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A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF COURAGE

A Research Project
Presented to the Faculty of
The George L. Graziadio
School of Business and Management
Pepperdine University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
in
Organization Development

by
Alizabeth Lord Jetter
August 2010

This research project, completed by

ALIZABETH LORD JETTER

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has
been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The George L. Graziadio
School of Business and Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Courage has been described as recognizing a worthy goal and taking action to achieve it, despite the presence of fear. While acting courageously does impose risks for the individual or organization and failure is a real possibility, acting courageously also offers the promise of rewards such as attaining a prized goal and enhancing personal or organizational capacity. This study involved a qualitative examination of courage. Specifically, the study examined (a) the factors that influence people and organizations to take courageous action, (b) the characteristics of courageous action, and (c) the outcomes of courageous action.

This study involved a qualitative examination of courage using semi-structured interviews with 11 men and women who had corporate experience. Participants were selected using a combination of criterion, convenience, and snowball sampling strategies. Nine interviews were conducted by telephone and two were conducted in person. Each interview lasted 25 to 60 minutes in duration. Interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed, and examined using content analysis.

Participants believed that both contextual factors (e.g., one's organization, one's society, important others) influenced one's choice to act courageously. The research found a key personal factor promoting courageous action is the ability to feel fear and yet respond productively. Additionally, the person's own characteristics influence the choice to act. Such characteristics include one's fear tolerance, integrity, perceptions of risk, willingness to sacrifice personal gain, perceived consequences of not acting, proclivity for risk, and maturity. Participants explained that fear naturally arises when contemplating a courageous act. Fears typically surrounded negative financial, political, and relational effects. Participants also reported that they fear tarnishing their reputations, experiencing others' anger and retaliation, failing, and being different by taking a courageous action. Courage was reported to manifest as integrity in speech, action, and outcomes. The outcomes of courageous actions centered on certain inner experiences and enhanced personal capacity, others' responses, and practical outcomes.

These collected findings suggest that courageous acts might be encouraged or achieved only through a three-pronged approach of societal influence, the organization's cultural influence, and the natural tendencies of the individual. Thus, if courage is a desired behavior, it would be helpful to design organization development interventions that diagnose the societal factors, organizational factors, and personal factors promoting courageous action, as they were identified in this study's findings. Then, it would be helpful to educate organization leaders and members about what factors encourage and discourage courageous acts, and assure that the organizational systems are aligned to encourage courageous acts.

Limitations of this study included use of a small, rather homogeneous sample and researcher bias. Suggestions for additional research are to examine the role of personality in courage, explore the role of wisdom in courage, investigate the types of courageous cultures that exist, identify what culture types tend to align with courage and what culture types tend to be at odds with courage, and conduct cross-cultural examinations of courage.

Acknowledgments

To Britt.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.
Anais Nin (cited in Pincott, 2008, p. 35)

In today's global climate, economic and social unrest can lead to stress and threats to one's livelihood and emotional, mental, or physical well being. The euro zone debt crisis (*The Economist*, 2010) and unprecedented United States national debt (Reynolds & Goodman, 2010) has thrown the global economy on the pendulum swinging between calamity and revitalization. Deadly social unrest in Greece (Thomson Reuters, 2010) and ecological and economic disasters such as the 2010 British Petroleum oil spill (Berger, Knowlton, & Fountain, 2010) are just the most recent challenges in a decade that began with tragedies like the bursting of the dot-com bubble (Kuo, 2001) and the September 11 terrorist attacks (The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004).

Studies of biology have suggested that innate responses to fear and threat include freezing, fleeing, or fighting (Bracha, Ralston, Matsukawa, Williams, & Bracha, 2004). In response to financial or debt crises (*The Economist*, 2010; Kuo, 2001; Taylor, 2002), this could lead to individual behaviors such as continuing to overspend rather than to save, or corporate behaviors such as adjusting financial reports.

Despite the natural temptation to freeze, flee, or fight, another response is possible: courage. Courage has been described as recognizing a worthy goal and taking action to achieve it, despite the presence of fear (Kilmann, O'Hara, &

Strauss, 2010). While acting courageously does impose risks for the individual or organization and failure is a real possibility, acting courageously also offers the promise of rewards such as attaining a prized goal and enhancing personal or organizational capacity.

Neglecting to act courageously can incur serious drawbacks that may have debilitating effects on individuals, communities, and organizations (Garvey, 2007; Lynas, 2007; Marlette, 2006; Tutu, 2006). Garvey (2007), for example, explained that various scandals in the Catholic Church have prompted many parishioners to abandon the religion. Garvey explained that had the Church taken the courageous act to expose the truth and take responsibility for the outcomes, for example, of the sexual abuse of children by priests, the Church might not have languished as it has in recent decades. The Enron scandal led to personal and financial devastation for its employees (Taylor, 2002) and investors. Had the company resisted the temptation to falsify its figures and had the courage to reports its actual financial realities, it is possible that the organization would still exist today—to the benefit of its stockholders, leaders, employees, and community. Lynas (2007) argued that the failure of news organizations to take a stand on climate change might contribute to planetary demise. In contrast, taking the courage to speak the truth as it is would better equip governments, communities, and citizens to take needed and appropriate action. These are but a few examples of failures to act courageously among individuals, communities, or organizations.

Courage is an often widely espoused and coveted virtue across individuals and organizations. A search for business and investing books on

courage available for purchase on Amazon.com (2010) results in a list of 233 books. Despite the apparent popularity of the concept (Woodard, 2001), courage does not appear to be practiced widely (Garvey, 2007; Lynas, 2007; Marlette, 2006; Tutu, 2006). Due to the costs of the lack of courage demonstrated in the earlier paragraph, it is important to understand what exactly courage is, what emerges from it, and what factors might encourage people to act more courageously.

Study Purpose

This study involved a qualitative examination of courage. Three questions guided this study:

1. What factors influence people and organizations take courageous action?
2. What are the characteristics of courageous action?
3. What are the outcomes of courageous action?

These questions were explored using a qualitative research interview design.

Significance of Study

Insights gained from this study will illuminate the ingredients of courage and what factors encourage people to act with courage. This study also will shed light on what positive and negative outcomes tend to follow courageous action. Based on this knowledge, it might be possible to construct a business case for courage by clarifying what individuals and organizations stand to gain from courageous action. The findings from this study could inspire individuals to reconsider how they show up in their life and in their organizations. Similarly,

good companies might be inspired to become great companies and great companies might be inspired to become quantum companies that operate with courage on a continual basis (Kilmann et al., 2010).

Based on this study, it might be possible to design and implement supportive structures that make it easier for people and organizations to choose courage. This information and supportive structure could be used in team development, leadership development, and coaching.

Researcher Background

In qualitative studies, researchers play an integral role in the research and their experiences and potential biases related to the material need to be acknowledged. I have been surrounded by incredible women and men throughout my life. As a result, I have always been an unwitting student of courage, lover of the icons of courage, and supporter of courageous acts.

My mother demonstrated courage by following her heart on behalf of love and her skills in the world of business. My aunt displayed courage by fulfilling her call to the ministry despite rejection of her call by the church of her youth (in Baptist tradition, women were not called into ministry). She ultimately earned her master's in divinity from the University of Chicago and became a preacher. My grandmother displayed courage by feeding homeless people and friends and neighbors in need, without concern for herself or her family. As a young man, my grandfather displayed courage by standing up for his beliefs in the early 1900s in Mississippi. Due to the response by an angry, drunken mob, he fled to Tennessee to preserve his life.

I grew up on “Say it loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud!” I grew up on powerful stories of the civil rights movement, slavery, and the beauty and tragedy of being an American. Courage was what I knew and what I saw every day surviving the streets of Chicago or living in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I always felt a soul connection to courageous civil rights leaders such as Medgar Evers, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X and keenly felt their loss when they left earth too soon. I felt like I knew the essence of Truth embodied in the stories of Harriett Tubman, Rosa Parks, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. I remember athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their black-gloved fists as a symbol of Black Power in the 1968 Olympics, although I was only a toddler. I remember watching Muhammad Ali’s boxing matches and recall the pride in my family member’s voices as they spoke of Ali’s American story, truth, and courage.

I was taught to stand behind the courage of my convictions, although it might cost me everything. I was taught that if I don’t stand for something, I will fall for anything. Most courageous of all, my mother taught me to love everyone, regardless of their religion, skin color, hatred, or ignorance. Thus, I have experienced people as individuals for who they are: whole beings to be loved, understood, misunderstood, and loved all over again.

My personal acts of courage have included speaking up for the underdog, refusing to play with the popular kids if they wouldn’t play with the unpopular kids, honoring my culture, saying no to a marriage that no longer worked, raising two small children alone, and ultimately saying yes to true love. I also put myself through college (making the Phi Kappa Phi honor society); volunteered with kids;

won community, business, and civic awards; worked on a Governor's Council; chaired a State Committee on Employment; and have led various ministries.

In work settings, I fell in love with courage working for and with great employees, great leaders, and heroic consultants such as Gus Blanchard, Roger Vincent, Jim Barber, John O'Brien, and a Union President by the name of Justin Shields. What I have found is that those who live by a moral code personify that in their strategies and solutions. These individuals and people like them were relentless in pushing for the best. With that, they empowered organizations to excel beyond their perceived boundaries. They set the stage for boundarylessness, learning, generative and transformational organizations. Because of this, everyone around them and their organizations excelled.

Across these various settings, I have challenged those in power to do the right thing. Reflecting on my personal history, I realize that I did not know I had a choice when it came to courage. It has simply been part of my personal, spiritual, familial, and communal value system.

In recent years, I have had more exposure to fear and cowardice and learned how certain leaders and organizations can evoke cowardice in their employees. Getting a closer look at cowardice has required me to actively choose courage in the face of fear, risk, and uncertainty.

These lifelong experiences of courage inspired me turn my interest into research. As I shared my topic with friends and colleagues, I was encouraged by their interest and excitement. They shared their own stories of their personal journeys through courage and, in contrast, their experiences of an economic climate and of corporate environments that encourage safety and self-

preservation. The findings from this study have validated and extended my own experiences of courage and have provided insights that I can share with others in my personal and professional circles.

Organization of the Study

This chapter reviewed the background, purpose, setting, and importance of the study. My background as the researcher also was provided. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature including a definition of courage, a discussion of courage in organizations, and an exploration of the following three questions:

1. What factors influence people and organizations take courageous action?
2. What are the characteristics of courageous action?
3. What are the outcomes of courageous action?

Chapter 3 presents the methods used in this study. Specifically, the research design, sampling, interview procedures, and data analysis procedures are discussed.

Chapter 4 presents the study results. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results, including conclusions, practical recommendations, limitations of the study, and suggestions for additional research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

It is curious—curious that physical courage should be so common in the world, and moral courage so rare

Mark Twain (cited in ThinkExist.com, 2010, para. 1)

Social views of courage have evolved over time, from focusing on heroism and manliness to including concepts such as wisdom and discernment and involving both action and inaction. Accordingly, courage has been examined from various lenses. For example, Aristotle, Bauhn, Compte-Sponville, and Mencius discussed it as a philosophical construct. Aristotle (1987) explained that courage consists of three principle elements: appropriate fear, confidence, and value judgment. Bauhn (2003) added that courage is a personality disposition of confronting fear for the purpose of advancing society's and one's own good. Similarly, Compte-Sponville (2001) explained that courage occurs when one manages their fear and faces reasonable risk in pursuit of a worthy end. Mencius distinguished between types of courage, seeing some as "pretty," those concerned exclusively with personal honor and "great," those grounded in and oriented toward the good. He added that when people feel they are working toward a justified cause, they have the motivation to face great danger (cited in Ivanhoe, 2002).

Cavanagh and Moberg (2000) explained that courage is not only a behavior but also a disposition or virtue. Courage also is a highly romantic idea. Woodard (2001) observed, "Most people are likely to want to perceive themselves with the socially desirable quality of courage" (p. 181).

Perhaps it is due to the popularity of the idea of courage that many terms (both fitting and ill-fitting) have emerged to describe it. Some popular synonyms for courage that, according to Rate (2005), do not adequately represent the construct are audacity, boldness, fearlessness, bravery, heroism, and valor. These ideas tend to suggest an absence of fear and bold action. More accurate depictions of courage according to Rate might include confidence, doing the right thing and acting despite fear, and standing up for what one believes in.

This description may bring to mind historical heroes such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Captain Ernest Shackleton, Ferdinand Magellan, and Gandhi, as well as heroes by profession, such as soldiers on the battlefield, firefighters, police officers, bomb operators; and every day heroes such as virtuous people, skilled managers, and other moral and ethical individuals (Rate, 2005). While courage can be needed from time to time in virtually any setting, the amount and nature of the courage varies. Further, Rate (2005) emphasized that there are no courageous people. Instead, there are only courageous acts. Rate explained that it is erroneous to determine that courage is a lasting trait of the individual. Instead, courage is demonstrated as needed in particular situations and toward particular goals.

This chapter discusses the construct of courage. First a definition of courage is provided based upon examination of existing literature. This section provides a general understanding of courage in preparation for the remainder of the chapter, which explores courage specifically within the context of organizations, including how it is developed within these settings and what outcomes could be expected.

Courage Defined

Psychological researchers have examined courage as a cognitive mechanism (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Putnam, 2001). Some authors also have emphasized that it is a multidimensional construct (Kilmann et al., 2010; Rate, Clarke, Lindsay, & Sternberg, 2007). Rate added that there are several kinds of courage, such as physical, moral, psychological, vital, creative, general, personal, and of one's convictions.

Courage appears to invoke activity on mental, emotional, and behavioral levels (Harris, 1999; Putman, 2001). Kilmann et al. (2010) explained based on their literature review that "courage involves emotion, cognition, and action in which a person risks harm in pursuit of a noble purpose" (p. 16). Putman (2001) elaborated, "Fear and confidence are thus deeply intertwined, but the two emotions rely on distinct perceptions: the danger of the situation, the worthiness of the cause, and the perception of one's ability" (p. 469).

Harris (1999) added that courage is dynamic, suggesting that it shifts in form based upon the attitudes and beliefs of the person and the needs of the situation. While "traditional" courage might focus on acts of strength, bravery, or boldness, Harris cautioned that such forms of courage (e.g., being physically aggressive) can be dangerous and can actually jeopardize one's goals. Cavanagh and Moberg (2000) added that, at times, courage may be quiet and undramatic, demonstrated through persistent effort against a difficult obstacle rather than through a burst of energy. Thus, it is important to discern what action (and what degree of action) befits the situation—whether that is to take a stand, to flee, or to surrender (Harris, 1999; Putman, 2001). Perhaps this is why during

Aristotle's time, the prevailing sentiment was that courage must be exercised in conjunction with other virtues such as wisdom and justice (Harris, 1999). Harris observed based on his recent studies that there also exists a link between courage and integrity. This suggests that significant attention must be given to what response is truly needed in any particular situation.

Rate et al. (2007) observed that tacit agreement across the courage literature exists about the definition of this construct. They offered this summary:

courage is a complex, multi-dimensional construct [consisting of] (a) a willful, intentional act; (b) executed after mindful deliberation; (c) involving objective substantial risk to the actor; (d) primarily motivated to bring about a noble good or worth end; (e) despite, perhaps, the presence of the emotion of fear. (p. 95)

Based on their definition, they observed that courage "is comprised of situational (external circumstances), cognitive, volitional, affective, and motivational components" (p. 95). Examination of the courage literature has surfaced similar components of the construct. These components and characteristics are discussed in the following sections.

Aimed Toward a Valued End

An important starting point for courage is the idea that it is aimed toward a valued end. Various descriptions of this are in the literature, such as striving toward morally praiseworthy ends; being motivated to bring about a noble, good, or worthy purpose; and standing up for what one believes in (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Rate, 2005; Woodard, 2001). Woodard added, "Courage includes a quality of grace, nobility, and meaningfulness. Without these qualities, it is reckless stupidity" (p. 174). A final important point is that courageous behavior is directed toward some good that is deemed valuable by one's

community (Harris, 1999). Thus, determining what is a courageous act is inherently bound to one's context. This is the focus of the next section.

Bound by Context

Harris (1999) explained that external circumstances (e.g., one's setting) and personal attributes are important for understanding courage. Harris emphasized, "Courageous behavior must be directed toward some good which is respected in the community" (p. 36). It follows that cultural beliefs and values dictate whether an act is courageous or foolhardy (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Woodard, 2001). For example, in collectivist cultures (e.g., China), where cohesiveness and face-saving is important (Hofstede, 1980), it might be foolhardy to voice an opinion that could make one's leader look wrong or misinformed. In contrast, in individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States), this same action could be considered laudable and highly courageous.

Further, just as the courageousness of an act differs from one culture to another, each culture has a different expectation regarding the level of courage members are expected to exhibit (Harris, 1999). For example, in ancient Greek society, "courage was not a theoretical matter but something practical that shapes skills" (p. 28). According to Harris, courage is also one of the four cardinal virtues in the Western tradition and a central virtue in Confucian thought.

Determination of what a courageous act is and how much courage is expected also are influenced by the person's own beliefs, values, and preferences (Harris, 1999; Putman, 2001; Rate, 2005; Rate et al., 2007). These values can vary based on one's gender; national, community, or family culture; and life stage (Rate, 2005). Rate et al. (2007) added, "Implicit theories of courage

are people's own cognitive constructions [that] need to be discovered rather than invented because they already exist" (p. 81). This suggests that each person determines for oneself what constitutes risk, what is fearful, what places one in a vulnerable state, what is a worthy cause, and what a courageous response would be.

Additionally, people tend to apply their own expectations about courage to others. Due to the subjective nature of the courageous act, no formal test of courage can exist and courage is ultimately in the eye of the beholder (Rate, 2005; Rate et al., 2007). It follows that an event that calls one person to courageous action might be the very thing that holds another back from courageous action (Harris, 1999). For example, observing a case of workplace bullying might compel one individual to speak up to honor one's principles of fairness or preventing victimization. However, the same case might lead others to choose safety, for example, if facing the bully would introduce the potential for harm or damage that was too overwhelming for the individual. For example, a single mother of five young children who is barely making ends meet in the midst of a deep economic recession marked by unprecedented unemployment might not speak out against workplace bullying if she believed it would result in her losing her job.

Involves Risk, Threat, and Fear

Courageous action inherently involves risk, threat, and potential harm for the individual considering the action (Cavanagh & Moberg, 2000; Kilmann et al., 2010; Putman, 2001; Woodard, 2001). Classic tales of courage involve someone risking their life for another, such as the 4-year-old boy who threw his body over

his little brother to keep him from being shot or the father who jumped in the icy pond to save his daughter who fell through a thin layer of ice (Rate et al., 2007). While these are not representative of every story of courage, they emphasize that the risk people face in taking courageous action can be substantial (Rate, 2005).

Other consequences of courageous action might include financial adversity or bankruptcy, social disapproval and ostracism, “increased scrutiny, a reprimand, or even an unwelcome [job] transfer” (Cavanagh & Moberg, 2000, p. 6). Social disapproval and ostracism can occur because, even if some people consider the act courageous, others may castigate the same action. For example, for the individual raised on family virtues of speaking one’s mind, it might be courageous to voice one’s ideas, even if it means going against one’s boss. However, in that individual’s workplace, the culture might be to “never oppose the boss.” In this situation, speaking out would be courageous based on the individual’s personal and family’s frame of reference, but doing so may earn criticism from coworkers and a reprimand from management. Given the significance of the potential impacts, the cause must be worth the risk involved in action (Putman, 2001).

Another aspect of the risk and threat involved with courageous action is that the individual must endure and overcome challenges and obstacles (Rate, 2005). Harris (1999) emphasized, “Courage has distinct obstacles and tools” (p. 32). For example, someone taking the courageous action to set off on a new path in a life might face the challenges and obstacles of ending some relationships, leaving a job, and moving away from one’s home. These activities

could result in grief, loss, and anxiety; financial hardship; and practical challenges.

Fear also plays a central role in courage. While one might conclude that courage is the absence of fear, several authors argued that this is a significant distortion (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Pury, Kowalski, & Spearman, 2007; Rate, 2005). In fact, Woodard (2001) emphasized, “Fear is a prerequisite for courage” (p. 174). Understanding the role of fear in courage is aided by the insight that fear results from one’s perception of vulnerability, which occurs when one perceives that a threat outweighs one’s resources for overcoming that threat (Beck, Emery, & Greenberg, 1985). As described earlier in this section, risk and threat is an inherent component of courage and it is the taking action despite the fear that essentially defines the action as courage.

Given that fear naturally arises when one considers a courageous action, the next question is what to do with one’s fear. Putman (2001) urged people not to deny their fear. He explained,

The ideal in courage is not just rigid control of fear, nor is it denial of the emotion. The ideal is to judge a situation accurately, accept the emotion as part of human nature and, we hope, using well-developed habits to confront the fear and allow reason to guide our behavior toward a worthwhile goal. (p. 465)

Woodard (2001) emphasized that living in an authentic manner—meaning acknowledging and appropriately expressing one’s actual feelings, thoughts, and desires (Rogers, 1961)—requires acknowledging one’s fear and risks and moving forward anyway when the cause merits action. Kilmann et al. (2010) argued that the alternative is living in fear and resigning one’s hopes for the

future, which ultimately hurts the individual, one's organization, and one's society.

Requires Evaluation of the Success Potential

The opposing forces of a worthy goal versus the risk, threat, and fear one faces in acting ignites a cognitive assessment of one's potential for success. This begins a comparison of one's available resources to the demands of the situation. Woodard (2001) argued that the "courageous person is one who, despite perceiving a danger or threat beyond that which his resources are capable of effectively managing, moves forward and acts anyway" (p. 174). At the same time, there needs to be some perceived potential for success—however slight that potential is (Worline, Wrzesniewski, & Rafaeli, 2002). Without this, action would not be courageous—it would simply be reckless. As Beck et al. (1985) explained in the earlier section, this evaluation process can result in fear if one determines (accurately or inaccurately) that the risk outweighs one's resources for responding.

According to Putman (2001), another part of this evaluation process is one's trust and confidence in oneself to pull through. Putman explained that this "confidence one has in one's skills or abilities cannot be simply a passive confidence" (p. 465). He added that this self-confidence is the major determining factor in how one responds to fear. Putman provided the example of an alcoholic who might fear the challenge of recovery; however, if he or she has trust in oneself to bear the pain of withdrawal, the individual may proceed with recovery. Even when one's confidence in oneself is limited, one might find needed support from others and such support can inspire one to act (Woodard, 2001). For

example, the therapy client considering the challenge of facing one's painful memories might lack confidence in oneself to deal with those memories; however, one might trust and rely on the support of one's therapist in beginning the journey. Support from others also can come in the form of social norms and expectations regarding definitions of a worthy goal, reasonable risk, and a courageous act.

It is important to note, however, that the value of the potential outcome (e.g., saving a family member's life) might make any evaluation of one's ability moot. For example, in the example where the boy shielded his brother, his need to shield his brother might have been greater than his need to survive. This seems consistent with Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs.

A third component of the cognitive evaluation process is comparing the possible benefits (if the goal is achieved) to the costs of the effort. The benefits must outweigh the costs; otherwise, the action could be considered foolish rather than courageous. Despite the potential for valued benefits, it is important to keep in mind that courage requires one to act without the assurance of a positive outcome (Kilmann et al., 2010; Rate, 2005; Woodard, 2001). Putman (2001) explained, "Courage requires us to push ourselves past what we know with relative certainty to area where we are not certain at all" (p. 466). Thus, "Courage lies in the interface where the limit of our confidence meets the reality of a feared situation" (p. 469). For example, in the case of the father jumping in the river to save his daughter who fell through the ice, he quickly determined that the value of saving his daughter was worth the risk to his own life, even though his own death was a very real possibility (Rate et al., 2007). Again, the value of the

potential outcome in this case (e.g., saving a family member's life) might make any other evaluations related to deciding whether to act moot.

Requires Conscious Effort and Choice

Following the identification of a worthy goal, the recognition of risk and threat, the emergence of fear, and assessment of the potential for success, the final condition for courageous action is intentional choice and effort (Harris, 1999; Putman, 2001; Rate, 2005). Worline et al. (2002) elaborated that courage requires free choice (rather than coercion) in deciding to act. This means proceeding with mindful action based on deliberate evaluation, despite any fear or presence of threat (Rate, 2005; Worline et al., 2002). Thus, when one declines to act courageously, it does not mean the person lacked will or was too afraid; it simply could mean that the action did not make sense following his or her evaluation of the situation. Putman (2001) added that the ideal related to courageous action is to judge the situation accurately and allow reason to guide one's behavior toward a worthwhile goal.

Harris (1999) described this as a multistage and sometimes iterative cognitive process of (a) assessing of the worthiness of the aim, (b) evaluating one's commitment to try to achieve the aim, (c) interpreting the situation at hand, (d) making the intention to act, and (e) acting according to the intention. This process from initial assessment through action often involves mental or moral strength (Kilmann et al., 2010; Woodard, 2001), involving "bearing and withstanding those things wherein it is most difficult to be firm" (Rate, 2005, p. 8). Cavanagh and Moberg (2000) added that courage is a moral habit that is developed through experience and with the help of role modeling.

The topics discussed so far in this chapter have helped formulate a general understanding of courage across settings. The next section explores courage specifically within organizations.

Courage in Organizations

According to Rate (2005), courage is necessary within the organization if it is to achieve honesty and integrity. Cavanagh and Moberg (2000) asserted that courage was necessary simply for the organization to be effective. Rate (2005) and Harris (1999) emphasized that courage must be an organizational and management virtue, which means turning abstract principles of ethics, integrity, and responsibility into daily practice.

While it cannot be predicted when courage will be required, it is relevant to many day-to-day situations within organizations (Harris, 1999). For example, courage could be required in voicing an unpopular opinion, making decisions that will make an important stakeholder unhappy, sharing difficult news with a manager or customer, or taking responsibility for one's actions. Of course, whether these behaviors require courage at all and whether these are courageous or foolhardy depend on perceptions and evaluations related to the value of the outcome (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Rate, 2005; Woodard, 2001); the cultural context (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Woodard, 2001); the potential for risk, threat, and fear (Cavanagh & Moberg, 2000; Kilmann et al., 2010; Putman, 2001; Rate, 2005; Woodard, 2001); and the possibility for success (Beck et al., 1985; Kilmann et al., 2010; Putman, 2001; Rate, 2005; Rate et al., 2007; Woodard, 2001; Worline et al., 2002).

Developing Courage in Organizations

Developing courage in organizations begins with simply understanding the meaning of what it is within the context of the organization (Rate, 2005). Harris (1999) outlined four degrees of courageous behavior: *changed my mind* (Type I), *try as hard as I might* (Type II), *summoned up the courage* (Type III), and *without a second thought* (Type IV). These four degrees suggest that courage can be cultivated from the point of considering the courageous action but not following through to performing courageous acts seemingly without a moment's debate. Harris (1999) offered this model as a framework for people to understand their past attitudes and behaviors as they relate to courage and to consciously set their expectations for future approaches to courage.

After one's past way of being and desired way of being are brought into consciousness, it is important to provide opportunities to practice courageous behavior and then to reward exemplary behavior (Harris, 1999). Ultimately, practice is possibly one of the most important means for institutionalizing courage throughout the organization. Cavanagh and Moberg (2000) elaborated, "courage [is] a moral habit that is developed through experience and with the help of role modeling" (p. 4). For example, even giving employees the opportunity to work on a project that requires a certain amount of innovation would invite them to take the risk of voicing and advocating for their own ideas. When they do, regardless of the outcome, their managers could express appreciation for sharing their ideas. This reinforces the courageous behavior and, in turn, resets expectations regarding what constitutes normal behavior and what constitutes courageous behavior. Therefore, increasingly courageous behavior becomes normalized.

Harris (1999) added that employees' courageous actions also could be encouraged by designing activities that help people move from Type I, to Type II, and so on in his model. For example, coaching and mentoring might give employees the emotional support they need to help them commit to trying as hard as they can with a new challenge rather than to simply choose safety and change their minds.

Another key point is that any efforts to build courage in the organization need to be supported through the organization's policies and procedures (Kilmann et al., 2010; Pury et al., 2007). For example, it is important to examine whether acts of courage would go against official policies, procedures, and practices. If so, employees would receive negative consequences for taking action, and both they and those who witness the consequences would be discouraged from taking the risk again (Kilmann et al., 2010). When considering any efforts to enhance the level of courage, the organization's external environment, climate and culture, and formal and informal systems should be examined to determine whether they support the attitudes and behaviors of courage. Finally, a powerful way to encourage courageous behavior is to reward those who take these kinds of risks (Pury et al., 2007). It is important to note that removing the risk from the action actually reduces the amount of courage involved, based on the components of courageous action described earlier in this chapter. However, the authors do not address this paradox.

Working to build courageous behavior within individual employees can have far-reaching beneficial effects throughout the organization—extending upward, downward, and laterally from the employee. Kilmann et al. (2010)

explained that building the capacity for courage at nearly any level within the organization contributes to moral elevation of the entire organization. This occurs because courage is socially contagious as people witness acts of courage, talk with others who take courageous action, or hear stories of organizational courage (Kilmann et al., 2010; McConkie & Boss, 1986). Worline et al's. (2002) research indicated that when members witness other employees taking chances for the benefits of their organization and succeeding with their actions, in particular, the witnessing members expand their beliefs about what is possible to do. (The reverse also is true: If negative consequences are witnessed as the result of taking chances, the members restrict their beliefs about what is possible). Thus, through these various socialization activities, courage becomes an organizational phenomenon rather than just an individual virtue (Cavanagh & Moberg, 2000). Kilmann et al. (2010) called organizations that operate with an optimized level of courageous action Quantum Organizations, meaning that members throughout the organization operate with wisdom and courage.

Despite the many options for instilling courage within organizations, it is important to understand that not all aspects of moral development and courageous behavior can be taught. Thus, the influence of employees' personal attributes needs to be acknowledged. Given this factor, it might be advisable to screen and hire for courage if this trait is desired within the organization.

Additional factors that affect the degree to which courage can be made manifest in the organization include the attributes of the leaders and their ability to create an organizational culture that supports courageous acts of its people. This can be

demonstrated through the organization's performance and ability to cope with change.

The literature within this section has demonstrated that leaders have many options for instilling courage within their organizations and encouraging employees to take such actions. However, successfully doing so requires concerted effort and significant changes throughout the organization. The next section discusses the benefits and drawbacks organizations stand to gain if they make this effort.

Outcomes of Courageous Action

Kilmann et al. (2010) argued that acts of courage might have a dramatic impact on employees and the long term success of an organization. He explained that when individuals embody courage, they internalize what behaviors are in the best interest of the organization both in the short-run and long-run and, in turn, perform these behaviors and acts as needed. Another important benefit of courage is simply avoiding the negative consequences of not taking courageous action. Kilmann et al. explained that the alternative of not cultivating employees' acts of courage is to leave them to live in fear and resign their hopes for the future. Deming (1986), in his pioneering work *Out of the Crisis* on total quality management, listed driving out fear as one of managers' primary responsibilities. They predicted this would ultimately hurt the employees, the organization, and even the larger society.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that negative consequences can result from taking courage action. Harris (1999) explained that organizations can be courageous to their detriment. He pointed out:

Concerns [have been] expressed in the literature that strong corporate culture can lead to extreme actions which inflict lasting damage on the wider society. Thus a culture in which the capacity for courage verges on rashness, where fearlessness or overconfidence are cherished [and are] undesirable by both management and society. (p. 33)

Therefore, it is important to be aware that acting courageously is not always the needed or best approach to address organizational challenges (Kilmann et al., 2010). As a result, it is important to exercise wisdom to determine when courage is needed and when the best action is inaction.

Summary of the Literature

Societal definitions of courage have evolved over time, from basic concepts of manliness, bravery, and heroism to definitions that involve wisdom and courage encompassing both action and inaction (Cavanagh & Moberg, 2000; Rate, 2005). Throughout time, courage has appeared to be a romantic ideal that people want to believe they embody (Woodard, 2001); however, the literature suggests that courage is characterized by specific attributes, invokes a series of evaluations, and can result in both positive and negative outcomes. Importantly, one's personal, social, and organizational attributes form a context that strongly influences this evaluation process (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Woodard, 2001). Additionally, Rate (2005) emphasized that while an act can be courageous, a person cannot be courageous, as it is not a human trait as much as it is a decision-making process.

Examination of the literature has suggested that courage begins with recognition of a worthy goal (Rate, 2005; Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Woodard, 2001). Following this recognition, the individual evaluates the risk and

threat he or she faces by acting (Cavanagh & Moberg, 2000; Putman, 2001; Rate et al., 2007). Determining the level of risk and comparing the demands of the situation to one's resources can lead to a sense of vulnerability which, in turn, triggers fear (Beck, Emery, & Greenberg, 1985). Accordingly, the authors reviewed in this chapter agreed that fear is a natural part of courage (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Rate, 2005; Woodard, 2001). Following this step of evaluating the risk and threat, the individual evaluates the potential for success (Putman, 2001; Worline et al., 2002). Ultimately, this gives way to a conscious choice of whether to act (Harris, 1999; Putman, 2001; Rate, 2005). I summarize the literature in the form of a "courage equation," where courage is the function of a combination of "head," "heart," and "hands":

$$\text{Courage} = f(\text{head [valued goal]}, \text{heart [fear and perceived risk]}, \text{hands [perceived ability to do this and probability of success]})$$

In terms of organizations, Cavanagh and Moberg (2000) and Rate (2005) argued that courage was necessary for organizational effectiveness and integrity. Harris (1999) added that occasions for courage can arise in various positions and levels of the organization each day. Developing courage in an organization begins with understanding what courage looks like within that particular organizational setting (Harris, 1999; Rate, 2005). The next step is to implement and support frequent practice of courage, as it is a habit that develops over time given the benefit of support (Cavanagh & Moberg, 2000; Harris, 1999). The researchers emphasized that managers and organizational systems need to encourage, acknowledge, and rewards acts of courage (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Pury et al., 2007).

Once courage is successfully encouraged and instilled among a few individuals, the social dynamics of organizations mean that the practice can more easily become an organizational virtue (Cavanagh & Moberg, 2000; Kilmann et al., 2010). This occurs because courage is socially contagious as people witness acts of courage, talk with others who take courageous action, or hear stories of organizational courage (Kilmann et al., 2010; McConkie & Boss, 1986; Worline et al., 2002). At the same time, it is important to be aware that not all aspects of courage can be taught; therefore, if courage is a desired behavior, employee recruiting and selection should incorporate screening for courage.

Ultimately, courageous action can have significant positive benefits for employees, their organizations, and their societies (Kilmann et al., 2010). However, courage also can result in negative outcomes. Therefore, the ideal approach might be to blend both wisdom and courage for the optimal organizational outcomes.

This literature review has generated valuable insights about the definition, process, and outcomes of courageous action in general and in organizational settings. This study set out to validate these findings through empirical data gathered through in-depth interviews with members of various organizations. The next chapter describes the methods that were used in this study.

Chapter 3

Methods

This study involved a qualitative examination of courage. Three questions guided this study:

1. What factors influence people and organizations take courageous action?
2. What are the characteristics of courageous action?
3. What are the outcomes of courageous action?

This chapter describes the methods used in this study. The research paradigm and design are described first, following by the procedures related to participant selection, interviews, and data analysis.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative design. Qualitative designs rely on constructivism, meaning that knowledge is socially constructed rather than discovered in a depersonalized and objective manner. Creswell (2003) elaborated that humans construct the meaning of their experiences and make sense of them as they engage with the world. The meanings that are derived from a person's experience are based upon his or her historical and social perspective. As a result, it is critical for the researcher to seek to understand the context of the participant and to gather information personally. Further, once the information is gathered, the researcher then assigns meaning and makes sense of the information through his or her own filters shaped by his or her experiences and backgrounds.

Whereas quantitative research seeks to measure and assess the relationships between variables, qualitative research seeks “to explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations” (Miles & Huberman, 2006, p. 7). As a result, the researcher’s role is to gain a holistic understanding of the construct being studied in all its richness and complexity. An important part of this is focusing on “naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what ‘real-life’ is like” (p. 10). In turn, the results are reported in the form of “*thick descriptions* that are vivid and nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has strong impact on the reader” (p. 10).

Qualitative research is a useful tool for understanding why things happen, locating the meanings people assign to events, connecting these meanings to participants’ social worlds, and appreciating the depth and complexity of a phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 2006). In particular, qualitative research can be a superior strategy for exploring a new concept, developing hypothesis, testing hypothesis, and illuminating quantitative data gathered from the same setting.

Qualitative methods also pose challenges in terms of managing the significant volumes of information gathered, managing researcher bias to preserve the credibility of the data, and effectively accessing the complexity of the data (Miles & Huberman, 2006). Miles and Huberman elucidated the difference between simple *behavior* and *action*, the latter of which is motivated by intention, imbued with meaning, followed by consequences, and rooted in the participant’s social and historical context. Miles and Huberman emphasized, “The

apparent implicitly of qualitative 'data' masks a good deal of complexity, requiring plenty of care and self-awareness on the part of the researcher" (p. 10). It follows that the qualitative paradigm holds that multiple participant meanings rather than a single, objective truth exists.

A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because it was exploratory in nature. The construct of courage does not have one agreed upon definition within the research community or even society at large. In fact, Rate et al. (2007) added that courage, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Thus, the qualitative approach that allows for multiple participant meanings was ideal for this study. While some researchers may argue that qualitative studies are not as "clean" or objective as quantitative research, quantitative methods dehumanize phenomena that are inherently human.

Participants

A researcher must choose a participant group that is relevant to the purpose of the study. Morse and Field (1995) explained that qualitative is governed by the principles of adequacy and appropriateness.

Adequacy refers to generating enough data to develop a rich and complete description of the phenomenon. This is best achieved through data saturation, meaning that the researcher generally keeps hearing the same ideas from each successive participant. Adequacy is addressed through assuring that a suitable sample size is achieved.

Appropriateness refers to identifying and involving the participants "who can best inform the research according to the theoretical requirements of the

study” (p. 80). Appropriateness is assured through identifying and utilizing suitable sampling strategies, selection criteria, and selection procedures.

The following sections describe the considerations and procedures that were used in this study related to sample size, sampling strategy, selection criteria, and selection procedures. Confidentiality and consent procedures also are discussed.

Sample Size

Miles and Huberman (2006) explained that sample sizes in qualitative research typically are small, thus enabling researchers to examine each participant’s experiences, meanings, and contexts in depth. This differs sharply from quantitative research, where the aim is achieving a large number of context-stripped cases to facilitate the testing of statistical significance.

A total of 11 participants were included in this study, which is within the guidelines advised by Kvale (1996) of including 5 to 25 participants, depending upon the purposes of the study. This sample size was determined based on time and resource considerations as well as the expectation that saturation would be reached at this point.

Sampling Strategy

Qualitative samples generally are purposive, meaning that participants are drawn according to the specific purposes of the research. For example, if the focus of the research were to understand the experience of coal miners in West Virginia, a random sample drawn from the general population of the United States is highly unlikely to obtain useful data.

The specific process of drawing participants is governed by a sampling strategy. A combination of strategies (criterion, convenience, and snowball) were included in this study. Criterion sampling means defining certain criteria that participants must meet to be included (Miles & Huberman, 2006). These criteria are defined to assure that participants can provide useful and relevant data. Convenience sampling means identifying study candidates from the researcher's personal and professional network. While this strategy often expedites the process of participant selection, it does so at the cost of limited transferability and bias. Snowball sampling means that the researcher asks study participants to recommend other people who might qualify and be willing to participate in the study. This can be an efficient way to achieve a suitable sample size.

Selection Criteria

Defining selection criteria enables the researcher to define aspects of the participants that are desired for the study. This helps assure that participants are directly connected to the study purpose and, in turn, that data collection is relatively efficient (Miles & Huberman, 2006). The selection criteria for this study were adults aged 20 to 60 who have worked at least 1 year in a corporate setting and were interested in discussing the concept of courage. This assured that participants had some experience working in a corporate setting and, thus, might have had experiences related to courage in these settings.

Selection Procedures

The participant selection process began by reflecting on the researcher's personal and professional networks and listing study candidates who satisfied the selection criteria. Candidates were contacted by telephone or sent a study

invitation by email (see Appendix A). Each was informed of the study purpose, the nature of participation, and the confidentiality procedures. Eligibility was confirmed whether the candidate met the study criteria.

If the candidate agreed to participate, a telephone or in-person interview was immediately scheduled and she or he was emailed the consent form (see Appendix B) that needed to be signed and returned before conducting the interview. Candidates were asked for suggestions of other people who might qualify for the study and be interested in participating. Participant selection concluded when 11 interviews were completed.

Participant Description

Eleven participants (five men, six women) were included in the study (see Table 1). Two were age 30, eight were 40- to 49-years-old, and one was 51-years-old. Five held bachelors degrees and six held masters degrees. One was an individual contributor, two were first-line supervisors, five were in middle management, two were in upper management, and one was a chief executive officer. One was from a non-profit organization, one was from a government organization, the remaining were private sector companies. Five companies were Fortune 500. Four participants were from consumer products, two were from adult beverages, and the remaining participants were from recruiting, marketing, pharmaceutical, and financial industries.

Confidentiality and Consent Procedures

Confidentiality and consent procedures are used to protect the health and well-being of participants (Cone & Foster, 1997). These procedures also allow for any issues or concerns to be surfaced before the participant agrees to participate

Table 1

Participant Descriptions

	Education, Position, Organization, Industry	Relationship to Study Topic
Brad 40-year-old male	Bachelors degree Middle management, Fortune 500 consumer products company	Company culture embraces managerial courage
Carter 40-year-old male	Masters degree Middle management (director), Fortune 500 pharmaceutical company	Has held human resources positions in several "Best Place to Work" companies
Corey 40- to 49- year-old male	Masters degree Upper Management, Fortune 500 consumer products company	Senior leader in a top global organization. Recommended by another research participant
Dan 40- to 49- year-old male	Masters degree Middle Management, private adult beverage company	Recommended by another research participant
Deani 49-year-old female	Masters degree Middle management (director), non-profit financial institution	Faced discrimination
Donna 51-year-old female	Bachelors degree, chief executive officer, privately held recruiting company	Successfully built four different businesses in different industries
Leslie 40- to 49- year-old female	Bachelors degree First line supervisor, private adult beverage company	Recommended by another research participant
Mimi 30-year-old female	Masters degree Individual Contributor, publicly traded marketing company	Age and experience switching careers
Nancy 30- to 39- year-old female	Masters degree First line supervisor, government	Displayed courageous acts that were met with disdain and no longer displays courage
Stewart 40- to 49- year-old male	Bachelors degree Middle management, Fortune 500 consumer products company	Experience switching careers. Recommended by another research participant
Toni 40- to 49- year-old female	Bachelors degree Upper Management, Fortune 500 consumer products company	Position and organizational affiliation. Recommended by another research participant

in the study. This project was conducted under the guidance of the Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board and all human protections considerations were observed. Each participant received, signed, and returned an informed consent form (see Appendix B) that outlined the study purpose, the manner and duration of participation, and the voluntary and confidential nature of the study. Potential risks and benefits also were outlined. The risks of participation were perceived to be minimal.

Participants were free to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The interviews were audio taped. Only the researcher had access to the recordings which were transcribed. Any possible identifying information was replaced with a pseudonym during transcription. Raw data was stored in a password-protected and encrypted file. The audio-recordings of the interview will be destroyed immediately upon completion of the study. Raw transcribed data will be kept indefinitely for research purposes.

Interview Procedures

A semi-structured interview design was used for this study. Semi-structured interviews are particularly appropriate for exploratory studies (Robson, 1993).

In semi-structured designs, the researcher creates a set of questions in advance, but has the freedom to modify their order and wording based upon the flow of the conversation (Robson, 1993). Kvale emphasized that “interviewing is a craft: It does not follow content- and context-free rules of method, but rests on the judgments of a qualified researcher” (1996, p. 105). As a result, the interviewer is the research instrument and he or she must exercise appropriate

empathy, knowledge, and sensitivity in order to gather relevant data. This can be quite difficult, as the interviewer must be both gentle and critical as well as open and structuring. Although I used a semi-structured approach, I did not alter the wording of any questions to avoid leading the conversation or the interviewee in a particular direction.

The specific questions for interview research are created based on the study purpose and research questions and what needs to be explored based on these. Questions are designed in sequence, to build on the previous questions, and around topical areas for exploration. Ultimately, this type of design helps to create a flowing and dynamic conversation.

The script used in this study included 14 open-ended questions (see Appendix C). Part I (Questions 1-5) of the script gathered demographic data about the participants, including their current employment status, their most recent position level in an organization, the type of organization they currently or last worked in, their age range, and highest level of educational attainment. Part II (Questions 6-13) of the script posed questions that explored the three research questions for the study (factors influencing people and organizations to take courageous action, characteristics of courageous action, and outcomes of courageous action). The final questions asked participants to share any additional insights or information that I did not access through my earlier questions.

Nine interviews were conducted by telephone and two were conducted in person. While conducting interviews by telephone can reduce the social cues and nonverbal communication exchanged between the researcher and

participant, this approach to interviewing also can be more convenient for both parties (Morse & Field, 1995). Telephone interviewing was selected for this study due to practical, time, and resource considerations.

Each interview lasted 25 to 60 minutes in duration, thus, observing the guidelines described by Robson (1993) that interviews much shorter than 30 minutes rarely yield valuable information and interviews longer than 60 minutes place too heavy a burden on participants. Interview data were captured through a digital recording. Handwritten notes were used as a backup and supplementary measure.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves examining the interview transcripts to search for patterns, themes, and insights about the study topic (Creswell, 2003). Content analysis was employed to examine the data, based on approaches described by Miles and Huberman (2006), which followed these steps:

1. I created a verbatim transcript for each interview. At this time, I replaced any identifying information with a pseudonym.
2. I organized the transcribed data by creating a master data sheet, with each participant's answer listed under each question. I used the pseudonyms to indicate who provided each response.
3. For each question, one by one, I reviewed the data that had been reported. I identified themes in the data on an ad hoc basis rather than creating a start list of themes and coding the data accordingly. I identified new themes as they emerged during my review and organized and reorganized the responses so that each theme was reported along with the responses that indicated it. I did not

require that two or more people voiced an idea to qualify it as a theme, as important insights can be voiced even by only one person according to qualitative analysis procedures (Miles & Huberman, 2006).

4. After completing an initial pass at the data analysis, I reviewed the themes that had emerged evaluated whether any macro themes might exist to help categorize and explain the numerous themes that emerged. Based on this approach, I created a series of macro, micro, and nano themes. Macro themes corresponded to the study research questions: factors influencing courageous action, characteristics of courage, outcomes of the courageous act. Micro themes for factors influencing courageous action included (a) contextual factors and (b) personal factors. Micro themes for characteristics of courage included (a) fears that arise and (b) manifestations of courage. Micro themes for outcomes of courageous action included (a) inner experiences and capacities, (b) others' responses, and (c) practical outcomes. Nano themes were the many themes that emerged for micro theme. For example, the nano themes for the manifestations of courage included (a) integrity in speech, (b) integrity in action, and (c) integrity in outcome.

5. When I had completed the analysis, I determined the number of participants who had reported each theme.

6. A second coder reviewed the results of the data analysis to determine her level of agreement with the results. The second coder was provided with the interview transcripts and asked to follow Steps 3 to 5 of this procedure. The researcher and the second coder compared results and, where discrepancies were found in the results, the researcher and the second coder discussed and

agreed upon how the analysis was revised. No adjustments of the analysis were needed.

Summary

This study involved a qualitative examination of courage using semi-structured interviews with 11 men and women who had corporate experience. Participants were selected using a combination of criterion, convenience, and snowball sampling strategies. Nine interviews were conducted by telephone and two were conducted in person. Each interview lasted 25 to 60 minutes in duration. Interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed, and examined using content analysis as described by Miles and Huberman (2006). The next chapter reports the results.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter reports the results that emerged from the interviews. Participant demographics are presented first. Results are then reported for each research question in order, including the factors influencing courageous action, the characteristics of courageous action, and the outcomes of courageous action.

Participants believed that courage was showing up in organizations to different degrees. Stewart observed that courage shows up in various forms and to varying degrees:

I think I have had a broad experience of courage because I have seen it on the organizational level where organizations have made decisions from fear. I've seen it from a team aspect where the team is approaching the leadership or putting any kind of challenge and maybe out of necessity or the health of the team. And I've seen it individually from a leader who has stood up for a principle and it took a great deal of courage and accountability. I have had very diverse experiences when it comes to courage.

Leslie believed that there has been a shift toward more courage—prompted largely by people's wants becoming clearer as a result of a bad economy:

I think it's interesting because when the economy is bad, . . . things come back in regard to customer service, product, reputation, and all that. I mean you are starting to see things come back to what people want as far as, "Hey I'm finding a lot more better customer service. I'm finding a lot better product, I'm finding better representation and stuff in areas than we used too."

Meanwhile, Brad believed there is a lack of courage in organizations—specifically as it concerned leaders listening to those at the front lines and those at the front lines voicing their opinions:

There are so many people within organizations that lack the courage, which to me is part of the reasons why companies are not as great as they can be. I also believe that if we had more people in organizations who were, at the tactical levels, willing to have more managerial courage, then all organizations would be much better because most decisions are top-down, but most of the decision makers do not understand all of the tactical ramifications when they are making decisions. So I think when you have a high performance work group, when you have people that are willing to say hey, I understand that you want to do it this way, but if we do it this way, it's more efficient, more effective, more productive. These are the people that do the work and we present that idea back up the chain and we make the right case study, the right business study, talk about the numbers and the profit margin and how we move the organization forward, I think it would be better. A lot of times I think we lose sight of the fact that because we are in power, we are in control, we are not listening to the people who are doing the work.

The remaining sections discuss the factors influencing courageous action, characteristics of courageous action, and outcomes of courageous action.

Themes are presented for the group overall and by gender. Analysis by age group is not presented, as 73% of participants were aged 40 to 49 and meaningful comparisons across the three age groups included would not be able to be drawn.

Factors Influencing Courageous Action

Two primary types of factors were found to influence courageous action. These included contextual factors characterizing the organization and larger society and one's personal factors influencing the decision to act.

Participants described one contextual factor influencing decision to act (see Table 2): organizational proclivity for courage (91% of participants). The organization's proclivity for courage (meaning its accepted beliefs, values, and behaviors) can encourage members to take courage actions or, conversely, to

seek safety. Participants added that a particularly important aspect of the culture is the influence of the leaders:

Courage is not encouraged here. . . . I have actually tried to display courage by standing by a belief or a decision that I have. And in the current situation it is not always supported. . . . I was told [by co-workers] that “Ooo, you shouldn’t do that.” (Nancy)

I’d say the catalyst is the value system. What is the moral fiber of organization? What is the code by which your organization lives? . . . We are out here trying to save lives. We take pride in our organization as a believer in serving science. So I think that is part of it. Our value system is the 4 Is: innovation, integrity, intensity, involvement. That is really what is driving the decisions that we make. What it means is each of those values, what it looks like with each of those values. That’s the bone. I think the first thing that I try to do is lead by example. (Carter)

The culture without question. So a company like [a F500] has a very people-oriented and empowering culture and when I came here, I realized these are people who go and get things done. And people are empowered to make decisions and others respect the decision and they move forward even if they didn’t agree with it. Whereas in [another company], someone would make a decision and someone would question it and then we would start going around in a spin cycle for weeks or months and so the results took a lot longer to get action okay. It is really the culture that you are in. One of my favorite analogies is change the water, not the fish. You know if you have an aquarium and you have some great fish in there and they are not doing so hot, you don’t need to replace the fish, you need to replace the water. And those same people at that point can really flourish and grow and show their courage. So it really is the culture, and the culture is dependent on the leadership. So it all comes back down to what I mentioned earlier, it’s the whole picture I have in my mind of a company with courage is one where you have dynamic leadership that enables that kind of culture to occur, so that everybody can experience courage. (Toni)

A bit of it is the culture of the organization. It might even be 50/50. I think a lot of it has to do with the individual and the other half has to do with sort of the culture of the organization and what is supported. In my former organization, there was a tendency not to say no to clients. But then I realized, especially with all the feedback that I got that it was something that [saying no] was really appreciated internally. So a lot of the time, I would be managing cross-functional teams and a client project and a client might

request something from a production team and I would have to say, we would like to do it, but instead of in 2 days, the absolute best we could do would be 3½ or something like that. And even that would be a stretch for what would normally be a 5-day project. So I realized that doing things like that on behalf of our internal team went a long way. (Mimi)

Table 2

Contextual Factors Influencing Decision to Act

Factor	N (%)
Organization's proclivity for courage	10 (91%)
Additional Comments:	
Society's proclivity for courage (1)	
Permission from important others (1)	

N = 11

Analysis of participants' responses pointed to five personal factors that influence the decision to act (see Table 3). The first of these factors is the ability to feel fear and yet respond effectively (82% of participants). Participants elaborated:

I think it's about minimizing the fear with layoffs and downsizing, rightsizing, whatever they are doing. That fear can be larger than it is. So, somehow to learn to manage and minimize the risk, help minimize the fear and then to take the risk. A combination of those two things. (Deani)

Table 3

Personal Factors Influencing Decision to Act

Conditions	N (%)
Ability to feel fear and yet respond effectively	9 (82%)
Drive for personal integrity, sticking to one's values, and doing "the right thing"	7 (64%)
Perceived risk and threat to self involved in acting	7 (64%)
Willingness to surrender personal gain to honor principles	5 (45%)
Adverse physiological effects experienced from not acting	4 (36%)
Additional comments:	
Personal proclivity for risk (2)	
Personal maturity (1)	

N = 11; Factors were determined based on identifying the meaning statements in participants' responses (Miles & Huberman, 2006)

I think that there is always fear and if you say you are not afraid, it's not true; courage is not a lack of fear in my opinion. (Stewart)

I think in order to have courage, you have got to know what fear is and you have got to go through that fear. . . . Fear has got a bad name. There is nothing wrong with that fear, as long as you don't let it consume you. . . . You begin to understand what fear is and what role it plays. That it is not evil. It is not bad. You have to know the fear to figure out what you are going to do about it. How are you going to conquer it? How are you going to get that courage to get through this situation or to get through that fear? (Leslie)

I was actually talking to one of our senior leaders just a couple of months ago and he was talking about the kind of people he wanted in his organization and he was talking about different attributes. And you know he wanted a lot of things [in his leaders], people who are problem solvers and that kind of thing. But he kind of talked in this space and it was probably more of the attribute of fear and he said, I want people who have a little bit of fear of failure, but not enough that it is debilitating. (Corey)

Corey further elaborated on the problem of not having enough fear:

I once had a guy work for me who I would tell you is very courageous. He went to the U. S. Military Academy. He had served in Korea in the early 1990s. . . . That guy lived on the line between North and South Korea where the U.S. military sits and it was a scary place. When he came back to work for me, I said, "This guy is going to be great. He's dealt with a lot of difficult stuff and all we are trying to do is get some frozen chicken from one place to another." But the problem was, he had such great courage and he didn't care about the basic problems in the business. Like I would go up to him and say, "You've got a bunch of loads that didn't ship" and he would be cool as a cucumber. He was very courageous . . . but he had no fear. . . . We want enough [fear] to know that you are accountable to do a good job.

Another personal factor participants described was the drive for personal integrity, sticking to one's values, and doing "the right thing" (cited by 64% of participants):

I used to get a lot of feedback in like 360 reviews from my colleagues; they would say that they were glad I would toe the line, though. So I think what I got from that feedback was that their impression was that I had the courage to do that and that was a

good thing. . . . So I think a big part of it is just whether that characteristic or that trait already exists or whether someone is courageous already. I think an organization can only foster so much of that. (Mimi)

What comes to mind for me is maybe integrity. A lot of times we are asked to do things where we may not personally believe in them or personally want to do them. We will do them as long as it doesn't affect our stand with our integrity and we can do what we know is right and not go against our core values. . . . I'm not talking about just blatantly unethical or blatantly illegal or something like that. . . . I'm just talking about even little things within the organization that no one will go to jail for, but you may lose some valuable capital by you displaying this courage. . . . I had a new manager come in here and he called us for a meeting and he held me back and he asked me information about somebody else . . . after they left the room. Almost like a gab fest. "What can you tell me about this person?" And the first thing I did was say, "You know what, I haven't worked with her in that capacity and I really don't feel comfortable answering that question. I don't feel as if I have the proper information to give you that. I really think you need to make your own decision." You could tell he was taken aback. (Nancy)

Some people might think it courageous to stay with a company that's a sinking ship. . . . But the people who have the courage to leave and not know where they are headed, I see that as more courageous. Because they are not going to wait around until that axe falls and they will say, "You know what, I've got to pursue a dream." And it's not necessarily when they've got another job lined up. But they just feel like "Gee, this place isn't [right]. I'm not aligned with their morals anymore." Or maybe they have merged with another company and its not going in the same direction. But for whatever reason, they took a courageous step to say, "No, I'm going another direction." (Donna)

Another 64% of participants emphasized that the amount of risk and threat to one's sense of self involved in the action influences one's decision. These participants explained that when the perceived risk and threat is relatively low, courageous action is easier to do:

I didn't really have anything to lose and I was there at the time that this SVP was angry and all of that, and so it was inappropriate, so I felt fine [acting with courage]. (Deani)

I think the more personal the risk, I think it is harder for a person. If I'm in something with a company and it means, "Hey, maybe this project isn't going to happen," I think most people are not going to feel that terrible about it. But if you say "This is going to happen and 20 employees are going to lose their job," then you start to get a little queasy. You know there are some big risks if this doesn't work out, people's jobs are on the line. . . . I think the closer they are to you, the tougher it is to make a decision and anything that hurts your paycheck [or] your ethics . . . I have a real hard time with that. (Leslie)

From a personal growth and development standpoint, it really wasn't very high risk. You know I was very comfortable at [my company], I kind of knew what I knew and I was still learning some things but I had plateaued out, so it was low risk for personal growth and development because I knew that was assured. (Toni)

Analysis of the factors influencing courageous action by gender is presented in Table 4. These results show that the women tended to be influenced by two primary factors: ability to feel fear and yet respond effectively (100%) and organizational proclivity for courage (83%). All the men reported that the organization's proclivity for courage influenced their decision. Three additional factors were mentioned by 60% each: ability to feel fear and yet respond effectively, perceived risk and threat to self involved in acting, and willingness to surrender personal gain to honor principles. These results could reflect social norms of preserving one's masculine identity and disassociating from fear (c.f. Abalos, 2005).

Characteristics of Courageous Action

Participants were asked to describe the characteristics of courageous action. They identified four fears that arise when contemplating the courageous act and manifestations of courage (see Table 5). These included negative financial impact or losing one's job (91% of participants), negative political

consequences (45% of participants), losing relationships (36% of participants), tarnishing one's reputation (36% of participants).

Table 4

Factors Influencing Courageous Action by Gender

Contextual Factor	Male N = 5	Female N = 6
Organization's proclivity for courage	5 (100%)	5 (83%)
Personal Factors		
Ability to feel fear and yet respond effectively	3 (60%)	6 (100%)
Perceived risk and threat to self involved in acting	3 (60%)	1 (17%)
Willingness to surrender personal gain to honor principles	3 (60%)	1 (17%)
Adverse physiological effects experienced from not acting	2 (40%)	2 (33%)

Table 5

Fears that Arise When Contemplating the Courageous Act

Fearful Consequence	N (%)
Negative financial impact or losing one's job	10 (91%)
Negative political consequences	5 (45%)
Losing relationships	4 (36%)
Tarnishing one's reputation	4 (36%)
Additional comments: Experiencing others' anger and retaliation (2) Fear of failure (2) Being different (1)	

N = 11; Factors were determined based on identifying the meaning statements in participants' responses (Miles & Huberman, 2006)

Ten participants (91%) reported the fear of negative financial impacts or of losing one's job. Many participants simply reported they feared losing their job.

Toni elaborated,

[The] risk 1-10 was very high, because basically of putting the entire financial future of my family on the line because I'm the only

one that works. I'm the bread winner so you know from a family standpoint it was very high risk. (Toni)

Leslie speculated that financial fear also influenced organization leaders'

decisions to be courageous:

I think a lot of it comes down to the books, you know, the numbers. I think the stock exchange if it is public. I think they are very afraid of "Well, gee, what will happen to my numbers if I do something that is courageous and might go against the public grain?"

Five (45%) participants also mentioned that fear of political consequences

also arises when taking courageous actions. Sample comments included:

The level of risk to me at first was just me thinking about it being a career limiting move. But when you are doing that, making sure that you understand that there are unwritten rules in corporations. So you have to understand the office politics. (Brad)

The biggest is really, it falls into that unwritten or unspoken political risk where the reality is, you know yeah, it would be very [Dangerous] for me to upset the wrong person and then that leads to risk of my job the next time there are cuts of whatever. (Dan)

[My action involved confronting] a person with more power than I had and [who was] higher up in the organization and had more power and authority than my boss. . . . [I] fear[ed] my professional career in a very great organization would be stymied. (Stewart)

An analysis by gender of the fears that arise is presented in Table 6. All the men reported two themes: negative financial impact or losing one's job and negative political consequences. In contrast, the women reported negative financial impact (83%) and losing relationships (50%). This could reflect social and corporate gender norms that focus on men advancing their careers and, thus, fearing political risk (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2005) and social norms of women focusing on relationships (Gilligan, 1982).

Table 6

Fears That Arise by Gender When Contemplating the Courageous Act

Fearful consequence	Male N = 5	Female N = 6
Negative financial impact or losing one's job	5 (100%)	5 (83%)
Negative political consequences	5 (100%)	
Losing relationships	1 (20%)	3 (50%)
Tarnishing one's reputation	2 (40%)	2 (33%)

Participants also described how courage manifests. Analysis of participants' responses suggested that courage manifests as integrity in speech, action, and outcome (see Table 7). Integrity, according to participants, refers to a consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcome. Participants described integrity in speech as being exemplified in two activities: voicing one's opinion (64%) and delivering a tough message (27%).

Table 7

Manifestations of Courage

Manifestation	N (%)
Integrity in Speech	
Voicing one's opinion	7 (64%)
Delivering a tough message	3 (27%)
Integrity in Action	
Acting without knowing the outcome	5 (45%)
Discerning the right action	4 (36%)
Making the hard decision	4 (36%)
Taking risks	4 (36%)
Setting or renegotiating boundaries	3 (27%)
Integrity in Outcome: Taking responsibility for one's actions	4 (36%)
Additional Comments:	
Facing reality as it is (2)	
Speaking the truth (2)	
Calling the organization to accountability (1)	
Rebounding after setback (1)	

N = 11; Manifestations were determined based on identifying the meaning statements in participants' responses (Miles & Huberman, 2006)

Seven participants (64%) described their experiences voicing their opinions. Brad emphasized, “You have to be willing to really step out there and take that risk when people at higher levels are saying something totally different.”

He shared his own story:

I would say it was a project for the CS Strategy at [Fortune 500] where the senior leader wanted the concept that was agreed to be in play and I challenged him because I did not believe and I still do not believe it is the most efficient and effective way to provide world-class customer service. So I had the opportunity to put together a presentation to present before him to state my case and why I felt a certain way. And, to me, that took courage because he is at a much higher level than me.

Other participants offered similar stories of voicing opinions:

People taking chances on expressing new ideas especially within environments where they have done the same thing the same way for multiple years. Speaking out with an opinion that might differ from the upper echelon’s opinion. . . . Usually I don’t have a big problem with bucking the system, . . . even when it’s a [chief executive officer] or president and I know they are bringing the company off the cliff because of their decisions, I feel it’s being courageous because I knew I could get fired; to say I think that is a mistake here is a better way. We should be doing this because you know this is negatively impacting the morale of the employees, we are losing good people. Or whatever. Also being vocal about fresh ideas. (Donna)

I guess for me courage is exemplified when you have people provide a counter view to something that is held as a belief or action by either more senior or more powerful people in your organization. It is basically saying no or pushing back when at least there is some organizational risk to what you are saying. And there are probably many examples, but that is the one that comes to mind. (Corey)

Standing up to upper management, in particular, my direct manager. In the course of managing a project he was taking the project down the wrong path and would not listen to the negative effects of what was going to happen if we continued down this path, and that actually forced me to go above his head to actually try to convey an understanding of the impact of what was being done. (Dan)

Integrity in action refers to five activities: acting without knowing the outcome (45% of participants), discerning the right action (36% of participants), making the hard decision (36% of participants), taking risks (36% of participants), and setting or renegotiating boundaries (27% of participants). Several participants described their experiences of acting without knowing the outcome:

A lot comes by way of taking risk. Having the b---- to maybe do stuff when people are holding back where other companies can't do something. We are going in and we are saying, "Hey, now is the time to do this and we are going to take that risk." (Leslie)

In the last year, I chose to depart an almost 20-year career with one of the best known companies and brands in the whole world—and a company that I loved and certainly wasn't looking to leave. And to go to another company where I would have to learn and to grow personally and also hopefully contribute in other ways and expand not only myself, but to add my knowledge and experience to a new leader and a new setting. So for me personally that took a lot. (Toni)

Standing up to upper management, in particular my direct manager. In the course of managing a project, he was taking the project down the wrong path and would not listen to the negative effects of what was going to happen if we continued down this path. And that actually forced me to go . . . two levels above his head in order to get some action to trickle down. . . . It was tough. Tough to the point where I feared for my job. Tough to the point where you are building enemies and friends at the same time with different people and you are almost starting like a little turf war. (Dan)

Integrity in outcome referred to taking responsibility for one's actions (36% of participants). Participants shared their perspectives about companies taking responsibility for their actions:

We have had cases where the client has received product that was not high enough standards and was being shipped over to another country. And the country said, "We are finding some defect with your product." You can say, "It happened over there" or "It's not our responsibility." But our company said, "You are right, let's look at this. We will take immediate action. Ship it. We will buy everything back from you. And we are going to track it down and find out what

the actual issue is.” We lost tons of money doing it because we had to buy back all of our product, but in the long run the government said “We respect you for that, so when you have got the issue resolved, we will buy your product again.” That’s all stuff in regards to what it takes. When you are in the wrong, you are in the wrong. (Leslie)

I think people in general are very forgiving when they see someone stand up and do the right thing. When they find out that there is some kind of scandal behind it or ulterior motive or cost cutting measure [and then admit it]. . . . Know they are gambling with people’s lives, money, or what have you, versus another company that has the courage to stand up and say “Even if I am going to take a loss, or it’s going to cost the company more money or more time or what have you. (Dan)

An analysis of the manifestations of courage by gender is presented in Table 8. These results show that the men strongly reported two themes: voicing one’s opinion (80%) and making the hard decision (60%). The remaining themes were reported by only 20% to 40% of the men. In contrast, the women rather equally reported all the themes except making the hard decision and setting or renegotiating boundaries, each of which were reported by only one woman.

Table 8

Manifestations of Courage

Manifestation	Male N = 5	Female N = 6
Integrity in Speech		
Voicing one’s opinion	4 (80%)	3 (50%)
Delivering a tough message		3 (50%)
Integrity in Action		
Acting without knowing the outcome	1 (20%)	4 (67%)
Discerning the right action	1 (20%)	3 (50%)
Making the hard decision	3 (60%)	1 (17%)
Taking risks		4 (67%)
Setting or renegotiating boundaries	1 (20%)	1 (17%)
Integrity in Outcome		
Taking responsibility for one’s actions	2 (40%)	2 (33%)

Outcomes of Courageous Action

The final topic explored with participants concerned the outcomes of courageous action. Analysis of participants' responses pointed to three types of outcomes: inner experiences and capacities, others' responses, and practical outcomes.

Participants voiced three internal effects of courageous action: enhanced needs for support (36% of participants), exhilaration and satisfaction (27% of participants), and distress (27% of participants). These themes are reported in Table 9. The most commonly mentioned theme was that people need a greater degree of support from others or within themselves when they take courageous action:

In coming here, the step I took was just normal stress management, like taking deep breaths and trying to keep calm. And take things step by step and not try to swallow too much at once. Trying to ask a lot of questions and trying not to . . . beat myself up when I make small mistakes. . . . Just accepting that "Okay, you are going to make some mistakes, so it's okay. Just keep going. It will be okay." Just that self-reassurance, I guess. (Toni)

I think in any situation, it helps if you have peers or other people to discuss [the situation] with, especially in a corporate setting. . . . If there is a group of other people there to discuss the fear or the challenge and the good sides and the bad sides, I think that helps I am one for believing that people who are a little bit older than us have some wisdom. And that is because they have gotten through more than we have. (Leslie)

Then I said, "Hey, let me just talk to my wife. And she normally doesn't like to talk about work, but I said, "Hey, here is something we ought to talk about and if it ever got to this point [of losing my job], what would we do?" And then we said "Here is what we would do" and we kind of made our own plan. And, honestly, once I was at peace with her, our [family] team would figure that out. (Corey)

If for some reason [the clients] were really upset, it certainly would have been taken to my supervisors. But because they would have

known where I was coming from, . . . I would have had someone who was willing to support me and look for that common ground on my behalf. It was almost like I had a support system. (Mimi)

Table 9

Inner Outcomes of the Courageous Act

Inner Outcomes	N (%)
Enhanced needs for support	4 (36%)
Exhilaration and satisfaction	3 (27%)
Distress	3 (27%)
Additional comments:	
Enhanced maturity and sense of self (2)	
Increased confidence (2)	
Increased capacity for courageous acts (2)	
Grief and loss (1)	
Martyrdom (1)	

N = 11; Inner outcomes were determined based on identifying the meaning statements in participants' responses (Miles & Huberman, 2006)

Participants also pointed out that other people typically had a response to one's courageous actions (see Table 10). Four participants (36%) reported that they gained a greater sense of credibility with others following a courageous action:

And I was able to convince our business president that this person was not right for the company, was not right for this role. And he appreciated me doing that. . . . It helped build credibility and trust in our relationship. . . . It's showing I'm here to help. I'm adding value to the equation. (Carter)

I think enough people saw that I was standing up to my own boss If I'm going to stand up to my own boss, I'm definitely going to stand up to you. Now more and more departments are coming to me and accepting recommendations. (Dan)

And I think it had people looking at me in a different light. They saw me more as a leader because I was willing to approach the situation and not run and hide from it. (Brad)

However, negative reactions also are possible, such as reproach and retaliation (mentioned by 27% of participants).

Table 10

Others' Responses to the Courageous Act

Response	N (%)
Enhanced credibility	4 (36%)
Reproach or retaliation	3 (27%)
Additional comments: Grief and loss (1)	

N = 11; Others' responses were determined based on identifying the meaning statements in participants' responses (Miles & Huberman, 2006)

The final type of outcome participants described as a result of a courageous act were practical outcomes, such as new perspectives or opportunities and avoiding the potential for lost opportunity (see Table 11). The most commonly mentioned outcome was new perspectives or opportunities (cited by 55% of participants):

It actually helped me. It helped me to see that there are better places you can fit where . . . you know, I didn't go Norma Ray on anybody or anything like that. I know that there are places where courage, bright ideas, and initiative are supported. So I realize that those types of places are a better fit for me. So it was more of a realization. It was more of an enlightenment, an awakening. A reminder. You know all of the above to help me realize what type of environment and climate is better suited for my skills and my abilities and my personality. (Nancy)

Frankly, I didn't worry about the stuff at work anymore. I said I will do my best in that case, but I've figured out what the worst case scenario would be and then I said, "All right, I can deal with the worst case scenario, so let's move on. Then that actually has helped me pretty much to this day. There is really not much at work that bothers me. Long-term stuff doesn't bother me, maybe for 24 hours, but it doesn't bother me from a long-term stand point anymore. (Corey)

It helped me to realize that I needed to move beyond that old way of thinking as far as career limiting moves. But I also recognize that you have to be wise in the way you play office politics as far as how you present your ideas. So when I presented it I had to make sure it wasn't a direct slap in the face of the senior leader but to build it in a way like it is the facts to build a case. It is almost like you are building a case study of an opposing viewpoint. So to me it helped me grow as a leader because I am less concerned with career limiting moves. (Dan)

But I think the most empowering thing for me was walking into an organization of people I'd never meet before in my entire life and having them welcome me with open arms and have respect immediately for who I am and what I've done and value what I say. And also offer to help and support and educate me in the areas I want to be educated in. It made me feel good as a person. You know when you get entrenched in a company and I don't just mean (F500), any company, when you get entrenched after years and years you start to get a feeling that maybe you are being taken for granted and your capabilities are what they are and that you've maybe plateaued out. I'm feeling that maybe this was a growth experience because of coming in and all of the support, which in a way feels like LOVE. It kind of feels like people putting their arms around you and saying come on in we welcome you and we want to hear your contributions and we want to help you and you become stronger because of it. (Toni)

You also have to remember that every idea that you throw out may not be approved. Or that everybody is not going to buy in. That does not mean that you take your creativity and you run and hide again. You have to continue to express your viewpoints and be willing to do so. (Brad)

Table 11

Practical Outcomes of the Courageous Act

Practical Outcome	N (%)
New perspectives or opportunities	6 (55%)
Avoiding the potential for lost opportunity	3 (27%)
Additional Comments: Collective action	

N = 11; Practical outcomes were determined based on identifying the meaning statements in participants' responses (Miles & Huberman, 2006)

Table 12 presents an analysis of the outcomes by gender. The men strongly reported two themes: enhanced credibility (80%) and new perspectives or opportunities (80%). The remaining themes were mentioned by only one or two men each. Notably, the men did not report distress or avoiding the potential for lost opportunity as outcomes, although 50% of women cited each of these themes. The women, in turn, did not cite enhanced credibility as an outcome of courageous action. No strong outcomes emerged among the women, as one to three women cited each theme.

Summary

This chapter reported the results of the study. Participants believed that both contextual factors (e.g., one's organization, one's society, important others) influenced one's choice to act courageously. Additionally, the person's own characteristics influence the choice to act. Such characteristics include one's fear tolerance, integrity, perceptions of risk, willingness to sacrifice personal gain, perceived consequences of not acting, proclivity for risk, and maturity.

Table 12

Outcomes of the Courageous Act by Gender

Outcome	Male N = 5	Female N = 6
Inner experiences and capacities		
Enhanced needs for support	1 (20%)	3 (50%)
Exhilaration and satisfaction	1 (20%)	2 (33%)
Distress		3 (50%)
Others' Responses		
Enhanced credibility	4 (80%)	
Reproach or retaliation	2 (40%)	1 (17%)
Practical outcomes		
New perspectives or opportunities	4 (80%)	2 (33%)
Avoiding the potential for lost opportunity		3 (50%)

Participants explained that fear naturally arises when contemplating a courageous act. Fears typically surrounded negative financial, political, and relational effects. Participants also reported that they fear tarnishing their reputations, experiencing others' anger and retaliation, failing, and being different by taking a courageous action. Courage was reported to manifest as integrity in perception, speech, action, and outcomes. The outcomes of courageous actions centered on certain inner experiences and enhanced personal capacity, others' responses, and practical outcomes. The next chapter provides a discussion of these results.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter provides a discussion of the study results, including conclusions for each research question, practical recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for additional research.

Conclusions

Conclusions were drawn for each research question. A discussion of the key findings is provided below for the factors, characteristics, and outcomes of courageous action.

Factors Influencing Courageous Action

Study findings (see Tables 2 and 3 on pages 42 and 43) suggested that both one's context and one's personal attributes influence the decision to act with courage. In terms of context, the influence of organizational culture (mentioned by 10 participants), societal culture (mentioned by one participant), and sanctions (or prohibitions) from influential others (mentioned by one participant) all act to encourage or discourage courageous action in another.

In terms of personal attributes, ability to feel fear and respond effectively (mentioned by nine participants) one's values and principles (mentioned by seven participants), maturity (mentioned by one participant), risk tolerance (mentioned by two participants), perceptions of risk and threat associated with acting (mentioned by seven participants), and negative effects associated with not acting (mentioned by four participants) also serve to push people toward or away from acting with courage. These findings were consistent with past literature on courage. While one could assume that the factors that were

mentioned by more participants are more important and powerful, it also is possible that the factors mentioned most were the easiest to describe or were most accessible to participants. Therefore, it is important to also consider those factors mentioned even by only one participant (Miles & Huberman, 2006).

These collected findings suggest that courageous acts might be encouraged or achieved only through a three-pronged approach of societal influence, the organization's cultural influence, and the natural tendencies of the individual. Thus, if courage is a desired behavior, it would be helpful to design organization development interventions that diagnose the societal factors, organizational factors, and personal factors promoting courageous action, as they were identified in this study's findings. Then, it would be helpful to educate organization leaders and members about what factors encourage and discourage courageous acts (based on the findings from this study), and assure that the organizational systems are aligned to encourage courageous acts using the factors identified in this study. Several instruments also are currently available for diagnosing courage. These include the Organizational Courage Assessment (Kilmann et al., 2010), the Learning Moral Courage Assessment (Kidder, 2005), the Courage Assessment (Klein, 2005), and Warrell's (2009) assessment to identify your role in problems.

However, it is also important to hire for the courage attribute and to continue developing the personal attributes courage within organization members. This is especially true of its leaders due to the influence leaders have over the organization its members. It also is important to acknowledge that

shifting the societal culture likely requires independent action outside of the workplace.

While these actions are important, it also must be acknowledged that courage is in the eye of the beholder, meaning each individual, organization, community, and culture has different definitions and proclivities for risk, fear, and courage (Rate et al., 2007). Therefore, even if the organization is cultivated to be courageous, assessing whether its members or the organization as a whole is acting courageously requires a highly subjective judgment. Ultimately, it might be necessary for organization leaders to define what courageous action is and is not within its context and then hire and groom members accordingly.

Some immediate steps for action include creating organization development interventions and solutions, communication strategies, and training and development programs for organizations to begin the dialogue leaders to define courage within their organizations and begin designing compensation, performance management, mentoring, support systems, and celebration and reward programs that facilitate courageous action. Immediate suggestions for research include beginning an investigation to determine whether there are a relatively small number of organizational courage types (similar to personality types in individuals or cultural types in organizations). A second suggestion for research is to seek to understand what culture types tend to align with courage and what culture types tend to be at odds with courage. For example, due to the nature of a certain industry or organizational climate, it might be that excessive fear is the daily norm, that people cannot accept and respond effectively to the fear, and thus, courage is unlikely.

Characteristics of Courageous Action

A notable finding of this study was that fear was reported to coexist with courage, based on nine participants' reports that a key personal factor promoting courageous action is the ability to feel fear and yet respond productively (see participant comments on page 42 to 44 and Table 3 on page 42). Participants emphasized that this ability was integral to courageous acts. They explained that many fears surface when one considers acting courageously, such as fear of losing one's job, relationships, or reputation (see Table 5 on page 46).

In terms of how courage showed up, participants reported that courageous action was marked by integrity, which refers to a consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations, and outcome. Thus, courageous acts are associated with integrity in perception (facing reality as it is), integrity in speech (such as speaking the truth or delivering a tough message), integrity in action (such as setting or renegotiating boundaries), and integrity in outcomes (such as taking responsibility for one's actions). These findings were consistent with past literature. Harris (1999), for example, observed the link between courage and integrity in his work examining courage in management.

Given these findings, it appears that a certain wisdom comes into play when courageous acts are taken and discernment is a critical piece of courage. That is, the courageous act might actually be inaction (e.g., when the worthiness of the goal is too slight, the risk involved in acting is too great, or waiting is the best alternative). Courageous action without wisdom could be foolish, at best, and suicidal, at worst.

Additionally, when a person tends to act courageously more often than not, it is critical for that person to select an organization that culturally matches himself or herself in terms of core beliefs, values, and behaviors. This kind of match is necessary because people who tend to act with courage seem to operate according to their own moral code. That is, courage is a romantic ideal (Woodard, 2001); however, it might not be comfortable for the person acting with courage or for those on the receiving of the courageous act. For example, Toni described the grief she and her manager both felt when she acted courageously to leave her 20-year career at one organization to join another. A courageous action also can expose oneself and others to criticism or harm. In short, courage seems to involve calling oneself, one's colleagues, and one's organization to a higher standard of operating.

As with the previous conclusion, it is essential to keep in mind that the definition of courage varies from one person to another and from one organization to another. Each organization's mission, vision, and values dictate what kind of courage it is expecting from its people.

Given these findings, it seems important to raise the consciousness about what a courageous act is within one's context and then to align the personal, group, and organizational definitions of courage within the organizational system. This act of raising awareness, alone, might spur growth and more acts of courage. More deeply understanding the characteristics of courage could be achieved through several possible research projects, including exploring the role of wisdom in courage and exploring how demonstrations of courage differ by personality type.

Outcomes of Courageous Action

Study findings suggested that certain outcomes often resulted from courageous acts, including inner experiences and capacities, others' responses, and practical outcomes. Given that these three types of outcomes included some negative effects such as one's own distress, grief and loss, and martyrdom (see Table 9 on page 53) or others' reproach or retaliation and grief and loss (see Table 10 on page 54), it seems clear that the courageous act might not result in benefit or a "happy ending." In particular, participants emphasized the physiological effects they experienced while contemplating or taking courageous action. For example, Toni and Dan both mentioned that their blood pressure went up, while Corey mentioned losing out on sleep. Toni also mentioned feeling supported to the point of feeling love.

As people contemplate taking a courageous act, they need to be aware of the range of very real risks they face. In short, courage is not for the faint of heart. At the same time, participants did describe several ways they personally grew from acting courageously (e.g., deepening their maturity, confidence), won more respect or credibility, and gained important new perspectives and opportunities. More capacity for courage also is built. These findings are consistent with the existing literature on courage.

Based on the findings about the negative and positive outcomes that can result from courageous action, it seems that it would be beneficial to experiment with these actions (however courage is defined for the person), as these acts seem to hold benefits for people and their organizations. For example, the courageous action can be a catalyst for moving people and organizations

forward. Dan described the enhanced credibility he gained after acting courageously. Mimi described the benefits her company experienced related to clients after engaging with them differently around deadlines. Toni shared how she grew from the experience of joining a new organization.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that all of these outcomes are bound to one's context and culture as well as the events currently happening in the larger society. For example, Bill Maher, host of *Politically Incorrect*, openly disagreed on his September 17, 2001, show with President Bush's comment that the 9/11 terrorists were cowards. Maher argued, "We have been the cowards, lobbing cruise missiles from 2,000 miles away. That's cowardly. Staying in the airplane when it hits the building, say what you want about it, it's not cowardly" (Bohlen, 2001). It appears that American viewers might not have been ready for his sentiment. In the wake of his comment, the show's ratings declined and it was canceled in June 2002.

Given these findings, it is advisable to create awareness about courage. Courage can be motivational and inspirational . . . and it can also come at a price. Ultimately, the outcomes of one's courageous action hinge upon the cultural climate of one's setting based on several authors' contentions that cultural beliefs and values dictate whether an act is courageous or foolhardy (Harris, 1999; Kilmann et al., 2010; Woodard, 2001) and the present study's findings that organizational proclivity for courage (10 participants), society's proclivity for courage (one participant), and permission from important others (one participant) influence whether one takes courageous action (and how those actions are ultimately perceived).

A practical recommendation emerging from these findings is to continue creating awareness about the outcomes of courage. This could be achieved by publishing articles, holding workshops, or even coaching individuals and groups. This recommendation is discussed further in the next section.

Recommendations

Study results suggested that courageous acts have the potential to benefit the actor and those around him or her. Additionally, taking a courageous act seems to feed a self-reinforcing cycle of continued courageous action. To cultivate courageous action in individuals, it would be helpful to develop an experiential learning cycle where people design, take, and reflect on small steps of courage. Through this activity, people might create their own definition of courage, develop wisdom about when and when not to act with courage, and gain clarity about their core beliefs and values. Ultimately, this approach may be an effective way to cultivate courage within individuals. Organization development professionals can play important roles as consultants and coaches in cultivating courage at this level.

This study's findings suggested that the benefits of courage extend to organizations as well as individuals. Therefore, it can be advantageous to cultivate courage at the organizational level. This might begin with dialogue among the organization's leaders to clarify what courage means within this particular setting. Once the definition is clarified, coordinated action may begin to encourage throughout the organization. Such action might center on a holistic intervention that addresses the organization's communication, recruiting, training and development, performance management, and compensation and reward

programs. Participants emphasized that the organization culture plays an enormous role in whether members act with courage. Culture is exhibited in the beliefs, values, and behaviors that members enact and in the implicit and explicit socialization that goes on day after day within the organization. Therefore, it is critical to design and implement a comprehensive approach to supporting courage if this is a desired behavior. Again, organization development practitioners can play a powerful role in helpful leaders shift their cultures to become more inclusive of courage.

Study results demonstrated that both positive and negative outcomes can follow acts of courage. Given that courage is sometimes romanticized, it is important to build realistic expectations about the demands and outcomes of courage if courage is to become a sustained way of operating for individuals and organizations. In particular, it is important to normalize the experience and role of fear in courage and to educate people about the possible outcomes. This could be achieved by publishing articles, holding workshops, or even coaching individuals and groups.

Limitations

The key limitation of this study is the sample. Specifically, it was relatively small ($N = 11$), drawn only from the United States, and did not include people aged 20 to 29 or 60 years and older. These individuals might have different perspectives on courage based on their generational cohort. While data saturation seemed to be reached and the sample featured a balance of men and women and of African American and Caucasian individuals, definition, demonstration, and outcomes of courageous acts might be very different among

Asian and other collectivist cultures. Based on this, it is important to further to conduct a cross-cultural examination of courage.

Researcher bias is another leading limitation. I have strong ideas and experiences related to courage and these certainly affected how I heard, perceived, and interpreted the study data. To help control for this bias, I acknowledged my own experiences in chapter 1 (Research Background) and also utilized a second rater to review my data analysis results.

Suggestions for Additional Research

Several suggestions for additional research are advised based on this study. First, study findings suggested that a person's unique characteristics influence whether he or she will take courageous action. This points to several possibilities for research. One opportunity is to examine the role of personality in courage. For example, do introverts display a particular kind of courage or possess a particular kind of propensity for courage distinct from extroverts and vice versa? Additionally, it would be helpful to explore the role of wisdom in courage. This might be best explored through a qualitative study that examines what is wisdom and how does it influence choices.

A second primary direction for research is to investigate the types of courageous cultures that exist. This might yield a typography of organizational cultures similar to Cameron and Quinn's (2005) competing values framework. Insights from this research could illuminate the range of definitions related to courage and how the manifestation and outcomes of courage vary across contexts. This research also could examine what culture types (e.g., those from Cameron and Quinn) tend to align with courage and what culture types tend to

be at odds with courage. This research would reveal nuances in organizational courage that are not currently defined.

The final suggestion for research is to conduct cross-cultural examinations of courage, as national cultures vary significantly and these, in turn, can strongly influence the definitions, manifestations, and outcomes of courage. For example, in this study, one manifestation of courage was voicing one's opinion, even if it differed from one's leaders. This is a strikingly Western notion, where individuality and low power distance are preferred (Hofstede, 1980). Further, it is very possible that speaking one's opinion—whether or not it differed from one's leader—would be foolish rather than courageous in an Asian culture. Thus, more research on culture from the perspectives of other world cultures is vitally needed.

Summary

Courage has been described as recognizing a worthy goal and taking action to achieve it, despite the presence of fear (Kilmann et al., 2010). While acting courageously does impose risks for the individual or organization and failure is a real possibility, acting courageously also offers the promise of rewards such as attaining a prized goal and enhancing personal or organizational capacity. This study involved a qualitative examination of courage. Specifically, the study examined (a) the factors that influence people and organizations to take courageous action, (b) the characteristics of courageous action, and (c) the outcomes of courageous action.

This study involved a qualitative examination of courage using semi-structured interviews with 11 men and women who had corporate experience.

Participants were selected using a combination of criterion, convenience, and snowball sampling strategies. Eight interviews were conducted by telephone and two were conducted in person. Each interview lasted 25 to 60 minutes in duration. Interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed, and examined using content analysis as described by Miles and Huberman (2006).

Participants believed that contextual factors and personal characteristics influenced one's choice to act with courage. Participants explained that fear naturally arises when contemplating a courageous act. Courage was reported to manifest as integrity in perception, speech, action, and outcomes. The outcomes of courageous actions centered on certain inner experiences and enhanced personal capacity, others' responses, and practical outcomes.

The key limitation of this study was its use of a small sample drawn from the United States and consisting primarily of African American and Caucasian men and women. Suggestions for additional research are to examine the role of personality in courage, explore the role of wisdom in courage, investigate the types of courageous cultures that exist, identify what culture types tend to align with courage and what culture types tend to be at odds with courage, and conduct cross-cultural examinations of courage.

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Appendix A
Study Invitation

Dear Interview Participant:

I hope this email finds you well. I would like to ask for your voluntary help.

I am enrolled in Pepperdine University's Master of Science in Organization Development program.

One of my program requirements is to conduct a research thesis project. I am conducting my research on "What factors and conditions lead to courage?" The results of my research will be published as a thesis initially and may later be published as an academic article. I have done my due diligence to protect your privacy. Please see attached letter for further details.

I am looking for approximately 60 minutes of your time in May to participate in an interview to discuss your experience of corporate communities and how you have displayed personal courage.

Please note the following:

- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- Your information and responses will be kept completely confidential. Information will be aggregated to present overall themes. Individual responses will not be reported.
- Research will be used for academic purposes only.
- You and your organization will be disguised to protect the confidentiality of both
- A copy of this research will be made available to you (upon request) once the study is completed.

Please let me know if you are willing to participate in the research via email ([contact information omitted]) or phone ([contact information omitted]) by May 10th. Once I hear back from you, I will follow up to schedule a time.

Thank you,

Alizabeth Lord Jetter
Pepperdine University MSOD Candidate 2010

Appendix B
Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Participant: _____

Principal Investigator: Alizabeth Lord Jetter

Title of Project: Exploring Courage

1. I, _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Alizabeth Lord Jetter under the direction of Dr. Gary Mangiofico, PhD, Pepperdine University.
2. The overall purpose of this research is: *To research the factors and conditions that lead to courage. Specifically the goals of the research are to:*
 - *Assess the personal characteristics;*
 - *Group characteristics, and;*
 - *Systemic conditions that are necessary for courage to occur.*
3. My participation will involve the following: Participating in an interview either in person or via phone.
4. My participation in the study will be approximately 60 minutes. The study shall be conducted either in person in (location TBD) or via phone.
5. I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from this research are: To gain an understanding of the factors and conditions that lead to courage and thereby apply them to my own organization.
6. I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.
7. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.
8. I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state, provincial and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others.
9. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Dr. Gary Mangiofico, at [contact information omitted] if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Jean Kang, Manager, GPS IRB &

Dissertation Support, Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology at [contact information omitted].

10. I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in the study.
11. I understand that in the event of physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.
12. I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Witness

Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix C
Interview Script

Interview Protocol:

- Introduce researcher and thank participant for their time. Clarify that the interview will be approximately 60 minutes.
- Provide a brief overview of the study.
- Remind interviewee that participation is completely voluntary and at any point they can choose not to participate. Participants are also not obligated to answer a question if he/she prefers not to.
- Outline that participant responses will not be identified and their identity will be protected.
- State that this study is for academic research purposes.
- Review that the session may be recorded via audiotape and that the researcher will take handwritten notes. All notes and audio recordings will be held in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the study and period of 5 years post completion of the study, at which point they will be destroyed.
- Address any questions and comments.

Part I: Demographics

1. Are you currently employed?

- Yes
- No

2. What is your most recent position level in an organization?

- Upper Management
- Middle Management
- First-line Management
- Individual Contributor

3. How would you describe your organization?

- Publicly Traded
- Privately Held
- Government
- Non-Profit
- Entrepreneurial
- Other

4. What is your current age range?

- 20 – 29 years
- 30 – 39 years
- 40 – 49 years
- 50 – 59 years
- 60 years or older

5. What is your highest level of completed education?

- High School Diploma
- Associates Degree
- Bachelor Degree

- Master's Degree
- Doctorial Degree

Part II: Exploring Courage

Defining Courage

For the purposes of this study, courage is being explored in four dimensional areas: (1) fear; (2) appropriate action; (3) a higher purpose; and (4) risk.

6. How have you experienced courage in organizations?
7. What have you done to display courage in organizational settings?
8. Describe the situational experience you had that lead to a display of courage?
9. Did the situation you just described
 - Make you experience fear?
 - What action did you take as a result?
 - What purpose did your actions serve?
 - Describe the level of risk as a result of your actions.
10. When you consider the tangible impact displaying courage had on you, how would you describe the experience?
11. When you think about the idea of courage in corporations, what comes to mind for you?
12. What do you consider to be the catalyst for displaying courage in organizations?
13. What do you feel is the biggest obstacle to the attribute of courage being utilized in corporations?

This concludes my formal questions. Now I would like to open it up to you and any additional thoughts you'd like to share or questions you may have.

14. Is there anything I did not ask that I should have or anything else you would like to share?

Conclusion of Interview:

- Thank participant(s) for their time.
- Reiterate confidentiality agreement and procedure of keeping information in a locked filing cabinet.
- Address any final questions and comments.
- Clarify approval for further contact if clarification is needed on any points made during the interview.
- Provide contact information of researcher to the interviewee.
- Follow-up with a "Thank you" e-mail.