more inclusive identity, and are thus more prone to presencing. People ranking low in wisdom more frequently operate from ego-awareness (a function from an existing habit of thought), have poorer-quality social exchanges, have a more fixed identity, and are thus more prone to operating from absencing. We propose the following relationship:

**H1.** *Wisdom is positively associated with inner presencing.*

**H2.** *Wisdom is negatively associated with inner absencing.*

According to Kabat-Zinn (2013), mindfulness is the practice of purposely bringing one’s attention to the present-moment experience with an attitude of non-judgment, curiosity, and appreciation. Research has shown that wisdom positively relates to mindfulness among post-conventional adults (Cook-Greuter, 2005; Miller & Cook-Greuter, 2000) and younger adults (Beaumont, 2011). Mindful individuals sense the heightened state of involvement and wakefulness in the experience (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). A mindful person shifts perspective to a higher level of awareness from which one re-perceives what is already known differently (Carmody et al., 2009; Shapiro et al., 2006), has less affective biases (Davis & Thompson, 2015), more empathy, better quality relationships (Jones et al., 2019), and experiences more authenticity (Leroy et al., 2013). Due to these qualities of mindfulness, we propose that mindfulness increases the tendency of a person for inner presencing (operating from expanded eco-awareness, and a generative sense of self with an open mind, open heart, and open will), and reduces the tendency for inner absencing (operating from a narrow ego-awareness and a narrow sense of self with a closed mind, closed heart, and closed will). Part of the total effect of wisdom on inner presencing flows through mindfulness, with a positive indirect effect. At the same time, part of the total effect of wisdom on inner absencing also flows through mindfulness, with a negative indirect effect. We propose the following relationship:

**H3.** *Wisdom has a positive indirect effect on inner presencing through mindfulness.*

**H4.** *Wisdom has a negative indirect effect on inner absencing through mindfulness.*

### 1.3 Courage

Courage is an emotional strength that involves “the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal” (Peterson &

Seligman, 2004, p. 143). Courage is perceived through the actions a person takes. A courageous action consists of four essential components: (1) a morally worthy goal, (2) a deliberate, intentional action, (3) perceived risks, threats, or obstacles, and (4) the presence of personal fear (Koerner, 2014; Rate et al., 2007). A courageous act refers to acting according to a moral principle or ideal. A courageous act is a deliberately chosen effort (including a deliberate choice not to act). An act is only considered courageous if it involves significant personal risks, threats, and obstacles. A courageous act is accompanied by the feeling of fear.

An act of courage is determined by personal characteristics. The determinants of the personal characteristics of courage are: quality of the state of mind (Walton, 1986), moral sensitivity (Jordan, 2007), moral decision-making, and self-regulation (Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007). An act of courage is not only determined by personal characteristics but is also contextually bound. The person will more likely engage in courageous acts in the presence of others (Woodard, 2004).

Koerner (2014) conceptualised courage as a form of identity work. At work, people engaged in four types of identity work: (1) preserving an identity by courageously withstanding situations that cannot be changed or controlled (endurance); (2) repairing an identity following an error by admitting fault and accepting responsibility (reaction); (3) strengthening, revising, asserting, or reaffirming identity by opposing the powerful individual person (opposition); and (4) creating a new identity by seizing a risky opportunity (creation). The first three lead to the reaffirmation of an existing sense of self, while the last one leads to the creation of a new sense of self.

According to Scharmer (2009), the outcome of presencing is identity change. The outcome of absencing is the strengthening of an existing identity. A courageous person who engages in courageous acts in order to preserve, repair, or reaffirm an existing sense of self has a more strongly expressed tendency to engage in absencing. Such a person preserves their own identity by sticking to their own view of what an ethical goal in a given situation is, what the right action is, functions from ego-awareness, does not take opposite perspectives into account, and despite facing opposition, obstacles, or threats, follows their own direction while experiencing an emotion of fear. A courageous person who engages in courageous acts with expanded (eco) awareness takes the opposite perspective into account, senses cues in the invisible social field, infers from this information what the right action is and then executes it, and is more likely to experience an identity shift. According to Koerner's (2014) study, people at work more frequently engage

in courageous actions for the purpose of preserving existing identities, and much less frequently to create a new identity. Therefore, we propose that courage has a positive relationship with absencing and a negative one with presencing.

**H5.** *Courage is negatively associated with inner presencing.*

**H6.** *Courage is positively associated with inner absencing.*

In the contextual behavioural theory of mindfulness, courage is the core building block of mindfulness (Sisti et al., 2014). This theory promotes mindfulness through interventions in which people need to engage in courageous acts such as disclosing intimate information about themselves to each other (Kohlenberg & Tsai, 1991). They claim that such a courageous act makes a person more mindful. Thus, courage has a positive relationship with mindfulness. The core attribute of courage is the capacity to act in the presence of fear. Research has shown that mindfulness eliminates the emotion of fear (Kummar, 2018). It builds an accepting relationship with one's internal cognitive, emotional, and physical experience in times of intense fear (Greeson & Brantley, 2009). By accepting one's fears, a mindful person becomes more empathic and capable of considering fresh perspectives (Block-Lerner et al., 2007). Mindfulness fosters a renewed awareness of, and connection with, one's own identity, usually leading to a more flexible sense of self (Atkins & Styles, 2015). Because of mindfulness, a courageous person has a more pronounced tendency to operate from the state of presencing and less from the state of absencing. Part of the total effect of courage on inner presencing flows through mindfulness, with a positive indirect effect. At the same time, part of the total effect of courage on inner absencing also flows through mindfulness, with a negative indirect effect. We propose the following relationships:

**H7.** *There is a positive indirect effect of courage on inner presencing through mindfulness.*

**H8.** *There is a negative indirect effect of courage on inner absencing through mindfulness.*

All eight proposed hypotheses are captured in the conceptual model in Fig. 1.

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Sample

The present study utilised primary data gathered from employees in Slovenia. Participation in

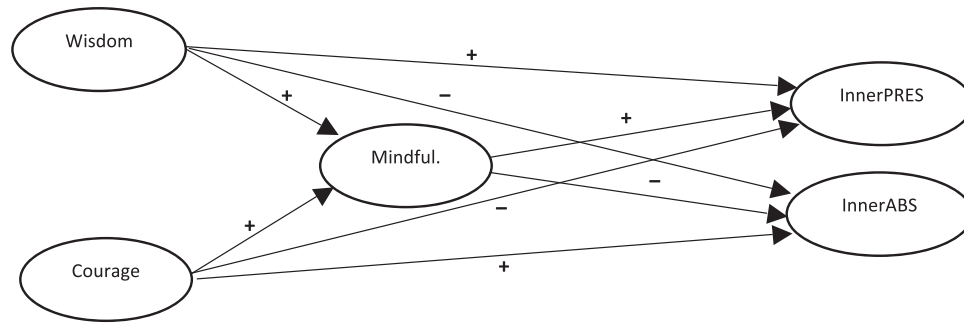


Fig. 1. Conceptual model with hypotheses.

the study was voluntary. The respondents provided the information via an online survey. We used convenience sampling. We approached part-time post-graduate students who attended the course on Building Leadership Capacity, which extensively covered Schärmer's U-theory and the concepts of presencing and absencing. We asked them to fill in a questionnaire and share it among their co-workers and peers. Anonymity was guaranteed as no identification information was required. Respondents received no compensation for participation. The study was done without the help of research assistants. In the data collection, 1021 respondents opened the questionnaire, out of which 274 provided responses with no missing values. The survey was conducted in the periods of July 2019–December 2019 and September 2022–October 2022.

In terms of gender distribution, 46.3% of the respondents were male, and 53.7% were female. In terms of their position in their organisation, 4.2% were senior managers, 11% were middle managers, and 15.6% were lower managers; 17.6% were frontline workers, 15.5% were professional support, and 36.1% occupied other positions in the organisation. In terms of work experience, 34.4% had less than three years of work experience, 40.6% had more than three years and less than 10 years of work experience, 24.3% had more than 10 and less than 30 years of work experience, and 3.7% had more than 30 years of work experience. In terms of age, 13.6% were under 25 years old, 37.4% were between 25 and 30 years old, 32.8% were between 30 and 40 years old, 11.2% were between 40 and 50 years old, and 5.0% were above 50 years old.

The sample met the assumption of multivariate normality, homoscedasticity, and positive definiteness. To test for collinearity among indicators, we calculated the variance inflation factor (VIF), which was below the threshold level of 10 for all indicators. The required minimum sample size calculated

from the number of indicators per latent variable ( $r$ ) represented by the formula  $n > 50r^2 - 450r + 1100$  (Westland, 2010) is 100 units. The required minimum sample size of at least five observations per parameter yielded 255 cases (Bentler & Chou, 1987 in Wolf et al., 2013). The required minimum sample size that accounts for the number of indicators per latent variable, effect size, statistical power and probability level (Soper, 2023) is 150 cases to detect a 0.3 effect size with 0.80 statistical power at 0.5 significance. The sample of 274 units meets these criteria.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2 Measure

The questionnaire consisted of theoretically established measures. All scales used in the study were five-point Likert-type scales. Below, we provide details on each scale.

### 2.2.1 Wisdom

The "wisdom" measure was adopted by Park et al. (2006), using five items representing character strengths. We asked "How often do you practice the following at work?": creativity ("I think of novel and productive ways to do things."), curiosity ("I take an interest in all ongoing experiences."), judgment, open-mindedness ("I think things through and examine them from every point of view."), a love of learning ("I master new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge."), and perspective ("I am able to provide wise counsel to others."). The scale asked respondents to assign a score of 1 – not important, 2 – slightly important, 3 – moderately important, 4 – important, and 5 – very important. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is 0.773.

### 2.2.2 Courage

The "courage" measure was adopted by Park et al. (2006), using four items representing character strengths. We asked "How often do you practice the

<sup>1</sup> Note: We kept only five indicators with factor loadings above 0.7 for the construct of mindfulness.



following at work?": honesty ("I speak the truth and present myself in a genuine way."), bravery ("I do not shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain."), persistence ("I finish what I start."), and zest ("I approach life with excitement and energy."). The scale asked respondents to assign a score of 1 – not important, 2 – slightly important, 3 – moderately important, 4 – important, and 5 – very important. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is 0.739.

### 2.2.3 Mindfulness

The "mindfulness" measure was adopted by [Feldman et al. \(2007\)](#) using a 12-item scale of mindfulness in general daily experience at work (Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale – Revised). The scale was designed to address attention, present-focus, awareness, and acceptance/non-judgment of thoughts and feelings at work. We asked "How often do you experience the following in your working settings: I am aware of what thoughts are passing through my mind. I try to distract myself when I feel unpleasant emotions ..." (sample items). The answers range between 1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, and 5 – very often. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is 0.825.

### 2.2.4 Inner presencing (InnerPRES)

The questions measuring "inner presencing" were: "How often in your own behaviour at work do you operate ... with curiosity, an open mind, and looking for new explanations, views, understandings (item 1); with compassion, empathy, an open heart, and the willingness to emotionally connect with others (item 2); and from courage, taking risks, being willing to let go (of old beliefs, mindsets) and let come novel insights (item 3)." These are three core attitudinal indicators of presencing suggested by [Scharmer \(2009\)](#). The Likert scale ranged between 1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, and 5 – very often. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is 0.773.

### 2.2.5 Inner absencing (InnerABS)

The questions measuring "inner absencing" were: "How often in your own behaviour at work do you operate ... with ignorance, a closed mind, acting from old habits of thought (item 1); from anger, blaming other, and greed (item 2); and from fear, a lack of courage, and a lack of risk-taking (item 3)." These are three core attitudinal indicators of inner absencing suggested by [Scharmer \(2009\)](#). The Likert scale ranged between 1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, and 5 – very often. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is 0.790.

## 2.3 Analytical procedure

For the data analysis, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to test the model as a whole

by following a two-step procedure ([Anderson & Gerbing, 1988](#)). First, we inspected the measurement model, which assumed a confirmatory approach to the data analysis and considered the measurement error. It helped us determine the links between the observed and latent variables and verify the validity and reliability of the scales. Second, we tested the structural model to examine the hypotheses. Aside from this, the model as a whole was evaluated with established goodness-of-fit indices. The effects were estimated using the Maximum Likelihood Estimation Method. The analyses were performed with IBM SPSS 28, including the IBM SPSS AMOS 28 Graphics software.

## 3 Results

As a pre-step in testing the measurement model, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis to examine the proposed measurement scales, which had been adapted to the survey. All scales were unidimensional, and all factor loadings were greater than 0.5. All scales for constructs remained intact, except for mindfulness, where in the final model we selected only five items that loaded above 0.7. We proceeded with a confirmatory factor analysis, where the fit indices of the CFA measurement model showed a satisfactory fit. Four out of six criteria indicated a satisfactory fit: the Chi-square was 238.321 with  $df = 160$  and  $P = 0.001$ , the value of RMSEA was 0.052 [90% CI = 0.038, 0.066], GFI = 0.892, with a value greater than 0.8 suggesting an acceptable fit ([Forza & Filippini, 1998](#); [Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1998](#)); TLI = 0.905, with a value greater than 0.9 suggesting an acceptable fit ([Forza & Filippini, 1998](#)), CFI = 0.903, with a value greater than 0.9 suggesting a good fit ([Hair et al., 2010](#)); and NFI = 0.762, with a value greater than 0.8 suggesting an acceptable fit ([Forza & Filippini, 1998](#)).

In the analysis, InnerPRES denotes inner presencing at work, while InnerABS denotes inner absencing at work. To test the convergent validity of the proposed constructs, we calculated the average variance extracted (AVE), which should exceed 0.5, and the composite reliability (CR), which should exceed 0.7. The AVE and CR values for studied constructs are summarised in [Table 1](#). For Mindfulness, InnerPRE, and InnerABS, AVE and CR met the required threshold. For Wisdom and Courage, AVE and CR were below the required threshold level, and convergent validity was not established. These results suggest the measures for wisdom and courage are not empirically reliable. To test the discriminant validity, we compared the squared correlations and AVE scores for each of the pairwise constructs. Discriminant validity was established for the majority of pairwise

Table 1. Convergent validity.

	Wisdom	Courage	Mindfulness	InnerPRES	InnerABS
AVE	0.371	0.394	0.544	0.514	0.538
CR	0.743	0.717	0.797	0.775	0.772
Conv. validity	Not established	Not established	Established	Established	Established

Table 2. Discriminant validity.

	Correl.	Squared correl.	AVE1	AVE2	Discriminant validity
Courage ↔ Wisdom	0.698	0.487	0.394	0.371	Not established
Wisdom ↔ InnerABS	−0.177	0.031	0.371	0.538	Established
Wisdom ↔ Mindfulness	0.226	0.051	0.371	0.544	Established
Courage ↔ InnerABS	−0.111	0.012	0.394	0.538	Established
Courage ↔ InnerPRES	−0.064	0.004	0.394	0.514	Established
Wisdom ↔ InnerPRES	0.07	0.005	0.371	0.514	Established
Courage ↔ Mindfulness	0.458	0.210	0.394	0.544	Established
InnerABS ↔ InnerPRES	−0.666	0.444	0.538	0.514	Established
InnerABS ↔ Mindfulness	−0.134	0.018	0.538	0.544	Established
InnerPRES ↔ Mindfulness	0.060	0.004	0.514	0.544	Established

Table 3. Correlation matrix.

	Wisdom	Courage	Mindfulness	InnerPRES	InnerABS
Wisdom	1				
Courage	0.904	1			
Mindfulness	0.259	0.557	1		
InnerPRES	0.095	−0.135	0.056	1	
InnerABS	−0.192	−0.016	−0.141	−0.643	1

constructs (Table 2), except for the relationship between courage and wisdom.

The correlation matrix among constructs is given in Table 3. There is a strong correlation between independent variables (courage and wisdom), which implies the problem of collinearity among these constructs (though the VIF test did not confirm multicollinearity among indicators of these constructs).

In the second step, we assessed the structural equation model. The structural model provided a good fit: Chi-square was 173.093 with  $df = 156$  and  $P = 0.166$ , the value of RMSEA was 0.025 [90% CI = 0.001, 0.044], GFI = 0.919, with a value greater than 0.8 suggesting an acceptable fit (Forza & Filippini, 1998; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1998); TLI = 0.974, with a value greater than 0.9 suggesting an acceptable fit (Forza & Filippini, 1998), CFI = 0.979, with a value greater than 0.9 suggesting a good fit (Hair et al., 2010); and NFI = 0.827, with a value greater than 0.8 suggesting an acceptable fit (Forza & Filippini, 1998). Herman's single factor test showed that 19.102% of variance was explained by a single factor, which does not indicate a common method bias problem (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, the common latent factor

approach (Serrano Archimi et al., 2018) revealed that four indicators were inflated by common method bias: open-mindedness, creativity, persistency, and zest (see Appendix, Table A1). The results of structural equation modelling are reported in Fig. 2.

To test for direct and indirect effects, we calculated a 95% confidence interval based on the 5000 bootstrap samples. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 4. The results reveal that the total effect of wisdom on inner presencing is positive ( $b = 0.280$ ;  $p = 0.015$ ). The direct effect of wisdom on inner presencing, in the presence of a mediator, was found positive but insignificant ( $b = 4.033$ ;  $p = 0.069$ ). Hence, hypothesis 1 is not supported. The results reveal a negative and significant indirect effect of wisdom on inner presencing through mindfulness ( $b = -2.295$ ;  $p = 0.009$ )<sup>2</sup>. Hypothesis 3 proposed a positive and significant indirect effect, hence hypothesis 3 is not supported. The results revealed indirect-only mediation.

The results reveal that the total effect of wisdom on inner absencing is negative ( $b = -6.462$ ;  $p = 0.034$ ). The direct effect of wisdom on inner absencing, in the presence of a mediator, was found negative and

<sup>2</sup> Note: Hayes (2018, p. 116) illustrates that there can also be a significant indirect effect (mediation) if only one of the paths (a or b) is significant.

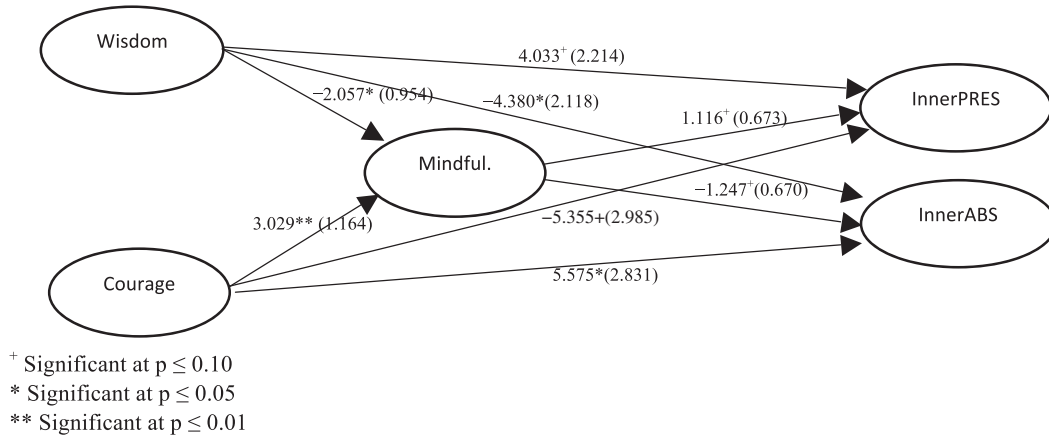


Fig. 2. Model results (path coefficients with standard errors).

Table 4. Direct and indirect effects.

Relationship	Direct effect (P-value)	Indirect effect	95% confidence interval for indirect effect		P-value	Conclusion
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Wisdom ⇒ Mindfulness ⇒ Inner Presencing	4.033 (0.069)	-2.295	-18.189	-0.196	0.009	Indirect-only mediation
Wisdom ⇒ Mindfulness ⇒ Inner Absencing	-4.380 (0.039)	2.565	0.196	22.380	0.012	Competitive mediation
Courage ⇒ Mindfulness ⇒ Inner Presencing	-5.355 (0.073)	3.379	0.410	25.082	0.005	Indirect-only mediation
Courage ⇒ Mindfulness ⇒ Inner Absencing	5.575 (0.049)	-3.778	-28.655	0.437	0.006	Competitive mediation

significant ( $b = -4.380$ ;  $p = 0.039$ ). Hence, hypothesis 2 is supported. The results reveal a positive and significant indirect effect of wisdom on inner absencing through mindfulness ( $b = 2.565$ ;  $p = 0.012$ ). Hypothesis 4 proposed a negative and significant indirect effect, so hypothesis 4 is not supported. The results revealed competitive mediation, while we had hypothesised complementary mediation.

The results reveal that the total effect of courage on inner presencing is negative ( $b = -8.375$ ;  $p = 0.013$ ). The direct effect of courage on inner presencing, in the presence of a mediator, was found negative and insignificant ( $b = -5.355$ ;  $p = 0.073$ ). So, hypothesis 5 is not supported. The results reveal a positive and significant indirect effect of courage on inner presencing through mindfulness ( $b = 3.379$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ), hence hypothesis 7 is supported. The results confirmed competitive mediation.

The results reveal that the total effect of courage on inner absencing is negative ( $b = -0.070$ ;  $p = 0.067$ ). The direct effect of courage on inner absencing, in the presence of a mediator, was found positive and significant ( $b = 5.575$ ;  $p = 0.049$ ). Hence, hypothesis 6 is supported. The results reveal a negative and significant indirect effect of courage on inner absencing through mindfulness ( $b = -3.778$ ;  $p = 0.006$ ). We proposed that hypothesis 8 would have a negative and

significant indirect effect, hence hypothesis 8 is supported. The results revealed competitive mediation.

### 4 Discussion

Presencing and absencing are novel concepts describing the interior dimension of work engagement. The effect of employees presencing is in an awareness-based system change characterised by more inclusive, just, and equitable organisations (Koenig et al., 2022). Absencing of employees leads to destructive organisational dynamics based on exclusion, unfairness, and deconstruction (Scharmer, 2009). There is a need to better understand what constructs may predict the presencing and absencing of employees. Wisdom and courage are positive psychological capacities that lead to desired employee attitudes, behaviours, and performance outcomes (Luthans, 2002). We hypothesised that wisdom and courage increase inner presencing and reduce inner absencing at work, while the effect is mediated by mindfulness. Below, we discuss the findings of this empirical study and enumerate their theoretical and practical implications.

The first two hypotheses examined the impact of wisdom on inner presencing and inner absencing at work. Our results show that wisdom has a

negative impact on inner absencing, but not on inner presencing. We can conclude that wisdom is a possible explanatory variable of absencing at work (more wisdom, less absencing at work). The literature on positive organisational behaviour has studied mostly the effects of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, subjective well-being, and emotional intelligence on employee attitudes, behaviours, and performance outcomes (Luthans, 2002; Luthans, Avolio et al., 2007) and only lately included wisdom. Research has shown that wisdom has a positive effect on creativity and stress reduction (Avey et al., 2012) and work engagement (Huber et al., 2020). We contribute to this line of research by showing that one possible effect of wisdom is also less absencing at work.

The third hypothesis expected that the relationship between wisdom and inner presencing is positively mediated through mindfulness. The results have shown that the mediation effect is negative and significant, and so the hypothesis is not supported. The fourth hypothesis proposed that the relationship between wisdom and inner absencing is negatively mediated through mindfulness. The indirect effect of wisdom on inner absencing through mindfulness has been found positive and significant, so this hypothesis is not supported either. Further analysis of the mediation effect has shown that the impact of wisdom on mindfulness is negative, while the impact of mindfulness on presencing is positive (and negative for absencing). The positive impact of mindfulness on wisdom has been suggested by many wisdom traditions and confirmed by some studies (Karunamuni & Weerasekera, 2019; Verhaeghen, 2020), the reverse impact of wisdom on mindfulness is less researched. Based on Cook-Greuter's study (2005) on post-conventional adults and Beaumont's study (2011) on younger adults, which found that wisdom increased mindfulness, we expected a positive impact. However, our findings show that wisdom can also decrease the tendency for mindfulness. Hy and Loevinger's (1996) research on the development of ego structure shows that as adults progress through conventional stages of adult development, they improve reflective judgment and perspective-taking (elements of wisdom) but lack the capacity for deep introspection and mindfulness (self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence). From an adult development perspective, there is a reverse relationship between wisdom and mindfulness for conventional adults.

Hypothesis 5 and 6 examined the impact of courage on inner presencing and inner absencing at work. The results show that courage has a positive impact on inner absencing. This is in line with Koerner's

(2014) study, which shows that the majority of people engage in courageous acts at work to preserve, repair, or reaffirm their existing identity, while according to Scharmer (2009), any identity protection action increases the tendency for absencing. Luthans et al. (2006) initially stated that despite intuitive appeal, courage may not be welcomed in the workplace, but later proposed that courage should be studied as well (Luthans et al., 2008). Recent research has shown that exercising courage in one's work leads to positive work meaningfulness and individual eudaimonic life well-being (Deeg & May, 2022), increased coping behaviour (Magnano et al., 2017), and improved working performance (Magnano et al., 2022). Our research has shown that courage can also have a negative effect such as more absencing at work, and as such should be treated with caution.

The next two hypotheses expected that the relationship between courage and inner presencing is positively mediated by mindfulness (hypothesis 7), while the relationship between courage and inner absencing is negatively mediated (hypothesis 8). Both hypotheses are supported. Mindfulness is treated as important psychological capital in organisations (Luthans et al., 2015). Recent research has confirmed that courage combined with mindfulness and other elements of psychological capital (hope, optimism, self-efficacy) improves resilience and reduces psychological distress (anxiety, depression, stress) (Chiesi et al., 2022). We contribute to the field of positive organisational scholarship by showing that mindfulness reduces the negative effects of courage at work (i.e., less absencing) and fosters positive effects (i.e., more presencing). In order to increase the positive effects and reduce the negative effects, we propose that courage should be combined with mindfulness. Any developmental initiative that aims to improve courage without mindfulness should be treated with caution. In the psychotherapeutic domain, group interventions that develop mindfulness through courageous sharing of personal risks and threats are frequently practised (Sisti et al., 2014). Such an approach not only improves mindfulness, but also improves social connectedness (Kohlenberg et al., 2015).

The results presented in this study hold various implications for those involved in the global U-theory movement (universities, governments, NGOs, corporations, freelancers, and start-ups engaged in U-labs around the world; U-labs had more than 57,000 members in 2022; <https://www.u-school.org/community/members>), HR managers and corporate leaders who would like to introduce a presencing practice for the purpose of organisational transformation, and OD practitioners interested in facilitating



awareness-based system change. The first implication is that in the employee hiring process, selection criteria could also include an assessment of wisdom and courage. A candidate high on wisdom and low on courage will have a greater tendency to engage in presencing at work; thus, the selection should give preference to candidates who score higher on wisdom and lower on courage. The second recommendation is to devise employee developmental programmes that aim to develop wisdom. An effective wisdom programme should develop four skills: mastery, openness, reflectivity, and emotion regulation (Glück & Bluck, 2013). The third implication is that programmes that aim to develop and foster mindfulness can be a double-edged sword if the organisation wants to foster presencing among employees. Employees high on wisdom do not need mindfulness.

There are numerous limitations to this study. The first weakness is the small sample size and use of cross-sectional data. The sample size of 274 units provides 5.4 observations per estimated parameter, which is below the threshold level of 10, making the sample size insufficient (Nunnally, 1967, as cited in Westland, 2010). The sample is female-skewed. Next, wisdom and courage exhibit problems with convergent and discriminant validity. The behavioural indicators for inner presencing and inner absencing are not assessed by an empirically validated instrument, and items are triple-barrelled. Furthermore, there is a collinearity problem between wisdom and courage (predictor variable). The high degree of multicollinearity among predictor variables results in standardised path coefficients greater than  $+/-1$  (Deegan, 1978; Jöreskog, 1999). Multicollinearity also causes a suppression effect (one predictor suppresses an irrelevant variance in another predictor and thus enhances the ability of this predictor to predict a dependent variable) (Akinwande et al., 2015; Beckstead, 2012).

Subsequent studies should consider the aforementioned weaknesses and address them. Our first suggestions would be to measure the absencing and presencing from more indicators that are not triple-barrelled, and then validate the instrument empirically. Another promising line of research would be the qualitative in-depth study of forms of absencing and presencing at work and contextual factors that influence these attitudes and behaviours. In terms of the study's analytical procedure, we have followed Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach; however, we have not been able to cross-validate the data by splitting the sample in half, as the sample was not large enough. This shortcoming may be reconsidered in future studies, where a larger sample could be drawn.

## 5 Conclusion

The paper draws on positive organisational behaviour by studying the impact of wisdom and courage on presencing and absencing at work. Presencing and absencing are important phenomena to be studied because they can facilitate awareness-based organisational change. Wisdom has a negative impact on absencing at work. Courage has a positive effect on absencing at work. The impact of wisdom and courage on presencing and absencing at work is mediated through mindfulness. Mindfulness negatively mediates the impact of wisdom on presencing at work and positively mediates the impact of wisdom on absencing at work. Mindfulness mediates the impact of courage on presencing at work positively and the impact of courage on absencing at work negatively. Mindfulness should be promoted among courageous employees but not among those who are high on wisdom.

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## Appendix

Table A1. Assessment of common method bias by common latent factor approach.

	Stand. $\lambda$ (model without common method factor)	Stand. $\lambda$ (model with common method factor)	Difference
Perspective ← Wisdom	0.483	0.286	0.197
Learing ← Wisdom	0.6	0.25	0.35
<b>Openmind ← Wisdom</b>	<b>0.504</b>	<b>0.288</b>	<b>0.216</b>
Curiosity ← Wisdom	0.43	0.295	0.135
<b>Creativity ← Wisdom</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.292</b>	<b>0.228</b>
Honesty ← Courage	0.483	0.334	0.149
Bravery ← Courage	0.39	0.17	0.22
<b>Persistency ← Courage</b>	<b>0.427</b>	<b>0.214</b>	<b>0.213</b>
<b>Zest ← Courage</b>	<b>0.491</b>	<b>0.259</b>	<b>0.232</b>
CAMSr10 ← Mindfulness	0.704	0.611	0.093
CAMSr9 ← Mindfulness	0.48	0.427	0.053
CAMSr8 ← Mindfulness	0.697	0.592	0.105
CAMSr11 ← Mindfulness	0.738	0.652	0.086
CAMSr12 ← Mindfulness	0.616	0.536	0.08
IP3 ← InnerPRES	0.514	0.437	0.077
IP2 ← InnerPRES	0.664	0.534	0.13
IP1 ← InnerPRES	0.752	0.649	0.103
IA3 ← InnerABS	0.524	0.49	0.034
IA2 ← InnerABS	0.808	0.764	0.044
IA1 ← InnerABS	0.832	0.708	0.124