



Mark Croweller AFSM

EMPA Post-Conference 2021 Webinar  
*“Ethical insights into managing crisis  
and adversity”*



# The Ethical Premise of leading through Crisis and Adversity

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The **greatest measure of success** in service to the community is the upholding of public trust and confidence throughout risk reduction, resilience, response, relief, recovery

The **greatest mission** is the reduction of suffering (Compassion/Non-Harmfulness, Care, and Justice) for all living and non-living beings and needs to be contemplated throughout risk reduction, resilience, response, relief, recovery



# The Nature of Suffering (Adversity / Pain / Harm)

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- Some philosophers argue that harms (sufferings) are more important in ethics and in life than benefits or goods (Gert, 1998).
- Suffering is a common and universal experience (Ricoeur, 2019).
- According to the First Noble Truth of Buddhist Thought, all human beings suffer from: birth; ageing; sickness; dying; having to experience things we do not like or want; loss and separation from those we love and things we like and value; not having our hopes and wishes fulfilled; and the aggregates of body and mind that give rise to grasping (including inflated self-interest, self-importance, anger, attachment, and ignorance) (Gethin, 2014, Tashi, 2005).
- From a sociological perspective, suffering may be defined as material deprivation, social injustice, and denial of civil liberties shaped by physical, psychological, social, economic, political, and cultural influences (Wilkinson, 2005).



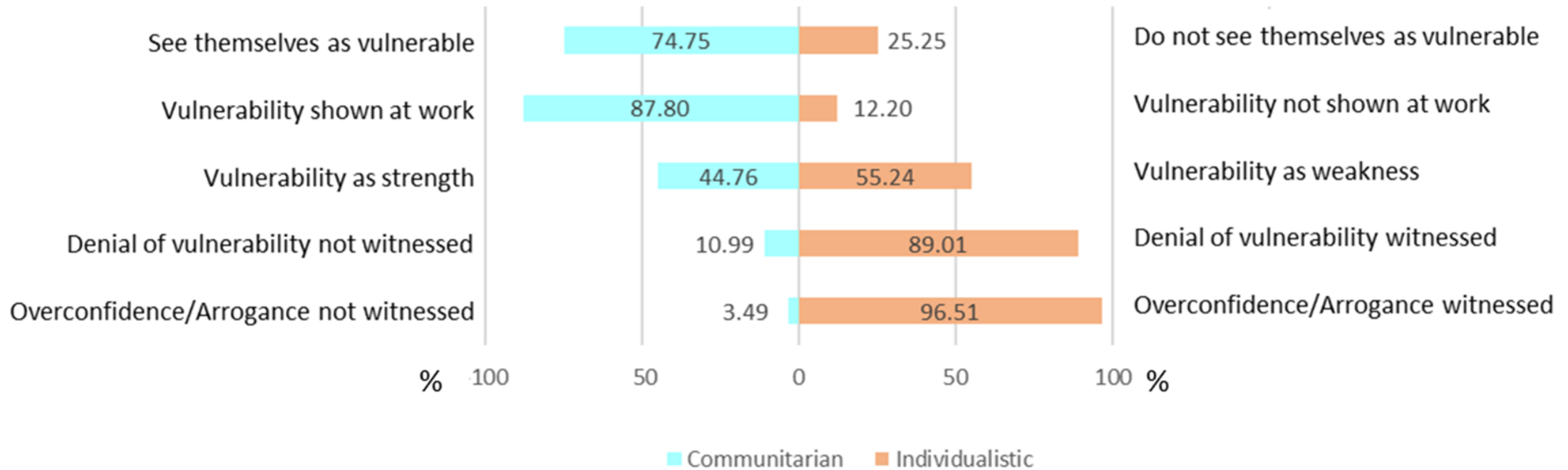
# What We Know about Vulnerability

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- Vulnerability can be defined as both the susceptibility to harm along with the inability to cope and adapt AND as the basis of relatedness and relationships
- Vulnerability requires courage as the outcome of being vulnerable is by its nature always uncertain
- Failing to recognise the vulnerability in and of oneself necessarily results in failing to see the vulnerability in and of others
- Social-cultural influences that shape perceptions of vulnerability also shape a leader's perspective on their role as and their worldview
- These perspectives help shape how they give policy advice and make decisions to protect citizens



# Research and Survey Results



# Negative Perceptions of vulnerability

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- If a person's vulnerability became their identity, doubts were cast over an individual's competence, and antagonistic attitudes emerged.
- Perceptions of weakness further entrenched existing vulnerabilities, constrained relationships, undermined compassion and trust, promoted fear and indecision, and stifled effectiveness whilst increasing costs.
- Denial of vulnerability exposed leaders to bullying, undermining their ability to lead, and subjecting them to criticism.
- Leaders became hardened and insensitive to the suffering of others and masked mental health challenges that led to self-harm.
- Compassion, trust, respect, emotional courage, and effectiveness were all compromised. Mistakes and errors were denied, promoting ignorance whilst stifling learning and growth.
- Denial promoted blame and shifted responsibility unreasonably onto individuals.



# Positive Perceptions of vulnerability

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- Vulnerability showed a leader's humanity, made them accessible to others, opened the opportunity for virtue (compassion, trust) and relatedness, and established the capacity to relate to the loss and suffering of others.
- Bullying and harassment were less likely when vulnerability was accepted. Being vulnerable opened them to being compassionate, established the basis for relationships, and improved trust and integrity. It also provided opportunities for organisational learning and growth, shaped better decisions, and gave people latitude to be human.



# Six things to remember about vulnerability

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- Vulnerability is a fact of the human condition, and our shared experiences form the basis of ethical obligations that can compel ethical responses to others.
- Vulnerability (susceptibility suffering) can be perceived as negative and something to be managed and minimised or denied and ignored.
- Managing and minimising vulnerability leads to decreases in suffering
- Denying or ignoring vulnerability leads to increases in suffering
- Vulnerability can also be perceived as positive as a universally shared space of affectivity, openness, trust, compassion, and community and the basis for relatedness and relationship.
- Viewing vulnerability as both negative (managed/minimised **OR** denied/ignored) and positive sets up a tension that can lead to very different outcomes in response to the potential for someone to suffer.





# How We Need to View Disasters

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HEART



HEAD



TRANSFORMATIONAL



NOT NATURAL



# Normative Ethics

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VIRTUE ETHICS



DEONTOLOGY



UTILITARIAN /  
CONSEQUENTIALIST



# Why the Virtues?

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They move us from Ignorance to Wisdom

They move us from Suffering to Happiness

They reinforce the importance of Lived Experience, Meaning & Purpose

They have a profound positive impact upon our Mental Health



# Universal Virtues

Good in their own right – Do not need logic or reason to determine goodness – Do need Wisdom to know how and when to apply them



# Foundational Elements when considering virtue

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## **Fallibility**

Living beings strive to be fundamentally good but suffer from delusion: Infinite will (desire) and finite understanding (ignorance); Inflated Self-interest, Self-importance, Anger, Attachment, Ignorance

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## **Hypocrisy**

We measure ourselves by our overstated thoughts of personal good, but we measure others by how we (deludedly) perceive their actions

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## **Reciprocity**

All cultures, religions, and societies have a version of “The Golden Rule”: *“Do unto others what you would have them do unto you”* or *“No harm to self or other through any action of body, speech, or mind”*

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## **Relatedness**

All living beings without exception experience suffering and predicate all thought on seeking to find happiness and avoid suffering



# 6 Rules of Virtue

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Leave the cudgel of moral superiority on the ground

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Virtuous commitment must be self-declared, it cannot be bestowed by others

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Virtuous recognition must be bestowed by others, it cannot be self-declared

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Standards of virtue must be self-determined and predicated upon the “Golden Rule” or “no harm to Self or Other through any action of body, speech, or mind”

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Be wary of virtue signalling (weaponizing virtues)

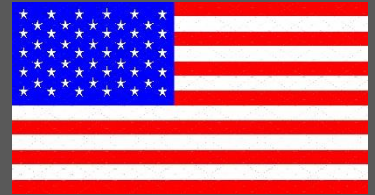
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It is fair and reasonable to expect a leader to be virtuous, but it is unfair and unreasonable to expect a leader or other person to carry the burden of our need for virtue



# Lived Experiences of Virtue

John's Story – Humility



Simon's Story - Compassion

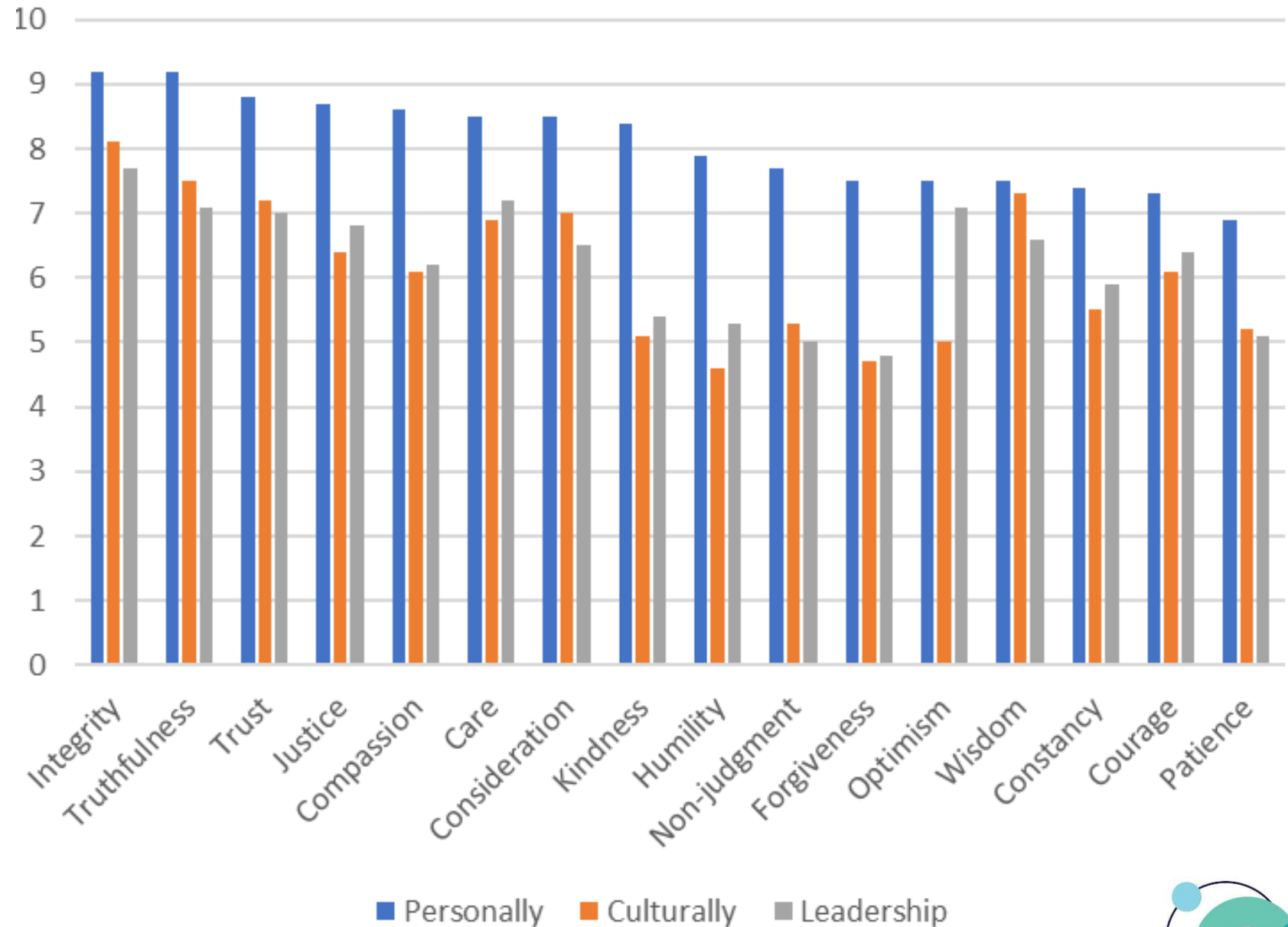


Sarah's Story - Integrity



# Virtues

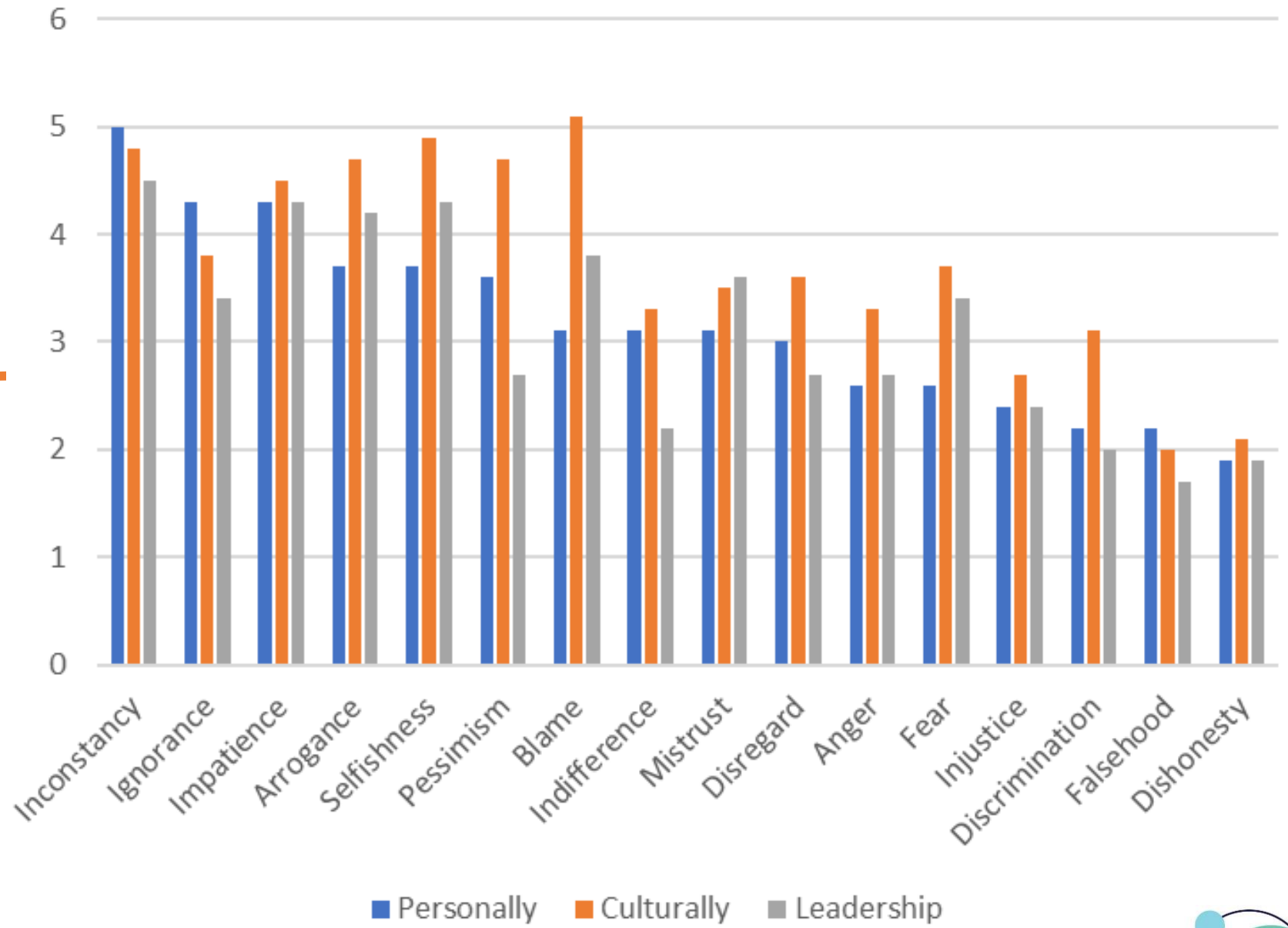
How important are these virtues to you personally / culturally / leadership?





# Non-Virtues

To what extent do you feel constrained by the following Non-Virtues?



# Summary of Results

Unranked			Ranked				
Personal	Cultural	Leadership	Personal	Culture (1)	Culture (2)	Leadership (1)	Leadership (2)
Integrity	Integrity	Integrity	Integrity	Integrity	Integrity	Integrity	Integrity
Truthfulness	Truthfulness	Care	Trust	Trust	Trust	Trust	Compassion
Trust	Trust	Optimism	Truthfulness	Wisdom	Compassion	Courage	Consideration
Justice	Wisdom	Truthfulness	Compassion	Truthfulness	Humility	Wisdom	Courage
Compassion	Consideration	Trust	Consideration	Consideration	Consideration	Optimism	Trust

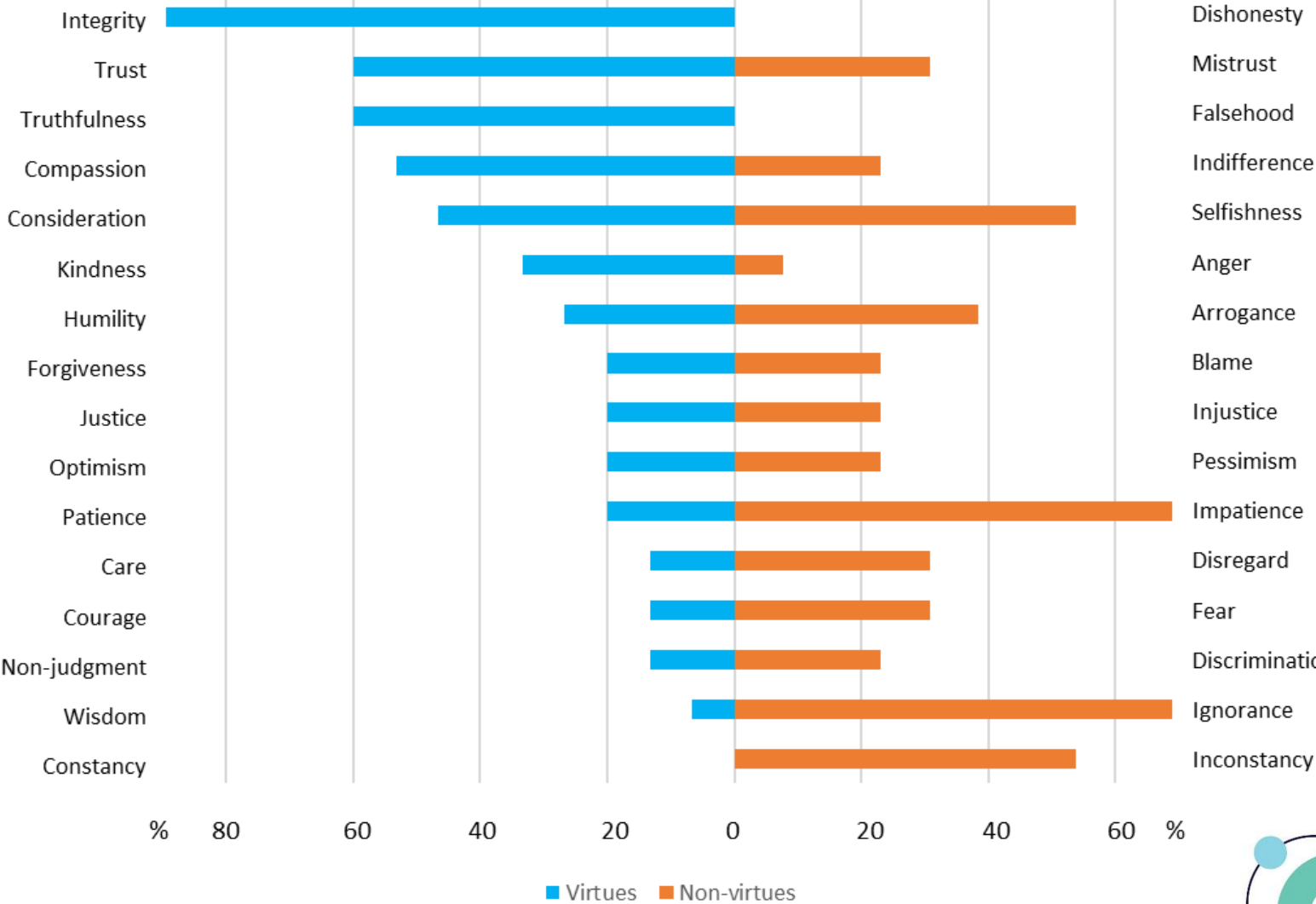
1 = Perceived 2 = Desired

To what extent do you practice these virtues in your personal life?	Min = 6	Max = 10	<b><u>Mean = 8</u></b>
To what extent do you practice these virtues in your professional life?	Min = 5	Max = 10	<b><u>Mean = 8</u></b>
To what extent does your organisation encourage you to practice these five virtues?	Min = 3.9	Max = 9.3	<b><u>Mean = 6.9</u></b>
To what extent does your organisation constrain or limit your ability to practice these five virtues?	Min = 0.1	Max = 8.1	<b><u>Mean = 3.8</u></b>
To what extent do these five virtues shape your sense of self?	Min = 6.1	Max = 10	<b><u>Mean = 9.0</u></b>
To what extent are these five virtues practiced by the majority of the culture of your organisation?	Min = 3.2	Max = 10	<b><u>Mean = 6.8</u></b>
To what extent are these five virtues practiced by the majority of the leadership of your organisation?	Min = 2.6	Max = 9.9	<b><u>Mean = 6.8</u></b>



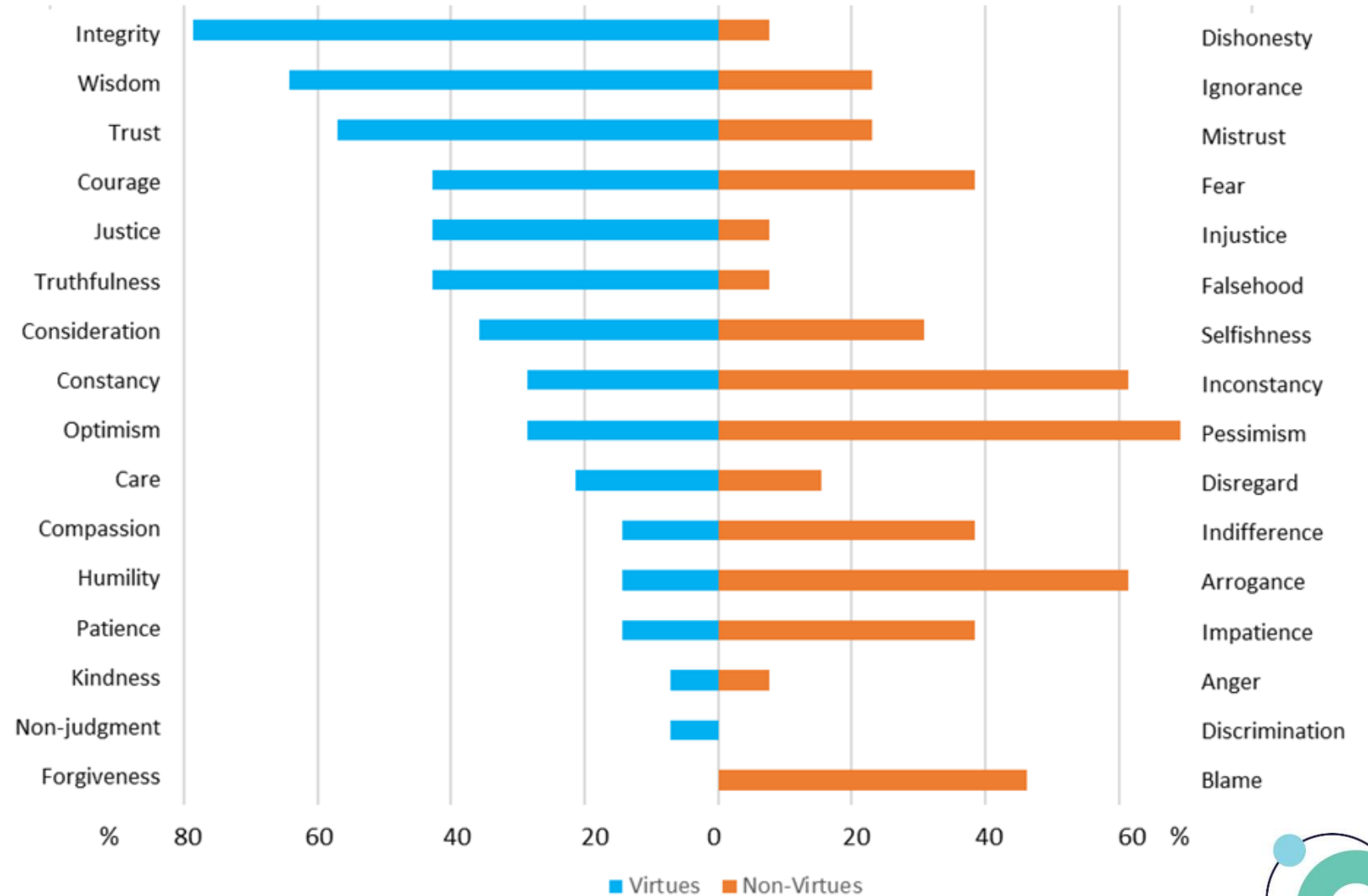
# Top 5 Personal Virtues / Non-Virtues

Personal Virtues / Non-Virtues

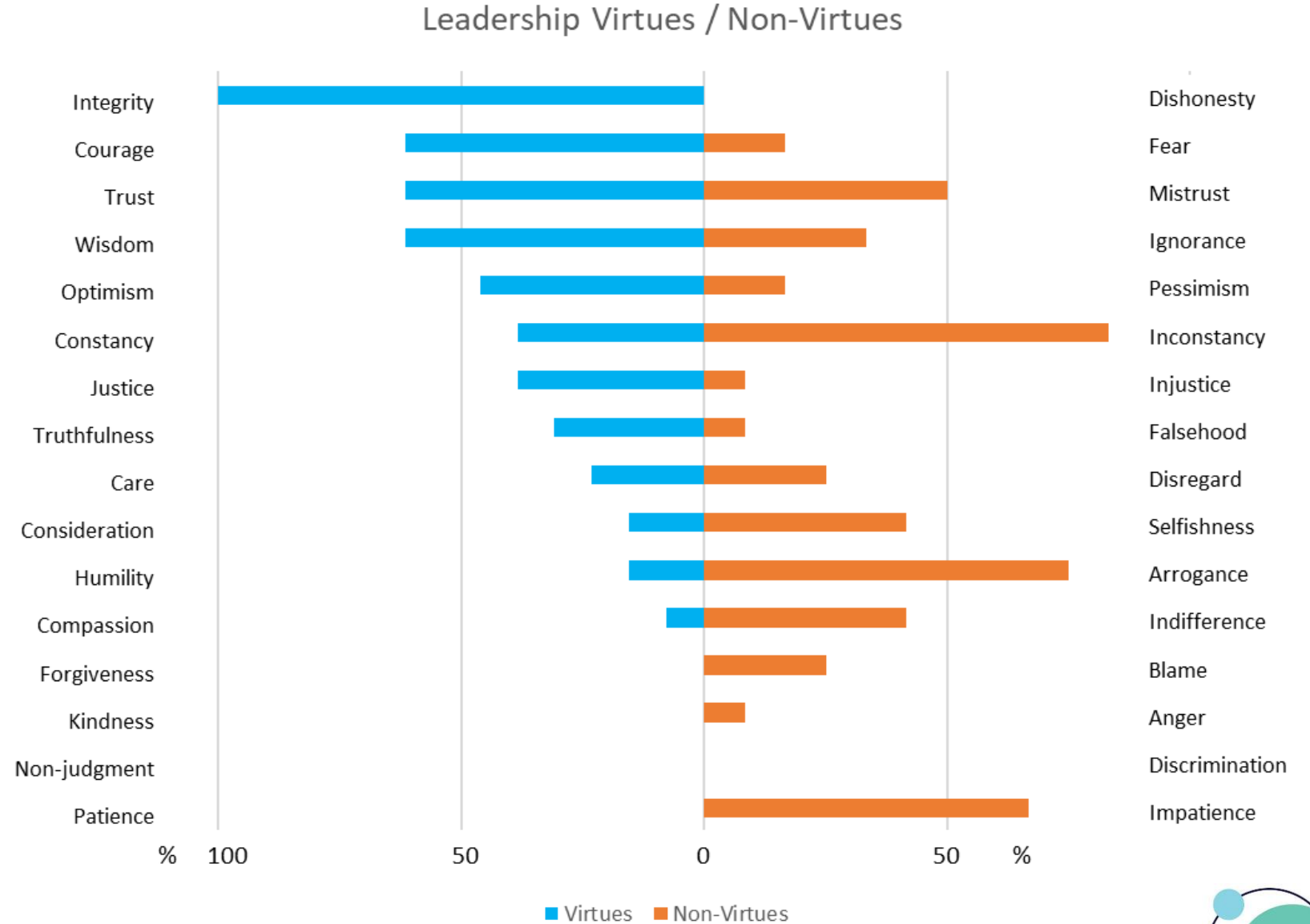


# Top 5 Cultural Virtues / Non-Virtues

Cultural Virtues / Non-Virtues



# Top 5 Leadership Virtues / Non-Virtues



# Four things to remember

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*“Life is not a problem to be solved; but a reality to be experienced” – Soren Kierkegaard*

**Who you are matters** – that includes the innate ability to be compassionate to Self and Other (Confidence)

**What you do matters** – that includes the capacity to act in the best interests of Self and Other (Courage)

**Who Others are and what Others do matters** - Make sure you tell them! (Acknowledgement)

**Don't be hard on yourself** – Practicing virtue with wisdom, compassion, humility and good humour leads you to your happiness (Competence/Just get better)



# Thank you!

