

The Employee Rational and Irrational Beliefs Scale: Preliminary Validation

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Abstract

One to five of the adult working population was found to present some type of mental health problem at any given time, with documented impact of their employability, employee performance and quality of life. Irrational and rational cognitions/beliefs represent evaluative cognitive structures, consistently associated with distress and psychopathology; in contrast, rational thinking is considered important for emotional resiliency. We conducted a study in order to preliminary validate the Employee Rational and Irrational Beliefs Scale (E-RIBS), a new self-report measure for identifying irrational and rational cognitions relevant for employees. Results show a three-factor solution for the E-RIBS, with an irrational beliefs subscale, a global evaluation subscale, and a rational beliefs subscale. The E-RIBS displayed adequate internal consistencies and concurrent validity.

Keywords

rational and irrational cognitions/beliefs, employees cognitions, emotional distress, workplace emotion-regulation

Introduction

Psychological disorders, often conceptualized in the literature in a broad sense as “distress disorders” (see Watson, 2005), are representing the third biggest health problem worldwide, after cardiovascular disease and cancer (Alonso et al., 2004). It is known that 14% of the working population of Europe has reported a lifetime history of any mood disorder (Alonso et al.,

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2004), and 20% of the adult working population was found to present some type of mental health problem at any given time (Lahtinen & Lehtinen, 1999). Based on the data from the European Agency for Safety and Health Work (Greiner, 2005), stress is affecting at least 28% of the employees in the European Union. Employability, employee performance, interpersonal relations, rates of illness, absenteeism, errors, accidents and staff turnover are all affected by employees' psychological distress/mental health status (Simon, Barber, Birnbaum, et al., 2001). However, since we are referring to a competitive and stressful environment, workplace is currently one of the most insensitive context to mental health concerns (WHO, 2000).

One of the main approaches investigating the mechanisms of employee distress and psychopathology is the cognitive-behavioral theory (CBT; and Rational Emotive and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, REBT; Ellis, 1962). The CBT/REBT is underlying the importance of the cognitive component, namely employee's emotion-regulation abilities, expressed in their attitudes, thoughts, perceptions, and cognitions referring to self, others and world as mechanisms for work distress and psychopathology. According to the ABC model of REBT (Ellis & Bernard, 2006), people's reactions (Cs; behavioral and emotional) are not determined by the activating events (As), but by their beliefs about the activating event (Bs). Irrational beliefs/cognitions (IBs) represent unrealistic and absolutistic demands self, of others, or of life. The REBT model disentangles four categories of IBs (see DiGiuseppe, 1996; DiGiuseppe et al., 2012): demandingness (DEM; e.g., "My boss must respect me at all times"), awfulizing/catastrophizing (AWF; e.g., "It is awful if my boss does not respect me"), frustration intolerance (FI; e.g., "I cannot stand when my boss does not respect me"), and global evaluations (GE) of human worth (i.e., self – "I am worthless if my colleagues do not respect me." , others – My boss is worthless if s/he does not respect me." and/or life – Life is bad if my boss does not respect me."). In turn, the corresponding rational beliefs/cognitions (RBs) are expressed as flexible preferences rather than demands (PRE; e.g., "I would very much like for my boss to respect me at all times, and I am making efforts to do get this, but I accept that s/he might not respect me at all times"); badness (BAD; e.g., "If my boss disrespects me, it is bad but not awful") rather than awfulizing; frustration tolerance (FT; e.g., "I do not like when my boss does not respect me, but I can stand it") rather than frustration intolerance; and unconditional acceptance (UA; e.g., "I can

accept myself as a valuable human being even when I am not respected by others”), rather than global evaluation/self-downing (GE/SD).

It was found that some of the cognitions employees may behold are irrational, in that they are self-defeating, and are important mechanisms for work distress (Harris, Davies, & Dryden, 2006; Sporrle, Welpel, & Forsterling, 2006). In addition to the general cognitions that people endorse (i.e., life in general), it has been documented that they can have specific cognitions about themselves in different roles (i.e., about their parenting role, job role; Gavita, 2011) which can be important for their specific reactions. For example, recently emotional labor has become recognized as an important workplace requirement for many public service workers, with underestimated effects on employees' wellbeing and performance (Mastracci, Newman, & Guy, 2006). However, the progress of knowledge on emotion-regulation strategies in the work field is suffering by the use of outdated psychological measurements, borrowing or introducing different, often contradictory, constructs for emotion-regulation and lacking the specific knowledge produced by fundamental research. There is currently a lack of relevant predictive measures in organizations in order to screen the mechanisms identified in the literature as being relevant for general mental health.

Particularly, the field lacks specific scales for employees focused on evaluative/appraisal processes (rational and irrational beliefs), based on modern developments in cognitive science (see David, 2003). Taking into account the increased level of distress in work context (see Alonso et al., 2004), it becomes essential to delineate the mechanisms of work distress both from a fundamental (e.g., mechanisms involved) and translational (how the mechanisms could be translated in psychological interventional packages; i.e., cognitive-behavioral coaching) research paradigm.

Development of the Employee Rational and Irrational Beliefs Scale

Employee Rational and Irrational Beliefs Scale (E-RIBS) was developed by Gavita, DiGiuseppe, & David, & based on the view of IBs and RBs as non-polar opposites (DiGiuseppe, Leaf, Exner, & Robin, 1988).

We started from the general version of RIBS (RIBS-GF; Rational and Irrational Beliefs Scale-General Format; see Montgomery, David, DiLorenzo, & Schnur, 2007) and generated an equal number of statements reflecting ra-

tional and irrational processes applied to the workplace domain. The original RIBS-GF is an 8-item scale based on Walen et al.'s (Walen, DiGiuseppe, & Dryden, 1992) discussion of Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). The items were constructed to reflect the processes measured by the Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (ABS-II; DiGiuseppe et al., 1988), respectively: (1) the four irrational beliefs (DEM, AWF, LFT, and GE) and (2) four rational beliefs (PRE, BAD, FT and unconditional acceptance of self, others and life rather than global evaluation - non-GE). Thus, based on the rational and irrational phrasing, four principal processes were designed for each of the content themes of the scale, as follows: Demandingness vs. Preference (DEM/PRE), Low Frustration Tolerance vs. Frustration Tolerance (LFT/FT), Awfulizing vs. Badness (AWF/BAD), and Global Evaluation vs. Unconditional Acceptance (GE/UA).

The statements of the P-RIBS were designed to reflect evaluative processes in the three content areas found relevant for managers: (1) Appreciation/Rewards (Part 1 of the Scale); (2) Achievement (Part 2 of the scale); and (3) Comfort. Special attention was given to the wording of items, in order to avoid being contaminated by emotions. Three pools (of 10 items each) were generated, one for each content domain, each pool having 5 IBs items, and 5 RBs items; GE and its rational counterparts had two items, one referring to employees (other) and one referring to the manager (self). Each of the items was assembled in a 5-point Likert format, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4).

Based on the recent priming methodologies (i.e., Articulated Thoughts in Simulated Situations; ATSS– see Davidson et al., 2003), a guided imagery instruction was included (one for each part) in order to prime/access employees' evaluative beliefs: "Please think about a last time when your work was not correctly appreciated or adequately recognized or rewarded. Try and recall the thoughts that you have had in such situations and rate how much do the items below represent the thoughts that you have had in such situations". An instruction was included explaining the difference between "preferences" and "demands", in order to help make the distinction between rational and irrational items, as follows: "When faced with adverse situations, some employees tend to think that situation absolutely must be the way they want (in terms of absolute must). In the same situation, other people think in preferential terms and accept the situation, even if they want very much that those situations do not happen. In light of these possibilities, please estimate how

much the statements below represent the thoughts that you have in such situations.”

The scale was reviewed and a group of five experts trained in REBT approved the face validity of the items. The total score on the scale is obtained by summing the items, with rational items scored in a reversed way. Distribution of the items on the subscales is applied to each of the three content domains: DEM: item 1; GE: items 4 and 9; AWF: item 3; LFT: item 5; IBs score: items 1, 4, 9, 3, and 5; PREF: items 2 and 7; BAD: item 8; FT: item 6; UA: item 10; RBs score: items 2, 6, 7, 8, and 10.

The aim of this study was to investigate the initial psychometric properties (i.e., reliability, validity) of the newly developed Employee Rational and Irrational Beliefs Scale (E-RIBS).

Method

Participants

161 employees participated to the study, working in Romanian national and international companies. 46% of them were males and 52.2 were females. 41% of the sample were aged between 20-29 years, 31.7% were aged between 30-39 years, while 13.7% between 40-49 years, and 10.6% between 50-59 years. Participants under 20 and 60 years are under 3% of the sample. In terms of education levels, 50% of the sample had superior education levels, followed by 25% of them with post-graduate studies, and 24% with medium education levels, and under 1% presenting secondary education levels. 40.4% of the employees were working in private companies centered on services, while 25.5% of them worked in private companies focused on production, 17.4% from state companies, 14.3% from private companies focused both on services and production, while 2.5% were part of non-profit organizations. 39.1% of the employees worked in small companies with less than 49 employees, 28.6% of them worked in national or multinational companies with up to 10.000 employees, 13% worked in companies with an employee number between 100-499, and 9% from companies with 50-100 employees and another 9% from companies with 500-1000 employees.

Measures

The following instruments were used in the study: the E-RIBS, the General Attitudes and Beliefs Scale – Short Form (GABS-SF), and the Profile of Emotional Distress (PDE).

Profile of Emotional Distress (PED; Opris & Macavei, 2005). The PED is a measure of psychological distress for adults, based on 26 items. The subject is asked to rate each item (adjectives describing emotions) in rating how he/she has felt during the last 2 weeks, on a 5 point Likert scale. The scale can be scored in functional negative emotions (e.g., concern, sadness), dysfunctional negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depressed mood) and positive emotions. The PED was validated on the Romanian population (Opris & Macavei, 2005) showing good internal consistency (alpha Cronbach=.94) and its subscales (alpha Cronbach between .80 and .94).

General Attitudes and Beliefs Scale–Short Form (GABS-SF; Lindner, Kirkby, Wertheim, & Birch, 1999). The GABS-SF is a self-report measure for rational and irrational cognitive processes based on 26 items. The GABS can be scored based on a series of subscales: the demandingness for achievement, demandingness for approval, demandingness for comfort, demandingness for fairness, self-global evaluation, other global evaluation, and rational beliefs. High total score indicate a high level of irrational cognitions. Adequate psychometric properties have been reported in the literature (Lindner et al., 2007). GABS-SF has also adequate psychometric properties on Romanian population (Cronbach $\alpha = .81$; David, Schnur, & Belloiu, 2002).

Procedure

Questionnaires were administered to the employees based on a strict protocol regarding the ethical handling of the data. After gaining informed consent, the questionnaires were filled by the employees independently.

Results

Exploratory factor analysis was utilized to explore the structure of the two-factor proposed design (rational vs. irrational beliefs).

Factor Analyses

Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFAs).

A Principal Axis Factoring extraction with Oblimin rotation was conducted for all item responses of E-RIBS in order to determine its factor structure. Three major aspects were examined: (1) the number of eigenvalues greater than one, (2) that each factor has at least three item loadings, and (3) the theoretical construct of the factor. Within the exploratory factor analysis, nine factors emerged, explaining 65,4% of the scale variance. First factor accounts for the greatest proportion variance 12.10%.

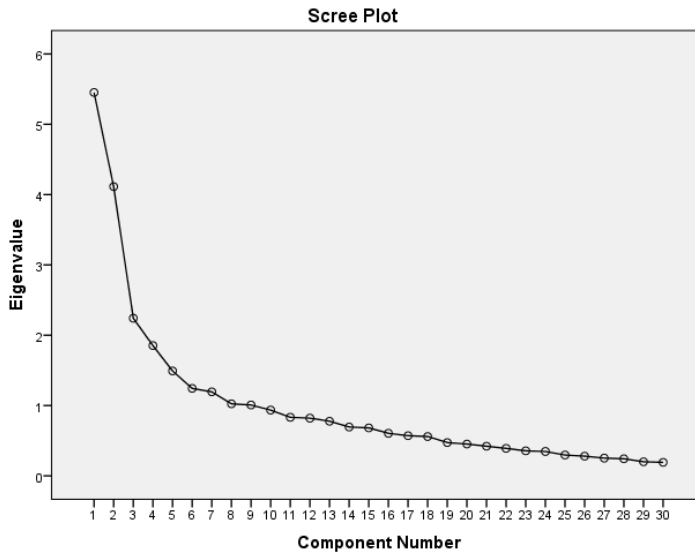


Figure 1. Scree plot of the E-RIBS factor loadings

Based on the scree plot (Figure 1) we propose two or three factor solution. Item loadings were considered based on the Cattell graphic criterion and if the factor loading was greater than .30.

Exploratory Constrained Factor Analyses.

A constrained exploratory factor analysis was conducted, extracting a two-factor model, with Oblimin rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin analysis suggests a good adequacy of the sample, and same does the Bartlett sphericity test (chi square=.74, p=.001).

The total variance explained by the two-factor model is 31,88% of the variance, with the first of them explaining 18,17% and the second 13,71%. All items except four had a factor loading of .30 or greater for at least one of the factors, with factor loadings ranging from .19 to .67 (see Table 1). The items 4, 9, 19, 29 have loadings lower than .30.

Table 1. Component matrix for two factors extracted after Oblimin rotation

Items/Factor	Components	
	1	2
item 2	.506	
item 6	.523	
item 7	.547	
item 8	.487	
item 10	.595	
item 12	.525	
item 16	.531	
item 17	.687	
item 18	.506	
item 20	.417	
item 22	.415	
item 26	.523	
item 27	.636	
item 28	.612	
item 30	.521	
item 1		.665
item 3		.616
item 4		.198
item 5		.675
item 9		.253
item 11		.553
item 13		.667
item 14		.414
item 15		.640
item 19		.259
item 21		.677
item 23		.649
item 24		.430
item 25		.671
item 29		.260

Additionally, an exploratory constrained factor analysis was conducted by extracting a three-factor model, with Oblimin rotation. The total variance explained by introducing an additional factor is 39.21% of the variance, with first explaining 18.007%, the second 13.57%, and the third 7.63. In this model, all items had a factor loading of .30 or greater for at least one of the factors, with factor loadings ranging from .34 to .71.

Table 2. *Component matrix for three factors extracted after Oblimin rotation*

Item no. Factor	Components			Commonalities
	1	2	3	
item 2	.530			.287
item 6	.504			.348
item 7	.498			.308
item 8	.473			.257
item 10	.502			.381
item 12	.637			.446
item 16	.574			.345
item 17	.642			.482
item 18	.528			.281
item 20	.342			.236
item 22	.587			.489
item 26	.551			.304
item 27	.638			.422
item 28	.629			.403
item 30	.471			.274
item 1		.713		.509
item 3		.605		.402
item 5		.684		.479
item 11		.674		.518
item 13		.699		.500
item 15		.583		.414
item 21		.712		.517
item 23		.627		.431
item 25		.614		.461
item 4			.543	.353
item 9			.530	.300
item 14			.661	.475
item 19			.481	.240
item 24			.634	.455
item 29			.687	.489

The theoretical construct of a three-factor model seems to be best supported by the theoretical background of the scale; the items that loaded onto each factor within the three theoretically derived factors have solid interpretable reasoning for being grouped together. Based on the data obtained, E-RIBS can be scored by getting the E-RIBS Total score, the Rational Beliefs (RBs) Subscale score, and the Irrational Beliefs (IBs) Subscale score, and the Global Evaluation (GE) Subscale score (see Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the E-RIBS scores, based on factorial analysis

Score	Indicator	Sex			Total
		Female	Male	Missing data	
RBs	<i>M</i>	27.16	27.11	27.22	27.14
	<i>SD</i>	5.83	6.81	2.51	6.23
IBs	<i>M</i>	19.98	21.2	21.33	20.55
	<i>SD</i>	5.23	5.23	4.16	5.46
GE	<i>M</i>	19.66	20.5	19.00	20.03
	<i>SD</i>	3.29	2.84	4.00	3.11

Reliability analyses

Internal consistencies were examined for the E-RIBS Total score, and for the three subscales. The Cronbach’s alpha was adequate for the E-RIBS Total, $\alpha = .74$, RBs Subscale, $\alpha = .83$ (15 items), IBs Subscale, $\alpha = .86$ (9 items), and GE Subscale $\alpha = .70$ (6 items). The inter-item correlations fell within the moderate range.

In order to analyse concurrent validity of the scale, correlations analyses were undertaken with the scores obtained for general irrational/rational cognitions (GABS) in the sample (see table 4).

Table 4. Pearson correlation coefficients for the E-RIBS și GABS scores

Scales	<i>r</i>
RBs E-RIBS / RBs GABS	-.328**
IBs E-RIBS / IBs GABS	-.632**
IBs E-RIBS / Fairness DEM GABS	-.568**
IBs E-RIBS / Achievement DEM GABS	-.534**
IBs E-RIBS / Approval DEM GABS	-.465**
IBs E-RIBS / Confort DEM GABS	-.491**
GEs E-RIBS / Self GE GABS	-.314**
GEs E-RIBS / Other GE GABS	-.293**

Note: ** $p < .01$; Correlation coefficients have negative value duet o the fact that the Lickert scales of the two measures are conversely stated (in E-RIBS, 1=strongly agree while in GABS 1= strongly disagree).

Predictive reliability.

Significant correlations were found between E-RIBS scores and emotional distress. E-RIBS total score correlates positively (please note that the two measures are conversely stated) with the total emotional distress score reported by the employees [$r(158) = -.24, p=.003$], dysfunctional negative emotions [$r(158) = -.27, p=.001$], anxious mood [$r(158) = -.28, p=.001$], and depressive mood [$r(158) = -.25, p=.002$]. The total distress reported registered significant correlations with the E-RIBS IBs subscale [$r(158) = -.18, p=.02$], and GEs subscale [$r(158) = -.23, p=.004$]. The E-RIBS RBs subscale registered significant correlations only with self-reported depressive mood [$r(158) = .17, p=.03$].

Discussion & Conclusions

We aimed to investigate the psychometric properties of a new developed self-report measure of employee's rational and irrational cognitions. This is the first psychological scale measuring rational and irrational beliefs in the workplace field, following new developments in the clinical cognitive sciences domain (e.g., specific scores for rational and irrational beliefs, ATSS priming mechanism) in RE&CBT. The results showed that E-RIBS has adequate psychometric properties and provide support for the use of the E-RIBS in organizational settings.

Instead of two factor solution, for IBs and RBs, the GEs factor emerged in addition. Based on the REBT theory, DiGiuseppe (1996) suggested that DEM and GE might be separate types of core irrational schemas. Indeed, our results in the case of E-RIBS are consistent with this view. This result is also consistent with a similar three factor solutions found in a similar measure developed based on the RIBS-GF (i.e., Parenting-RIBS; Gavita, DiGiuseppe, David, & DelVecchio, 2012).

The E-RIBS was found to demonstrate good reliability, concurrent and predictive validity. We found strong correlations between both the E-RIBS total score and its subscales and general measures of irrational/rational cognitions. We have also found correlations between the E-RIBS and general emotional distress. The modest level of these correlations could be explained by the fact that the distress was measured at the general level, while irrational/rational beliefs were measured by the E-RIBS at a specific level. Future studies need to use specific measures of workplace distress in order to further investigate the predictive properties of the E-RIBS.

The current study utilized only traditional exploratory factor analysis to examine the factor structure of the measure, which might be considered a limitation. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, future studies could further investigate the psychometric properties of the E-RIBS using confirmatory analysis.

Clinical Implications. Employees cognitions are considered important causes of their emotional reactions and behavioral reactions (Harris, Davies, & Dryden, 2006; Sporrle, Welpel, & Forsterling, 2006). Therefore, the E-RIBS will contribute to identifying cognitive mechanisms that are responsible for employee's dysregulated affect and/or behavior. The validation of the E-RIBS has a number of implications in the field of organizational research and interventions (i.e., cognitive-behavior coaching). More specifically, the E-RIBS could lead to further understanding of employee's thinking as determinants of adaptive or maladaptive responses. The E-RIBS could also facilitate the identification and measurement the mechanisms of change following participation to cognitive-behavior coaching.

Overall, after considering the limitations of this study, our results suggest that the E-RIBS can be utilized as a valid self-report measure of employee's rational and irrational cognitions. The E-RIBS appears to be a potentially useful measure for predicting employee distress and may be a useful tool for parent training groups to assess therapeutic mechanisms of change.

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Appendix

Employee-RIBS

Today's Date: / / _____ Name: _____ Position: _____ Age: _____ Sex: M/F

(circle one) Company: _____ Profession _____ Years in Company

When faced with adverse situations, some employees tend to think that situation absolutely must be the way they want (in terms of absolute must). In the same situation, other people think in preferential terms and accept the situation, even if they want very much that those situations do not happen. In light of these possibilities, please estimate how much the statements below represent the thoughts that you have in such situations.

Using the following scale, indicate in the space provided how true each of these statements is for you.

- 1. Strongly Agree*
- 2. Somewhat Agree*
- 3. Somewhat Disagree*
- 4. Strongly Disagree*

Part 1 – Appreciation/Reward RIBS

Please think about last time when your work was not correctly appreciated or adequately recognized or rewarded. Try and recall the thoughts that you have had in such situations and rate how much do the items below represent the thoughts that you have had.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I absolutely must be adequately appreciated and rewarded for my work.	1	2	3	4
2. I want very much to be adequately appreciated and rewarded for my work, but understand I do not necessarily have to be.	1	2	3	4
3. It is awful if I am not adequately appreciated and rewarded for my work.	1	2	3	4
4. When I am not adequately appreciated and rewarded for my work, this shows how incompetent and worthless I am.	1	2	3	4
5. It is unbearable and I cannot stand not to be adequately appreciated and rewarded for my work.	1	2	3	4
6. I can stand when I am not adequately appreciated and rewarded for my work, although it is difficult for me to tolerate this.	1	2	3	4
7. When others are not adequately appreciating and rewarding me for my work, I understand their worth remains the same.	1	2	3	4
8. It is unpleasant and unfortunate not to be adequately appreciated and rewarded for my work, but it is not awful.	1	2	3	4
9. When I am not adequately appreciated and rewarded for my work, this shows how incompetent and worthless others are.	1	2	3	4
10. When others are not adequately appreciating and rewarding for my work, I can accept myself as human being.	1	2	3	4

Part 2 - Achievement RIBS

Please think about a last time at work when you obtained low performance at work. Try and recall the thoughts that you have had in such situations and rate how much do the items below represent the thoughts that you have had.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11. I absolutely must have high professional achievements and work in team with competent people.	1	2	3	4
12. I want very much to have high professional achievements and work in team with competent people, but I realize things do not have to always be as I wish.	1	2	3	4
13. It is awful if I do not have high professional achievements and work in team with less competent people.	1	2	3	4
14. When I do not have high professional achievements and work in team with less competent people, this shows how incompetent and worthless I am.	1	2	3	4
15. It is unbearable and I cannot stand to not to have high professional achievements and work in team with incompetent people.	1	2	3	4
16. I can stand when I do not have high professional achievements or if I work in team with less competent people, although it is difficult for me to tolerate this.	1	2	3	4
17. When I do not have high performances and work in team with competent people, this does not lower other people's worth.	1	2	3	4
18. It is unpleasant and unfortunate not to have high professional achievements and work in team with competent people, but it is not awful.	1	2	3	4
19. When I do not have professional achievements and work in team with competent people, this shows how incompetent and worthless people are.	1	2	3	4
20. When I do not get high professional achievements and work in team with incompetent people, I can accept myself as human being.	1	2	3	4

Part 3 – Comfort RIBS

Please think about last time at work about which you felt uncomfortable, distressed, or you had to do tasks for which you were overqualified. Try and recall the thoughts that you have had in such situations and rate how much do the items below represent the thoughts that you have had.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21. I absolutely must always feel comfortable and not have to do tasks for which I am overqualified at work.	1	2	3	4
22. I want very much to always feel comfortable and do tasks matching my competences at work, but I do I realize that things do not have to always be the way I want them to be.	1	2	3	4
23. It is awful if I do not feel comfortable, or have to do tasks for which I am overqualified at work.	1	2	3	4
24. When I do not feel comfortable, or have to do tasks for which I am overqualified at work, I think this shows what an incompetent and worthless human being I am.	1	2	3	4
25. It is unbearable and I cannot stand not to feel comfortable or have to do tasks for which I am overqualified at work.	1	2	3	4
26. I can stand when I do not feel comfortable, or have to do tasks for which I am overqualified at work, although it is difficult for me to tolerate this.	1	2	3	4
27. When I do not feel comfortable, or have to do tasks for which I am overqualified work, I think that the worth of people requiring this is not lowered.	1	2	3	4
28. It is unpleasant and unfortunate if I feel uncomfortable, or have to do tasks for which I am overqualified at work, but it is not awful.	1	2	3	4
29. When I do not feel comfortable, or have to do tasks for which I am overqualified work, this shows how incompetent and worthless I am.	1	2	3	4
30. When I do not feel comfortable, or have to do tasks out of my competence at work, I can accept myself as human being.	1	2	3	4