

Discussion Paper

Increasing **Courage** *through* Partnership

Exploring how HR can transform business through
courageous leadership



CourageousHR works with HR leaders and Communities to identify their distinctive contribution and then make it, both culturally and operationally, an organisational reality.

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Courage - the critical factor for organisational success

You must be the change you wish to see in the world. Mahatma Gandhi

Is courage in the workplace now 'coming of age'? The turbulence of the marketplace, new opportunities constantly emerging, the uncertainty about the future, the lack of job security, the need for greater flexibility and creativity all indicates that predictability is history.

The implications for organisations and its employees is that increasingly, those organisations which are best able to tap into their talent pool and engage most effectively with their employees will be those which are best prepared to prosper through their ability to effectively respond to changes as well as having the resourcefulness to create new opportunities.

People - not organisations - are adaptable and resilient, innovative and purposeful. However, the extents to which employees are prepared to 'give of themselves' for their organisations will be determined by their level of commitment and engagement. At CourageousHR, we increasingly believe that 'courage' is becoming the critical factor in determining how effective organisations are in tapping into the wealth of their people's capabilities.

Courage to lead, courage to act

Courage turns organisational rhetoric into activities

- Turns strategy into performance
- Turns values written on paper into a living culture
- Turns human 'capital' into people
- Encourages employees to become engaged
- Changes hierarchical and rule led groups into self managing teams
- Transforms organisations

A Courageous Person

- A courageous person is one who has a *state of mind or spirit that enables them to consciously function despite fear or anxiety.*

Courageous Leaders

Courageous leaders are able to articulate their personal enduring vision and their values and therefore begin the process of transforming their organisations.

- Successful courageous leaders are able to transform their organisation by building a culture that allows employees to take the courageous steps needed to follow their leaders.

Courageous Organisations

Courageous organisations support employees to measure and take risks and to be innovative, based on commonly held organisational values.

- Courageous organisations minimise the ‘fear’ factor through providing information and tools to understand risks and by providing an environment that reduces the personal consequences of mistakes.

The Business Case for a Courageous Workplace

Courage is the missing ingredient between leaders that can successfully transform their organisation and those that can't; between employees that are engaged and those that do the minimum; and between organisations that are consistent market leaders and those that are ‘also ran’s’.

There are three key business cases for having a courageous workforce

- Increased Employee Engagement
- Creating a transformative organisation
- Working as one through a culture of partnership

Increased Employee Engagement

Employees who undertake a courageous act are individuals who, despite personal risks to themselves, are prepared to do the ‘right thing’ for the greater good.

- Employee engagement is defined as “*the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work beyond the minimum to get the job done e.g. intellect, energy and time.*”
- Courageous employees are therefore typically engaged employees i.e. they choose to act for the greater good of the organisation.
- There is a growing body of research that shows those employees who are more engaged with their business have a positive impact on their organisations. Further recent research by Towers Perrin (2007) also suggests there is a significant correlation between highly engaged employees and improved productivity, sustained profits, higher customer loyalty, employee retention and lower health and safety issues.

Creating a transformative organisation

The second business case recognises the societal movement away from hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations towards more integrated, flexible and adaptable teams.

- As organisations adapt to the information age, many need to radically change i.e. transform their way of doing business. However, this process requires organisations to recognise that the end state is often uncertain and will constantly alter as market conditions change.
- For an organisation to transform, courage is required from leaders who will be required to formulate and then communicate the business need and end goals; from employees who will need courage to follow their leaders into the unknown; individuals will choose to act for the greater good of the organisation despite the uncertainty of success and the personal risks to their own career.

Partnership Business Case

Organisations which work as integrated, flexible and adaptable teams with a shared purpose and aligned business goals tend to demonstrate not only increased efficiencies but also enhanced

organisational benefits. Partnership refers both to the organisational structural as well as the prime relationship model adopted or 'ways of doing things'.

- A Partnership Culture refers to the 'quality' of the relationship that enables individuals to influence, guide and constructively challenge each other, so that they are able to implement strategies and solutions which consistently deliver business value. Without strong relationships with the 'right people' the effectiveness of any type of organisational partnership is severely compromised.
- The goal is to create a culture around 'common ground' (rather than an 'underground' or 'battleground'). This is characterised by: honesty; trust and tolerance; acceptance of ambiguity; fluid and permeable; shape and direction is determined by the partners. From our experience at CourageousHR, we have observed that when organisations get their relationship model 'right' the structure is secondary. (For further insights refer to our whitepaper '[HR Dynamic Operating Model](#)')

Is HR courageous enough to meet the challenge?

Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage. Maya Angelou

Courage is a concept which is easy to grasp but difficult to consistently live out. For HR professionals it is important they decide for themselves what being courageous means and how courageous they wish to be in their role. The important thing to emphasise about HR courage is that increasingly those HR professionals who display courage will be relying less on their HR technical expertise, they will have the credibility and influence with business leaders to make a difference and they will be the HR Leaders of the future.

Research highlights that more often than not, HR flatters to deceive. It seems that business leaders state they not only want a more assertive HR Function, they are also looking for senior HR Professionals to play a more strategic and influential role in shaping the future of their organisation. So, why does HR repeatedly fall short of the mark set by the business? Well, at CourageousHR, we believe HR tends to have a legacy mindset which results in it acting like a passive service function, relying on out of date and limiting HR practices and focusing on efficiency savings. The continual failure of HR to deliver real business value will result in it increasingly becoming marginalised with the endgame being HR becomes an administrative function with minimal influence and few career prospects.

To counterbalance this possibility of HR's decline there is an opportunity for HR to take the initiative and identify where its' distinctive contribution is so that it can make it, both culturally and operationally, an organisational reality. To achieve this turnaround requires HR to be courageous – to change not only how it sees its role within the organisation but also how it operates and behaves so that it can demonstrate to the business the power and validity of being courageous.

CourageousHR is committed to creating a debate across both the HR world and organisations in general as to how should we respond to the 'courage challenge'. If you are interested in becoming involved in developing effective practices and techniques to develop personal and organisational

courage then join us at [Courageous HR Leadership Debate @ http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=2419901&trk=myg_ugrp_ovr](https://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=2419901&trk=myg_ugrp_ovr)

In addition, CourageousHR is also creating a practical framework for HR to work with based on our “7 faces of courage model”, as outlined below:

The seven faces of courage



Courage through partnership

Developing courageous partnerships certainly does not involve taking the easier path. It does require discipline, commitment and willingness to admit mistakes and be able to re-group. However, at CourageousHR we believe that unless HR does become courageous it will increasingly become marginalised and it will have no distinctive contribution to make.

By choosing to become courageous, HR will take a vital step away from being a passive follower to a leader of the business in the area which is most critical to the long-term health and vitality of any organisation – the people it employs.

About CourageousHR

At CourageousHR we work with HR Professionals like you to help you create innovative people solutions and courageously apply them. We help you to bridge the gap between academic vision and consulting rhetoric to guide and inspire you and your HR Community to move from being 'followers' to leaders.

Our passion and thinking comes from our experiences, research and a belief that 'tomorrow doesn't have to be the same as today'. Our reach is global and we happily work with clients throughout the world and across a wide range of industries