



Courage in The Lucky Country—a Perspective on Australian Organisations

By Dina Pozzo

There are a number of social issues that impact many of us—homelessness, mental health, climate change, our carbon footprint—some of these issues impact some of us more closely than others. A societal issue that has, and continues to, impact all of us is the COVID-19 pandemic. Within all of this is a call to courage.

Today, you may* need to be courageous to express how you feel about the impact of COVID-19; to have a tough conversation with a child or an ageing parent who may still not understand the current situation; or to disagree with a dear friend whose opinions and actions are contrary to your own at this time.

Thinking of our workplaces today: you may need courage to insist on continuing to work from home, even if your workplace continues to remain open or is about to re-open; to trust that your working-from-home team is still being productive; to connect with colleagues who don't seem to need to connect as often as you; to decide to what extent you will continue or start to “pivot” (or not); to accept that you are

doing the best you can in the current situation.

Other situations in which you may need courage in the workplace—whether today or in future—include giving feedback, and being clear on your expectations about equity—whether this is about recognition, promotion, or a pay increase. You may need courage to ask for help. Professor Brené Brown's (University of Houston) research with 150 C-suite leaders uncovered that leaders will delegate critical work to those who have asked for help in the past, because they trust that these same people will ask for help again should they need, if they are stretched too far. You may need courage to ask for a performance review; to express a mental health need; to ask for a career break; to make the decision to not be tied to a role that doesn't enable you to be your best self; to own your strengths and what you have to offer your role, your team and your workplace.

Whatever it is you may need courage for, it may seem overwhelming and fearful, but we can still choose to be courageous

* It is important to realise that courage is subjective. What I deem to be a courageous act, you may not, and vice versa. Actions for which I require courage, you may not, and vice versa.



even when experiencing these emotions. Brené Brown's research further identified that it's not unusual to feel both courageous and fearful at the same time.

The benefits of courage

So, what might we get in return for being courageous? A review of the literature shows that for individuals, courage is associated with increased positive energy and self-confidence, and improved motivation; increased accountability, resourcefulness and goal attainment; greater empathy, conscientiousness and prosocial orientation. We know that we are inspired to courage by observing the courageous acts of others and upon reflecting on our own courageous acts. There is a direct correlation between demonstrating courage and our psychological wellbeing. As wellbeing and happiness researcher, Robert Biswas-Diener writes, "Courage enables individuals to live a full life."

For our workplaces, the benefits of courage include improved leadership performance, increased business results and increased workplace integrity.

What is courage?

There are many definitions of courage, which can be identified as far back as the time of Aristotle, and later, the philosopher Thomas Aquinas. Definitions of courage

"Courage is an intentional constructive or moral action taken by an individual in the presence of perceived personal risk and uncertainty of outcome (personal or organisational) in order to resolve or avert a workplace issue"

have changed over time as society has valued different notions of courage.

Based on the literature, my own experience in workplaces, and my desire to make courage more tangible and pragmatic for workplaces, I have defined courage as "an intentional constructive or moral action taken by an individual in the presence of perceived personal risk and uncertainty of outcome (personal or organisational) in order to resolve or avert a workplace issue".

To further understand courage in the workplace, with the help of Associate Professor Peggy Kern of the University of Melbourne, insium developed the Workplace Courage Questionnaire.

insium's Workplace Courage Questionnaire (wCQ)

269 Australian participants responded to insium's Workplace Courage Questionnaire (wCQ). This questionnaire invited respondents to assess 38 workplace situations such as giving feedback, developing employees, holding others to account, asking for a pay



rise and more. For each workplace situation, participants were asked to assess the extent to which acting on the situation was worthwhile; the risk associated with taking action; and subsequently, how willing they were to take action.

The 38 workplace situations were grouped into 5 categories:

1. Authentic self
2. Workplace conversations
3. Accountability & responsibility
4. Career development
5. Workplace culture

This article will focus on the results—analysed in partnership with Wavemaker Australia—of those situations associated with Authentic Self, with accompanying discussion and conclusions. A number of paradoxes are noted.

The methodology and a breakdown of demographics can be found in Appendix 1. A graph of the results, with details of the workplace situations that make up Authentic Self, can be found in Appendix 2.

Authentic Self

Paradox 1. Authenticity & Vulnerability

92% of respondents consider being authentic to be worthwhile and are willing to be authentic, with the risk of being authentic considered to be low for both men and women (10% and 19% respectively).

However, only 3 out of 5 people consider being vulnerable to be worthwhile. Overall, respondents consider the risk associated with being vulnerable with their leader is greater than with their peers or direct reports (33%, 24%, 23% respectively). Regardless of the level of risk, only 1 in 2 people is willing to be vulnerable.

Willingness to act drops from 92% for authenticity to approximately 50% for vulnerability.

Here's the paradox. Authenticity requires vulnerability. To be authentic is to be and feel genuine; to be whole; to live an integrated life in which you show up and are you—not someone else's version or expectation of you. To be authentic is to be aware of your values and beliefs, your strengths and weaknesses, your motivations and fears, your thoughts and feelings, and how these drive the expression of who you are. To show up and to express the authentic you requires courage and to be courageous requires vulnerability, and vulnerability is the source of authenticity.

In considering our workplaces we know that vulnerability is the cornerstone of building relationships, of creativity and innovation, and of accountability. What is the impact on performance of only half of a workforce being prepared to be vulnerable? Consider your own organisation. To what extent are you and your employees truly authentic? What does your



organisation need to learn and unlearn about authenticity and vulnerability?

For people leaders; what impact does the increased risk perceived by your direct reports in being vulnerable with you have? Where does this perceived risk come from? As a leader, to what extent do you lead by example and model vulnerability? Do you encourage and create a psychologically safe environment for your team to be vulnerable?

Women consider being vulnerable with direct reports twice as risky as do men (26% vs. 13%). Additionally, less than 50% of women are prepared to be vulnerable with their direct reports. Do women in positions of leadership feel they need to know more than men, that there is less room for them to make mistakes than there is for men, and that they need to trust more than men do before they are willing to be vulnerable?

Paradox 2. Values & Balance

Being true to one's personal values in light of competing workplace demands is considered to be worthwhile (91%) and of low risk (25%), and 4 out of 5 respondents (82%) will act on being true to personal values. Similarly, maintaining balance when conflicting priorities impact on the ability to meet one's own needs is also considered worthwhile (89%) and the risk is low (22%). However, less than 2 in 3 respondents (62%) will act on maintaining their own

balance. 82% of respondents are willing to act on personal values but only 62% are willing to act on balance—a difference of 20%!

Our values are our judgement of what is most important to us in life, and hence are very unique to self. Our values drive our behaviour and are the guide posts in our decision-making—be they consciously taken into consideration or whether this happens at a subconscious level. Having clarity of our core values enhances our decision making and subsequently, enables our ability to live into our values fully. Clarity of our core values enables us to maintain balance, and therein lies the paradox.

We know that balance is also very unique to self. Balance is about having the “correct proportions” for self and the ability to maintain these correct proportions over time. These “proportions” include the different sectors of our life—personal growth, relationships, family, health, work and career, finance, community, recreation. Our values can help us understand our behaviour in each of these sectors and hence our balance or imbalance.

Consider your own organisations. Do your employees understand their values and how to live them? Do they equate values with balance? Do they understand what balance looks like for them personally? It's a curious thing; often we may not know our true core values until they



are tested and we have a sense of unease and imbalance.

Think of the teams at work that you're a member of. Do you share your values with your team members and inquire into their values, hence sharing what is most important with each other, and in doing so, helping understand behaviour and decisions that are made?

Let's bring vulnerability into the mix. Vulnerability is the emotion we feel during times of uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure, and the data demonstrates that approximately 1 in 2 respondents is not willing to be vulnerable. To what degree is your team actually living their values and prioritising those sectors of life which are most important to them? To what degree is your team encouraged to speak up—particularly if their values and needs for balance are conflicted? What is the risk associated with declining a calendar invitation for a global conference call at 11pm? What is the risk associated with saying “no” to those last-minute work requests because they repeatedly impact one's ability to maintain the correct proportions for balance?

Women are 14% less likely than men to put personal values ahead of workplace demands (women 78%; men 92%). Do women feel a greater need to prove they can have a career and a family, and not have to choose between them?

“You can't get to courage without rumbling with vulnerability.”
Brené Brown

Paradox 3. Strengths: Willingness to act vs taking action

The data tells us that sharing strengths with others is considered worthwhile (86%) and low risk (12%), and that 4 out of 5 respondents are willing to share their strengths. But, whilst people say they are willing, do they? Herein lies another paradox. My own work with teams and strengths over the past 15 years repeatedly highlights that people are reluctant to speak about their strengths. Whether I'm working with an intact team or a group of individuals, and regardless of the level of seniority in an organisation, I frequently observe a negative response in body language and facial expression when people are asked to share their strengths.

Australia is known for being an egalitarian culture; one that “cuts the tall poppy down” in order to remind others to be humble and modest. But what impact does this have on an individual's opportunity to reach their potential; on a team's ability to learn from each other and grow; on an organisation's ability to drive innovation and performance?

We know that there is a direct correlation between the use of strengths and with individual, team and organisational performance. Specifically for individuals, the use of



one's strengths results in higher levels of energy, confidence and self-esteem; increased engagement and meaning; increased authenticity; increased achievement of goals and higher performance; and increased wellbeing. These individual benefits result in transformational shifts for teams and organisations, including increased profitability, productivity and quality; increased employee performance, retention and job satisfaction. What does a potential lack of being able to name our individual strengths and/or to share them with others have on individual employees, on teams and on organisations?

No further paradoxes, just a bit more data ...

91% of respondents consider asking for help to be worthwhile and low risk (12%), with 80% willing to act on this. This augurs well for building trust. Brené Brown's research has identified 7 elements to build trust—boundaries, reliability, accountability, vault, integrity, non-judgement and generosity. In understanding non-judgement, Brené's research with 1,000 leaders uncovered that the most common trust-building behaviour was asking for help. Leaders responded that they would delegate important work to those who ask for help; they explained that they would not delegate important work to those who don't ask for help as they *"did not trust they would raise their hands and ask for help"* if needed.

While 82% of respondents consider accessing an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to be worthwhile and the risk of doing so to be low (7%), less than 2 in 3 respondents say that they would access it if needed. Consider why? Might this be due to accessibility? Confidence in maintaining anonymity? The process? The capability of the program provider? Perhaps, even though the process is anonymous, there may still be stigma associated with accessing the program. What is your organisation's stance on mental ill-health?

The courage to be my authentic self

While the benefits of being "my authentic self" are many, realistically not all workplaces support authenticity—particularly in an environment of competing demands which may be contradictory to an employee's own core values and the beliefs upon which authenticity is founded. A competitive marketplace, stakeholder expectations and destructive organisational politics are likely to hinder the demonstration of authentic behaviour. As such, courage is needed to be authentic despite these challenges and tensions. It's easy to say, *"you need to be authentic"* or *"you need to be courageous"*. It's easy to espouse that one of your organisation's values is authenticity, courage or boldness. It's easy to say these



“It takes courage to be your most authentic self when others all around you are acting and pretending to be what they think is expected of them.”
Andrew Bienkowski,
Lessons Learned in Siberia

things, but harder to put it into action. But we know how. insium has the knowledge and expertise to help you explore what it means to be my authentic self and how to build courageous individuals, teams and organisations. What are you waiting for?

Look out for further results from insium’s Workplace Courage Questionnaire.

“The difference between knowing and doing is courage”.
Dina Pozzo

We are sincerely grateful to Associate Professor Peggy Kern and Wavemaker Australia for their help with this questionnaire.



About the author:

Dina Pozzo is the Founder and a Director of insium Pty Ltd. Her purpose is to open doors. She invites you to courageously open your own doors and explore and honour what is on the other side.

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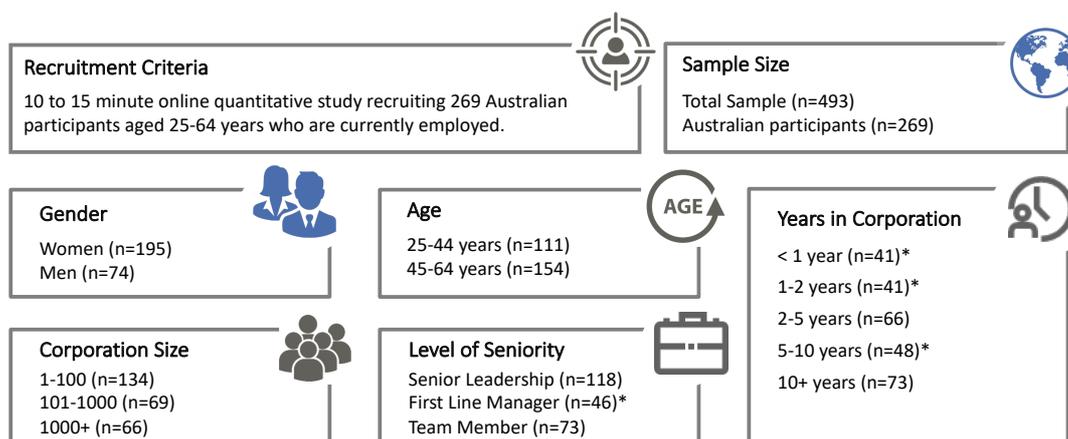
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Appendix 1. Courage Questionnaire Methodology and Demographics



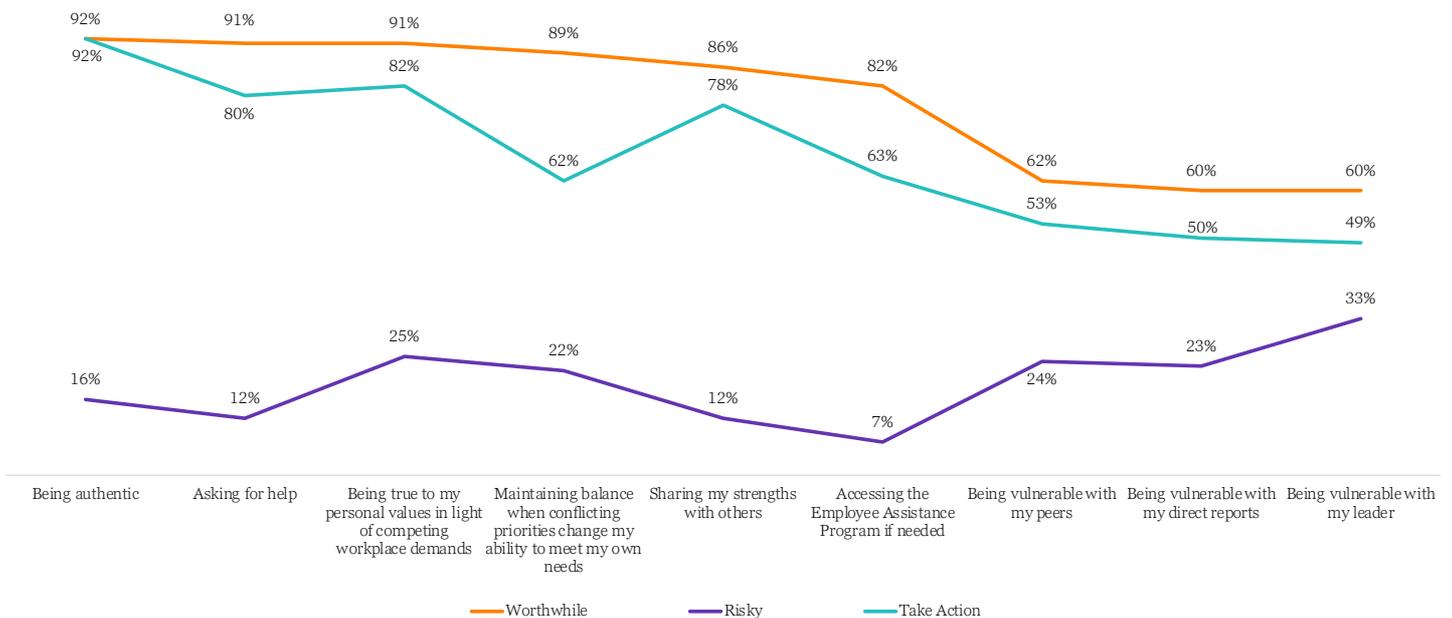
Note: Senior Leadership = Senior Leaders & Management and C-Suite; Excluded from the analysis are 18-24 years and 65+ years due to small sample size <10
 *=sample size below 50 respondents



Appendix 2. Workplace Situations: Authentic Self

- Being authentic
- Maintaining balance when conflicting priorities challenge my ability to meet my own needs
- Being vulnerable with my leader
- Being vulnerable with my peers
- Asking for help
- Being true to my personal values in light of competing workplace demands
- Being vulnerable with my direct reports
- Sharing my strengths with others
- Accessing the Employee Assistance Program if needed

Authentic Self





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“Being vulnerable isn’t a weakness. It’s a strength. That’s a lesson that took me years to learn, but it made me a better leader when I realised how true it really was.”
Professor Bill George, Senior Fellow at Harvard Business School, former Medtronic CEO, Leadership author.