



Courage in The Lucky Country—a Perspective on Australian Organisations

by Dina Pozzo

Accountability

269 Australian participants responded to insium's Workplace Courage Questionnaire (wCQ)*. When asked to define workplace courage, their answers included:

"To admit your mistakes. To take accountability for success and failure."

"Calling out others' bad behaviour, even at the detriment to your role."

"Ethical conduct, taking responsibility, leading the team, standing up for others, demonstrating diversity and inclusion at all times."

"Being brave enough to speak up and/or do what is right, regardless of opposition or challenge (including admitting when you are wrong)."

This article will focus on the results—analysed in partnership with Wavemaker Australia—of those situations associated with Accountability, with accompanying discussion and conclusions. Overall results for Accountability can be found in the graph in Appendix 3.

Accountability

Accountability is associated with a healthy and sustainable culture, is one of five key behaviours demonstrated by high performing teams, and is an adaptive leadership skill that is critical to dealing with a crisis. The need for clear accountability for performance and results cannot be denied.

The insium Workplace Courage Questionnaire (wCQ) has identified that each of the eleven workplace situations in the category of accountability are considered to be highly worthwhile and of low to moderate risk. However, willingness to act varies from moderate to high.

*Further information about insium's wCQ, including methodology and breakdown of demographics can be found in Appendices 1 and 2, respectively. The workplace situations within Accountability can be found in Appendix 3.



The 3 workplace situations in which 90% or more of respondents are willing to act are:

1. Holding myself accountable (94%)
2. Upholding diversity and inclusion (93%)
3. Admitting mistakes (90%)

Risk is considered slight for each of these three situations. Intuitively, it may not be surprising that low risk and high worth would lead to action. However, in today's current environment in which we find a number of world leaders not demonstrating diversity and inclusion, and not being accountable, it is inspiring to note that our Australian workforce is willing to act on both situations.

Similarly, at a glance, the graph in Appendix 3 shows that willingness to act is generally less for those workplace situations that carry greater risk. However, are there any curiosities in the data?

Admitting Mistakes and Admitting I can't do a Task

Is there a link between admitting mistakes and admitting I can't do a task? While 90% of respondents will act on admitting mistakes, only 65% will admit to not being able to do a task. Brené Brown's research uncovered that admitting mistakes is key to accountability and to building trust. Additionally, her research uncovered that being aware of your competencies and limitations—that is, I can do this task

or alternatively, I cannot do this task—is also important for building trust. These results for admitting mistakes and admitting I can't do a task suggest that they may be competing mindsets, beliefs and attitudes. Curious. If these two workplace situations do compete, what is the overall impact on trust? Without further study, we may not know. What I encourage you to give consideration to right now is the possible cause.

What might be the driver(s) behind these competing mindsets, beliefs and attitudes? Might it be genuine belief—rightly or wrongly—in self and ability? Might this be the Australian attitude of “give it a go,” and then “I'll let you know if I've made a mistake?” Might it be a fixed or a growth mindset? Individuals with a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is fixed and their fear of failure is real as every failure threatens to expose this fixed value. What if you, as the leader, have a fixed mindset? Do you inadvertently communicate this, thereby impacting the willingness of others to admit they can't do a task? Alternatively, a growth mindset of “challenges help me grow” and “I can learn anything I want to” encourages the individual to accept challenges and learn from feedback, success and failure. “Admitting I can't do a task” may mean asking for help; might it be that asking for help causes vulnerability which employees are not willing to demonstrate?



Brené Brown's research of 150 c-suite leaders uncovered that they will give more significant projects to those who have admitted they can't do a task as they trust they will call for help if needed. If you, as a senior leader in your organisation, think the same way, do your employees know this? Have you explicitly or implicitly given your employees permission to admit they cannot do a task?

Differences in gender for "admitting mistakes" are negligible for both worth and willingness to act. However, risk is perceived to be almost twice as great by females. With respect to "admitting I can't do a task," differences in worth and risk are slight, however fewer women than men will admit they cannot do a task†. What is at play here? Why the gender differences? Might women feel a greater need to prove themselves in our current environment in which gender equality—equal rights, opportunities, accountabilities, outcomes—is still an issue in Australia and globally? On the flipside, might this mean that, in fact, women are more courageous when it comes to admitting mistakes?

What are we least likely to do?

1 in 3 respondents will not take action to manage destructive conflict, to hold others to account, or to admit they can't do a task, even though these actions are all

considered highly worthwhile (92%, 88% and 83% respectively). These are the 3 actions that respondents are least likely to implement.

What is standing in the way? Some of the answers may lie in a further breakdown of the results. We explored admitting I can't do a task above, and so the focus in this section will be on destructive conflict and holding others to account.

When looking at job roles—that is, senior leaders, first line managers (FLMs) and team members—the data shows the following.

Willingness to manage destructive conflict decreases considerably from senior leaders to FLMs and team members (83%, 55% and 43% respectively). Similarly, the same pattern is noticed in holding others to account. Approximately 4 out of 5 (79%) senior leaders will take action, but only half of FLMs (53%) and team members (52%) will take action.

Is this a function of seniority and/or experience? Is this a function of senior leaders ensuring they meet the expectations of governing Boards and shareholders. Since the financial crash of earlier this century, corporate boards have increased the demand for greater accountability of leaders. While this might sound like an oxymoron, do FLMs and team members consider

† Refer Table 1: Admitting Mistakes & Admitting I Can't Do a Task in Appendix 4.



that these accountabilities do not lie with them? That these lie with senior leaders only? Or is something else at play?

For *managing destructive conflict* and *holding others to account*, risk increases from senior leaders to FLMs to TMs[‡], with the difference in risk between senior leaders and team members increasing by ~ 20% in each of these two workplace situations. What are the perceived risks and consequences anticipated by FLMs and TMs? Where has this come from? Is accountability associated with punishment, instead of a tool to help people unlock their potential?

Why do more FLMs and TMs potentially avoid taking these two actions? Consider this—both of these actions require giving feedback to others. What might individuals be thinking and/or feeling when confronted with these situations, when confronted with providing feedback? Let's do a quick brainstorm:

- *"It's too hard"*
- *"I don't want to hurt their feelings"*
- *"If I say something, it'll just get messier"*
- *"I don't have the skills"*
- *"I'm not good at giving feedback, so I won't do/say anything"*

[‡] Refer Table 2: Risk: Senior Leaders, First Line Managers and Team Members (Senior Leadership = Senior Leaders & Management and C-Suite) in Appendix 4.

[§] Refer Table 3. Willingness to act on managing poor performance (Senior Leadership = Senior Leaders & Management and C-Suite) in Appendix 4.

- *"It makes me feel uncomfortable, awkward and vulnerable"*
- *"Nothing's going to change anyway"*
- *"It's not my job"*

... and therein lies the lack of accountability

We spend time and effort developing the feedback skills of employees, often providing multiple models and frameworks, but in addition to the skills, do we explore the mindsets, thoughts and feelings that individuals bring to giving and receiving feedback?

And a bit more data ...

Managing poor performance of direct reports—behaviour and/or skills—is considered high worth and slight-moderate risk, with high willingness to act. Similarly, the same results are noticed for being honest with my manager about my career development and also dismissing an employee at the end of their probationary period if needed. This suggests high accountability and commitment to both individual and organisational performance, and maintaining authenticity and integrity. A point to note is that willingness to act on managing poor performance—both behavioural and skills—is lower for TMs compared to FLMs and Senior Leaders[§]. While



managing poor performance is firmly the responsibility of the direct manager of the individual in question, what does this mean for when these TMs are promoted into leadership roles? Are you providing the necessary skill and mindset development that is required to manage poor performance effectively for all parties involved?

Overall, making difficult decisions is considered high in worth, with moderate risk and a high willingness to act.

The Courage to be Accountable

If we look beyond the survey results and the perceived risk of acting on the various situations explored above, what gets in the way of accountability or a willingness to act, a willingness to do? After all, as mentioned in the introduction, being accountable provides benefits for organisations, teams and leaders. So again, what gets in the

"The difference between knowing and doing is courage." (Dina Pozzo)

way of accountability? What stands in the way?

Perhaps it's a lack of understanding of the term? A Google search of "accountability definition" returned 214 million results in 0.50 seconds.

According to Patrick Lencioni, accountability is, "The willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviours that might hurt the team." In "The Oz Principle," accountability is defined as, "A personal choice to rise above one's circumstances and demonstrate the ownership necessary for achieving desired results." Contradictory or complementary definitions? The former calls on team members to hold others to account, while the latter calls on self to hold self to account. What does accountability mean in your organisation? Are your expectations of accountability clear to others? Are your employees aligned with your expectations of their accountabilities? Do they understand the "why" of your expectations of accountability?

insium has the knowledge and expertise to help you explore and agree what it means to be accountable, and how to build the courage that will enable the attitudes and skills that are required to be accountable.

Your alternative? Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor and Philosopher (AD121-180) said, "What stands in the way becomes the way." What are you waiting for?

Look out for further upcoming results from insium's Workplace Courage Questionnaire (wCQ). Visit our Leading With Courage website to view our "Dare to Discover: Courage



in the Lucky Country – a Perspective on Australian Organisations” Zoom presentations, focusing on Authentic Self and Workplace Conversations. You’ll find recordings of the presentations (including Q&As) as well as copies of the reports to download.

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“Accountability is a shared team responsibility.. As uncomfortable and difficult as it can often be, accountability helps a team and an organisation avoid far more costly and difficult situations later.”

Patrick Lencioni.

“An attitude of accountability lies at the core of any effort to improve quality, satisfy customers, empower people, build teams, create new products, maximize effectiveness and get results.”

Roger Connor, Tom Smith & Craig Hickman



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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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Appendix 1. insium's Workplace Courage Questionnaire (wCQ)

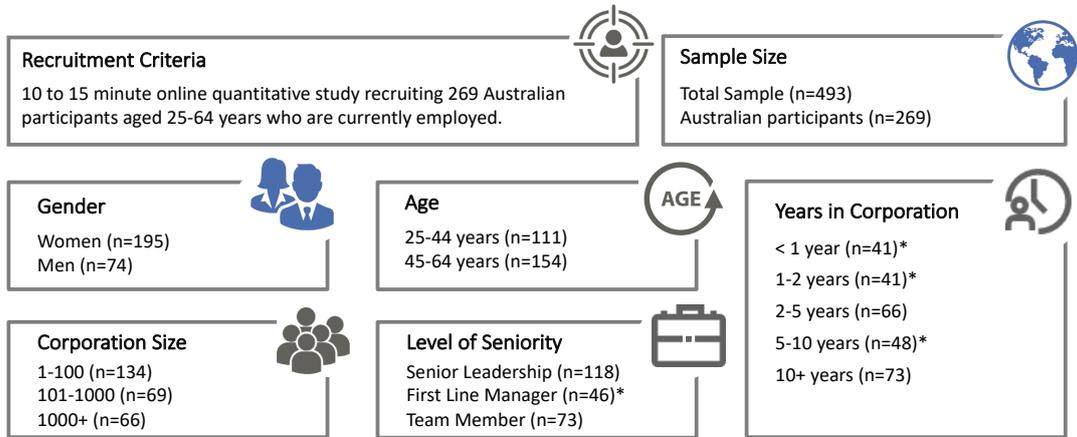
insium's Workplace Courage Questionnaire (wCQ) invited respondents to assess 38 workplace situations such as giving feedback, developing employees, holding others to account, asking for a pay rise and more. For each workplace situation, participants were asked to assess the extent to which acting on 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



Appendix 2. Methodology and Demographics:

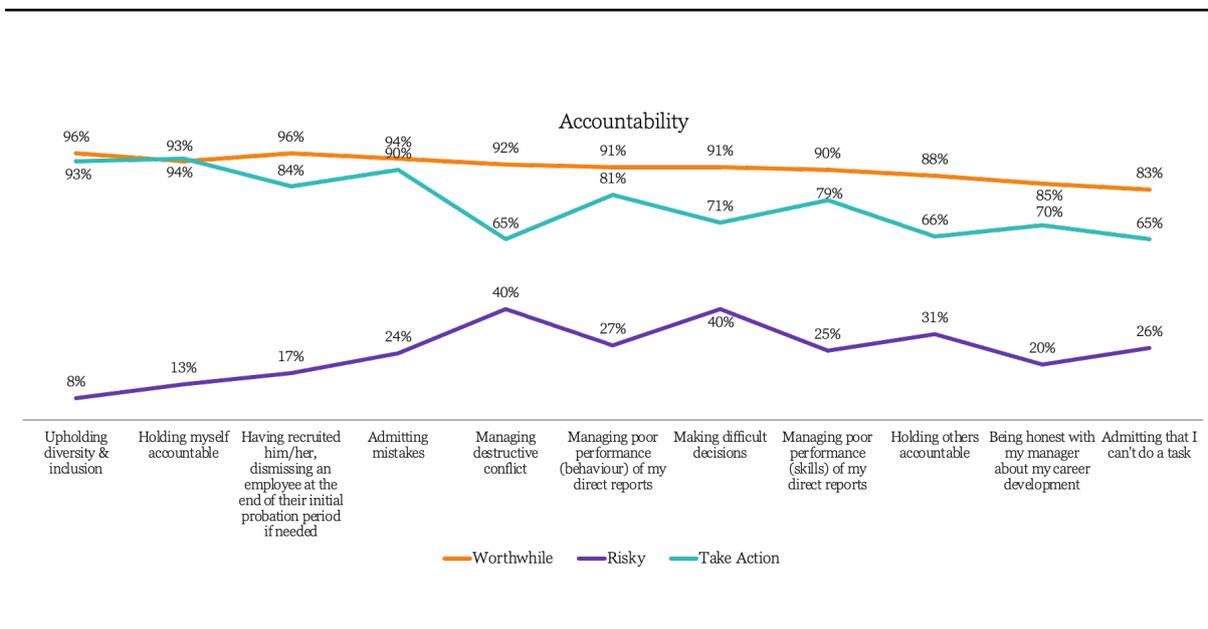


Note: Senior Leadership = Senior Leaders & Management and C-Suite; Excluded from the analysis are 18-24 years and 65+ years due to small sample size <10
*=sample size below 50 respondents



Appendix 3. Workplace Situations: Accountability

- Upholding diversity & inclusion
- Holding myself accountable
- Having recruited him/her, dismissing an employee at the end of their initial probationary period if needed
- Admitting mistakes
- Managing destructive conflict
- Managing poor performance (behaviour) of my direct reports
- Making difficult decisions
- Managing poor performance (skills) of my direct reports
- Holding others accountable
- Being honest with my manager about my career development
- Admitting that I can't do a task





Appendix 4.

Table 1. Admitting mistakes & admitting I can't do a task

	Admitting Mistakes			Admitting I Can't Do a Task		
	Worthwhile	Risk	Willingness to Act	Worthwhile	Risk	Willingness to Act
Female	93%	27%	93%	81%	28%	62%
Male	94%	15%	94%	88%	22%	74%

Table 2. Risk: Senior Leaders, First Line Managers and Team Members (Senior Leadership = Senior Leaders & Management and C-Suite)

	Senior Leader	First Line Manager	Team Member
Managing destructive conflict	29%	43%	57%
Holding others accountable	21%	39%	45%

Table 3. Willingness to act on managing poor performance (Senior Leadership = Senior Leaders & Management and C-Suite)

	Behaviour	Skills
Senior Leader	89%	88%
First Line Manager	86%	76%
Team Member	63%	62%



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