"Retraction: Leaders and decision making: a study of the drivers of courage"

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LEADERS AND DECISION MAKING: A STUDY OF THE DRIVERS OF COURAGE

Abstract

Interest in leadership effectiveness and failure has led scholars to investigate the underlying factors. Courage has been evoked as an essential component of character in effective leaders. Kidder and Bracy (2001) posit that courage lays the foundation for other virtues and values to emerge and develop in leaders. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to explore the drivers of courage in leaders at various decision making moments in their career and life. To this aim, a qualitative narrative analysis of sixty stories extracted from structured interviews of fourteen Mauritian leaders was carried out. The principal results indicate leadership skills are not sufficient for a leader to act courageously, and that both internal and external drivers of courage are required for courageous leadership. In addition, some of the internal drivers of courage such as Values & Beliefs and Self-Consciousness are closely linked to dimensions of authentic leadership. Therefore, organizations or leadership programs that are interested in developing and maintaining qualities of effective leadership should develop support systems that further the internal and external drivers of courage. However, because it is found to be the result of a continuous lifetime process, courage should be encouraged and integrated early in educational curriculum.

Keywords courage, decision-making, leadership, authentic leadership, identity

JEL Classification M10, Z00

INTRODUCTION

Post Enron era, the research of the determinants of leaders' successes and failures has attracted many scholars (Svensson & Wood, 2006; Burke, 2006). In particular, the presence of courage and character appears to be linked to effective leadership and positive followership (Tait, 1996; Mahoney, 2001; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Barlow, Jordan, & Hendrix, 2003; Sarros, Cooper, & Hartican, 2006). Similarly to leadership, several definitions of courage exist (Schilpzand, 2008). One definition states that courage corresponds to the sacrifice of one's personal benefit in the short term in order to achieve a higher order goal for the organization despite fear due to risks, threat and potential consequences.

Conducting an empirical study in the United States, Hannah, Avolio, and Walumbwa (2011) evidenced that moral courage in leaders predicted ethical and pro-social behaviors amongst followers. However, despite a growing interest (Amos & Klimoski, 2014; Koerner, 2014; Schilpzand et al., 2014), a deeper understanding on the relationship between leadership and courage is lacking.

Therefore, this research aims to analyze the drivers of courage in leaders at critical decision-making moments. In addition, the study aims

to determine whether the drivers of courage are innate, developed, or both amongst leaders. To this aim, a narrative analysis of sixty stories extracted from structured interviews of fourteen leaders in Mauritius was conducted.

This article is structured as follows: the first section presents the current literature review on courage and leadership and the drivers of courage. It is followed by the methodology used to determine the drivers. Finally, the findings of the research are presented and discussed.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. The concept of courage

Courage is derived from the French language and signifies "heart and spirit". Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas viewed courage as a cardinal virtue (Kateb, 2004). Similarly to Socrates, scholars (Tilich, 1952; Walton, 1990) assimilate courageous acts as the self-affirmation of one's values and ideals involving rationality and discretion.

Although courage initially referred to physical courage, various forms of courage have been identified. In psychology, physical, social, moral, creative and psychological courage co-exist (Putman, 2001). Various other forms have been defined such as moral courage (Kidder et al., 2001), managerial courage (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2004; Sekerka et al., 2009), and vital courage (Snyder & Lopez, 2009). Individual courage is a complex construct that occurs in a risky situation (Amos & Klimoski, 2014) and might be driven by internal and external forces. In addition, it is interesting to determine whether courage is innate in individuals or is socially constructed (Walton, 1990).

1.2. Courage in leadership theories and management competencies

Many leadership theories such as servant leadership, ethical leadership and responsible leadership are rooted in values-based leadership (Reilly & Ehlinger, 2007). Therefore, courage is present in these theories. In ethical leadership, moral courage plays a role in long-term decision-making (Voegtlin, 2016). The construct of courage is found within Idealized influence and Inspirational motivation of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990) because they both require for leaders to act in the

benefit of the group, and to provide assurance (Dionne et al., 2004). Authentic leadership holds that authentic leaders being confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient and of high moral character have a predisposition for displaying courage (Avolio et al., 2004).

Scholars have linked leadership failure to lack of character and moral bearings (Burke, 2006; Allen & Klenke, 2009). Lack of courage in followers is also evoked as a culprit for bad leadership (Allio, 2009). George and McLean (2007) argue that unsuccessful leaders possess three destructive behaviors, namely rationalizing their failures and problems away, not admitting mistakes and avoiding close relationships, which are behind the lack of courage. Similarly Aprigliano (2000) argues that courage is continuously developed from the interaction between the self and life experiences.

In business literature, courage finds its place as a management virtue (Harris, 2013). The managerial competency called professional moral courage (PMC) encompasses moral agency, multiple values, endurance of threats, going beyond compliance and moral goals (Sekerka et al., 2009).

Courage to challenge in leaders is found to create cohesive and supporting groups in organizations (Wang et al., 2011). Furthermore, it leads to an organizational culture that nurtures creativity and innovation. Jablin (2006) adds that courage in leaders guarantees leadership commitment as courage is linked to values and principles. However, it should be noted that courage does not necessarily result in moral acts or decisions.

1.3. The drivers of courage

Emotions are found to play a role in the display of managerial courage (Harbour, 2007; Harbour & Kisfalvi, 2014). Specifically, Harbour evidenced

the importance of "emotion intensity and control" in enabling the shift from "courage to act" to "courage to be". Similarly to Schilpzand (2008), the author also acknowledges the importance of experience to the emotions. Lerner, Li, Valdesolo and Kassam (2015) argue that emotion and cognition continuously interact during the decision-making process. Harbour found that courageous decisions are favored by self-confidence which requires what Schilpzand (2008) labels courage disposition.

In this model, Rate (2007) found that courage is triggered by external factors, and internal factors such as a motivation towards excellence and the capacity of a conscious decision. By contrast, studying the military environment, Schilpzand (2008) argues that a courage personality does not exist but circumstances will lead to a courageous act. According to her findings, values and personality could be similar, but courage could be predicted in a leader who had a courage predisposition.

Goud (2005) found that fear, appropriate action and purpose resulted in courage. Pury Kowalski and Spearman (2007) posit that by contrast with personal courage, and despite greater difficulty, general courage was associated with more confidence, less fear and fewer limitations. April et al. (2010) found several ethics external and internal enablers in courage amongst such as conscience, integrity or critical moments.

Koerner (2014) by emphasizing the role of identity in courage development pinpoints the importance of the context.

Courageous acts emerge in critical decision-making situations also referred by as fateful, crucible moments or turning points (Thomson et. al., 2002; Bennis & Thomas, 2002). Courage is found to be a subjective process resulting from internal and external forces such as traits, social forces, values, beliefs, positive states and risk perception (Hannah et al., 2011). The risk perception triggers fear which will be moderated by the various forces. This process can be reflective and iterative and results in a courageous act or a courage predisposition.

Eight themes identified as courage drivers by scholars are: (i) internal conditions such as traits and individual characteristics, (ii) risk, (iii) worthwhile goal, (iv) disposition, (v) external conditions, (vi) courage to be, (vii) courage to act, and (viii) fear (Rate et al., 2007; Hannah et al., 2011; Harbour, 2007; Goud, 2005).

Similarly to Hannah et al. (2011), this study focuses on the drivers of courage as reflected upon by the participant himself. The construct of courage is organized around three dimensions: courage disposition (internal traits, self-confidence), community (group maintenance, values, norms, morality) and situation (risk, threat, uncertainty, fear, consequences, worthwhile goals).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to determine the drivers of courage from the story told and constructed by the leader himself. This approach allowed the leaders to form a meaning for their courageous act as they would tell their experiences. Therefore, a qualitative method based on the paradigm of post-modernism was used (Hassard, 1994).

2.1. Participants

The study used purposive and theoretical sampling coupled with a snowball strategy (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). The selected leader participants were all at the executive level, had extensive experiences in leadership and courage, and had a degree of trust with the researcher.

The final selected participants were a homogeneous group (Polkinghorne, 2007). Fourteen leaders in Mauritius were studied from an initial list of fifty selected leaders. Seven of them were CEOs of different types of companies, associations or NGO. Three of them were former ministers. One participant was an entrepreneur. One participant was a director and one participant was a chairman.

To assess the required number of interviews, data saturation and variability were calculated through an experiment similarly to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006). Saturation was reached after twelve interviews. In total, sixty stories on courage and leadership were obtained and analyzed.

2.2. Research tool

The instrument for data collection was unstructured in-depth interviews to allow flexibility. The story was co-constructed by the storyteller and the researcher (Rogan & de Kock, 2005).

An interview protocol was prepared and two questions were asked:

1. Recall times when others have displayed courage in their lives. Tell me about them.

2. Now recall a time when you displayed courage.

Each of the questions was then followed by further inquiries. The whole interview was in conversational style. On average each interview lasted for 45 to 60 minutes.

2.3. Unit of analysis

In this study, every story is a unit of analysis. Moen (2006) argues that narratives are good units of analysis because of their completeness. Specifically, the leaders were allowed to delve into their stories. In addition, this allowed to get a picture of the environment and the culture surrounding the courageous act.

3. DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

A narrative analysis approach was used to analyze the data for the study as the meaning of the story from the leader viewpoint was important for the analysis.

The approach consisted of seven phases of analysis (including cycles of coding) of the narratives using Atlas Ti. The three dimensional space approach (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) was used to extract stories from the transcriptions of the interviews. These stories were analyzed further using the dialogic/performative analysis (Riessman, 2008) including a number of cycles-coding. Themes emerged from the third-cycle coding phase. Final cross-participant and cross-story analysis was carried out. This was followed by the emergence of the final meta-stories.

4. RESULTS IN A QUALITATIVE STUDY

The results are substantiated by trustworthiness ensured by an analysis similar to Tobin and Begley (2004). Therefore, a particular attention was devoted to the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity of the results.

The formulation of the research questions for the study was conformed to the intention to use narrative analysis. Regarding the analysis, this consisted in the automatic transcription post-interviews. This allowed questions to be reviewed for the next interviews. Whenever possible, the analysis of the different interviews was conducted simultaneously. An iterative process was, therefore, set up during the analysis of the data requiring the intellectual involvement of the researcher.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

5.1. First cycle coding results

Table 1 displays the results found after the first-cycle coding according to the participants.

The results of the first-coding indicate that identity tensions, change or response to challenge are the most frequently cited as a driver of a courageous act.

Support is also mentioned recurrently as playing a role in courageous act. One of the participants resumed that support was needed because "the decisions that they are going to make are decisions which are extremely painful".

However, the variety of codes found and their distribution amongst the participants shows that many drivers of courage co-exist.

5.2. Results of the second and third cycle coding

This process consisted in a second and third cycle coding similarly to Riessman (2008) performance analysis. First-cycle order codes were grouped under a second-cycle order categories according to

Table 1. Summary of the first cycle coding

Codes after first-cycle coding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Organizational change	x		x		x									
Change of career	x	x	x											
Response to challenges	x			x	x				x		x	x		
Identity tensions	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Support	x		x				x			x	x			x
Political instability		x												
Presence of risk		x			x					x				
Internal values		x		x						x				
Ethical and moral stand								x						
Principles and conviction									x					
Interests of the larger community		x	x				x		x	x				
Identity clash			x								x		x	
Identity alignment			x											
Sense of sacrifice				x			x	x	x	x				
Living with consequences of risk-taking				x		x			x				x	
Being focused with perseverance				x		x	x							x
Conflicts				x										
Change new terms contract				x										
Independency of institution				x										
Acting on principle				x										
Passion and enthusiasm						x								
Culture						x								
Upbringing						x		x		x				x
Prior preparation						x								
Luck						x								
Proactive vision						x	x		x	x				x
Spirituality, God								x	x					
Childhood experiences									x					
Prior courageous incident									x					
Intuition									x					
Thinking										x				
Problem-solving skills										x				
Being creative and innovative										x				
Communication										x		x		
Negotiation skills										x				
Rational thought												x		
Independency													x	
Sticking to the law or rules													x	
Inspiration from others														x
Having a purpose mission in life														x
Conviction														x

commonalities which in turn were grouped under themes identified as the drivers of courage. The following four main drivers of courage were found: (i) greater cause, (ii) support, (iii) internal disposition enablers, and (iv) sacrificing something. Table 2 presents the identified drivers of courage detailed and their distribution per participant in the study.

Internal disposition enablers were diverse and comprised of calculated risk taking, emotional balance and control, self-consciousness, values and beliefs, spirituality, perseverance and focus, ownership and independency, positive and forward-looking and prior experience. Fear is included in calculated risk-taking and emotional balance and control. Some participants explained the need to be true to themselves. Some participants viewed their acts of courage as a manifestation of their deep self. Some participants evoked the appeal of the act of courage. Other participants indicate a spiritual or higher dimension in their act. For instance, one participant evokes God. Self-conviction, self-respect, self-realization about an

Table 2. The drivers of courage

Drivers of courage	Participants													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Internal disposition enablers														
Positive & forward-looking	X	X		X			X							
Prior experience	X			X		X	X	X		X	X			X
Self-consciousness	X	X	X		X			X	X					X
Calculated risk-taking		X		X						X	X			
Emotional balance & control		X		X						X	X			
Values & belief		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
Spirituality								X	X					X
Perseverance & focus		X		X		X	X			X	X			X
Ownership & independence			X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	
External drivers of courage														
Support	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sacrificing something	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Greater cause		X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X		X

unfair system, fearlessness or control of the fear, prior experience, tough experience are stated by the participants in preparedness in performing an act of courage. Self-control of emotions was indicated to be a driver of courage. Some leaders indicated they had a feeling of ownership in the situation when acting courageously. Lastly, participants admitted that they had qualities of focus and perseverance. One of the participants indicated passion as a driver for courage.

Greater cause comprised of the interests of the larger community, the focus on the organization despite pressure, being a role model, having a purpose in life, being fair to all and impacting life. A participant who was a politician acted because he was convinced it would be good for the country. Another participant acted to defend the rights of the people and to bring positive changes to society. One participant stated, it was important for him to be an example for his children and, therefore, he acted accordingly. One participant argued that focusing on the bigger goal gave him courage to act.

Support was emphasized as being a significant and needed driver for the participants. It is divided between support from remote stakeholders such as peers, colleagues support, unexpected individuals or even strangers, and support from close stakeholders such as family, friends, or local community.

Sacrificing something was necessary to be able to perform the courageous act according to some

of the participants. Some of them were conscious about the consequences, while others were unable to measure their extent. One participant indicated that he did not take care of the consequences as doing the right thing was more important. Some participants reflected that they had to live with the consequences of their acts. Some added that acting with courage in leadership involved a personal sacrifice.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

6.1. Drivers of courage in literature

Some of the drivers of courage in the study are found in the literature on courage and leadership. The internal driver Values and Beliefs is close to the driver Foundational Attributes which includes beliefs and principles of Aprigliano study on transformational leadership (2000). Moreover, calculated risk-taking and prior experience are also similar to Aprigliano Contemplative Actions and Life Experiences. In addition, similarly to Harbour (2008) who studied courageous acts in leaders, this study found that self-confidence and prior experience were important elements for courage to emerge in decision-making. This research found some external drivers of courage, respectively Support and Greater Cause, which are consistent with Rate et

al. (2007) research who argue for the presence of external circumstances for courage to manifest. The Internal Disposition courage drivers are also found in April et al. (2010) research on ethics enablers in leadership such as upbringing, spirituality, role models, integrity, self-control, and conscience.

The study found Emotional Control & Balance as a driver of courage. This is consistent with Rate et al. (2007) who found the role of emotions although they are relegated to a marginal role in courage in his research. The results indicated that fear and purpose are drivers of courage similarly to two of Goud's (2005) dimension of courage. The importance of support in courageous act is also found in Koerner (2014) study which argues the importance of social forces. Participants in the study emphasize the positive importance of support from their family.

This study has revealed new drivers and sub-drivers of courage such as Ownership and Independence, Perseverance and focus, Sacrificing, Self-consciousness and Spiritual dimensions.

6.2. External and internal drivers

The study evidenced the importance of both external and internal drivers of courage for the participants as suggested by Table 2. For all of the participants, internal and external drivers of courage were simultaneously present. Therefore, courage cannot be considered as an internal construct. Furthermore, neither external nor internal drivers take precedence on the other type of driver.

In terms of distribution, there is not necessarily a common/similar distribution of external or internal drivers among the participants.

The importance of the driver support suggests that the existence of a supporting mechanism inside the organization can help fostering courageous acts similarly to what Harris (2003) suggested. In addition, the results of the research might suggest that shared organizational values or culture that are directed towards a great or strong cause might favor courage amongst leaders.

6.3. Courage and authentic leadership theory

Three of the drivers of courage found in this study are similar to characteristics that drive authentic leaders namely Values & Beliefs, Self-consciousness, and Emotional Balance & Control. Authentic leadership is characterized by four components: self-awareness, unbiased processing, authentic action and relational transparency (Luthans et al., 2006).

One characteristic of authentic leaders is that they are true to themselves and possess a strong self-knowledge (Avolio et al., 2004; Steffens et al., 2016). As argued by Luthans et al. (2006) this strong self-knowledge helps authentic leaders in decision-making. They are true to themselves (Michie & Gooty, 2005). In addition, authentic leaders adhere to their values when making decisions. In this study, Values & Beliefs is similar to internalized moral perspective (Walumbwa et al., 2007) which calls integrity in behavior. One participant expressed that if he didn't demonstrate courage he wouldn't feel at peace with himself which is a characteristic of an authentic leader. Emotions and values also play a significant role in authentic leadership (Michie et al., 2005). One of the participants stated that decision-making was a mix of intuition, thinking, integrity and values. Identity is a component of self-awareness (Luthans et al., 2006). The study found Identity Tensions was a recurrent code emerging in the stories of courageous acts. This indicates that the leaders were self-conscious of their identities but also aware of the social context. Luthans et al. (2006) argue that emotions are also a component of authentic leaders. The study found that self-awareness of emotions was a driver of courage for the participants. Participants emphasized that their emotions were under control in order to act courageously. One participant indicated he had "to appeal to the brain".

Being positive and forward-looking is a characteristic of authentic leaders (Voetglin, 2015).

Despite courage being not explicit in authentic leadership, the drivers found in this study confirm that courage is a characteristic to be studied in authentic leadership. This is an interesting finding for authentic leadership theory as recent literature has shown the positive benefits of authentic leaders for organizations (Steffens et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that the drivers of courage have an important role in decision-making for leaders. Therefore, courage development has a place in leadership development programs.

More specifically, fostering courage is found to help developing qualities associated with authentic leaders. This is particularly relevant since growing research shows the importance of authentic leaders in positively inspiring followership in organizations (Steffens et al., 2016; Gardner & Carlson, 2015). This fosters behaviors of trust, creativity and innovativeness.

However, given that both internal and external drivers have an important role in driving courageous acts, a training program is insufficient to develop courageous leaders. Courage development is a lifelong journey that can start at an early age. Developing courage should be part of educational programs in schools or educational programs as the study shows the importance of experience. Moreover, these programs should take into account the importance of realizing the self for individuals. But also the ability to self-reflect. In addition, support groups, coaching or mentoring programs can be set up to support courage development. This support can be focused on internal and external drivers of courage. This is particularly relevant for organizations that want to develop authentic leaders.

Therefore, a developed organizational support and strong values in organizations can help create, encourage and should reward courageous leaders.

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