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The Experience of Human Dignity in Culturally Diverse Teams: A Qualitative Study through a Humanistic Lens

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Abstract
Based on the humanistic management model and its conceptualization of human dignity as a balance between four universal human drives, we explored differences and similarities in the experience of human dignity among team members working in culturally diverse teams. We interviewed twenty nine team members of culturally diverse teams and used a directed content analysis to learn more about the experience of human dignity in the context of cultural diversity at work. Our research suggests that the four drives underlying the human dignity threshold in the humanistic management model, are recognized as relevant for the experience of human dignity, yet the experience of human dignity is not universal. Contributions to and violations of experienced human dignity manifest in relationships on different levels of the organization, are experienced differently in different organizations, and are experienced in different frequencies by team members with different diversity characteristics. We conclude that the experience of human dignity requires the fulfillment of the four drives on a satisfactory level for all team members, while balancing the tensions between humanizing and dehumanizing organizational practices, inclusive and exclusive team dynamics and caring and power based relations with management.
Keywords: human dignity, human drives, cultural diversity, humanizing, inclusive, caring

Introduction

The societal focus on business leaders has started to shift from a profit-driven, shareholder approach, to a social, purpose-driven approach, aiming to optimize social value for all stakeholders (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015). More responsible leadership practices, contributing to sustainable development and social justice (Gehrke et al., 2024), refocuses attention on inherently ethical components in the business realm.

The humanistic management school positions itself explicitly as an alternative to the predominantly economistic leadership perspective, offering a critical approach to general management research, and new insights into global responsible leadership specifically (Dierksmeier, 2018). The concept of human dignity is at the heart of humanistic management, and is firmly embedded in the Humanistic Management Model (HMM) (Huijser & Nullens, 2024; Lawrence & Pirson, 2015; Pirson,

2017). In the HMM, human dignity is presented as a baseline in need of protection (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015). Ensuring the protection of this human dignity threshold requires humanistic leaders to attend to a set of four universal human drives (Lawrence & Nohria, 2002; Lawrence, 2010). These drives include the "drive to acquire (dA)", the "drive to defend (dD)", the "drive to bond (dB)" and the "drive to comprehend (dC)" (Lawrence, 2010; Lawrence & Nohria, 2002). In this conceptualization of human dignity, fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of the universal human drives result in either an experienced contribution to or a violation of human dignity (Lawrence, 2010; Lawrence & Nohria, 2002).

While traditional management research is performance related, the dignity perspective widens the organizational output from wealth to well-being (Pirson, 2014; Pirson et al., 2016). Yet research on humanistic leadership in a global context is limited (Fu et al., 2020; Khan and Amann, 2013), and does not include empirical research in the most common global business setting: culturally diverse teams. Promoting wellbeing in culturally diverse teams requires culturally sensitive leaders (Joshanloo et al., 2021).

In this study, we define *cultural diversity* as the presence of various collective identities within a group, team or organization, through which people experience relative differences between their social selves and others, within a specific context (Lawler, 2008; Mahadevan, 2014). It encompasses various aspects of identity, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic background (Romani & Holgersson, 2020). Being a culturally sensitive leader is thus relevant in both the international and local context of cultural diversity (Akdere & Acheson, 2022). Leadership directed at increasing well-being requires a new view on leadership, one with human dignity at its core.

In this article, we explored experiences of one specific aspect of humanistic leadership, focusing on experiences of human dignity. We did so by studying team members working in culturally diverse teams. Based on the humanistic management model and its conceptualization of human dignity as a balance between four universal human drives, we explore the differences and similarities in the experience of human dignity of team members working in culturally diverse teams by focusing on two sub-questions. First, how do team members in culturally diverse teams experience the four drives in relation to human dignity? Second, how do diversity characteristics present in team members of culturally diverse teams relate to the experience of human dignity at work? Through a better understanding of human dignity experiences among team members with different diversity characteristics working in diverse teams, we aim to contribute to understanding the potential global applicability of the humanistic management model.

Theoretical Framework

The Difficulty of Human Dignity at Work

The context of organizational business practice is not a self-evident place to expect human dignity to be promoted or even protected. One could argue that all values underlying human dignity are missing in a traditional business environment (Laloux, 2014): organizations are based on hierarchical and potentially harmful relations of power, in which the instrumental nature of the employer-employee relationship makes one dependent on the other, which creates the possibility for exploitation and abuse of workers, and accordingly, dignity violations (Bal, 2017; Habermas, 1987; Lucas, 2015). The modern conception of human dignity is based on an egalitarian ideal, replacing the aristocratic conception of dignity reserved for the elite (Sayer, 2007; Waldron, 2009). Yet inequalities persist in various domains, including in the business context, challenging the maintenance of dignity amongst people of unequal power and authority (Waldron, 2009). These inequalities may not make it impossible to uphold dignity, yet do create inequalities in the ease with which one can uphold one's dignity, as individual autonomy and dependence are unequal (Waldron, 2009). These inequalities can form barriers to experienced dignity, both intrapersonal as a sense of impaired self-worth, and interpersonal in the interactions with those on higher levels of the organizational hierarchy.

Donaldson and Walsh (2015) explicitly call attention to instrumentality in the Theory of Business as an obstacle to experiencing human dignity. As respect for dignity means respect for the capacity of human beings to define their own ends freely (Dierksmeier, 2011), the demands of transactional work environments are fundamentally at odds with the moral obligation to protect dignity (Mitchell, 2015). Yet Sayer (2007) points to the possibility of mixed motives with regard to instrumentality in organizations, in which civility and respect towards colleagues may be motivated by feelings of genuine care and friendship, and simultaneously prove effective means in establishing cooperative relations. Both employers and employees may have instrumental motives within their relations. In instrumental organizational contexts it is quite common to find non-instrumental interactions to signal a valuation of coworkers as persons in their own right, acknowledging human dignity, *in parallel to* the instrumental value they may hold (Sayer, 2007).

Dignity in the Humanistic Management Model

The humanistic management school aims to offer an alternative to the predominantly economistic view on organizing and leadership based on inherently unequal and transactional relations. Humanistic views on management offer a new way of looking at human nature while explaining – yet explicitly rejecting - the limited view of homo economicus. In the humanistic view on human nature, well-being is the explicit purpose of human existence. It requires good relations with others, in which people respect each other's capacities and do not take advantage of each other's vulnerabilities (Sayer, 2011). Well-being is not happiness, nor pleasure; it is what Aristotle terms *eudaimonia*, or flourishing (Pirson, 2017). The concept of well-being applies at all levels, from the micro (individual), meso (teams, organizations) to macro level (economy, society, the world). A true focus on well-being as the main purpose of human existence thus requires practices that promote the well-being of more than just the individual, practices which focus on protecting everyone's dignity (Pirson, 2017).

Lawrence and Nohria's four drive model (2002) serves as the foundation of the Humanistic Management Model (HMM) (Pirson & Lawrence, 2010; Lawrence & Pirson, 2015; Pirson, 2017). Lawrence and Nohria studied how human beings have evolved and survived, basing their insights on Darwin's work *The Descent of Man* (1871). They propose four drives that evolved in human beings as survival mechanisms, operationalized as criteria human brains use in evaluating and decision making. Lawrence (2010) states the drive to acquire (dA) – to stay alive and procreate - and the drive to defend (dD) – the drive to defend what is acquired, were already present in our earliest ancestors. The drive to bond (dB) evolved initially to support the formation of the family bond, in the transition from homo habilis to homo erectus (Lawrence, 2010). Lawrence defines dB as "the drive to form long-term, mutually caring and trusting relationships with other people" (Lawrence, 2010, p. 14). The drive to comprehend (dC) emerged in the transition from homo erectus to homo sapiens, and is defined by Lawrence as "the drive to learn, create, innovate and make sense of the world and oneself" (Lawrence, 2010, p. 14).

Finding a dynamic balance among the four drives is a core concept in the four drive model. The economistic perspective is viewed as a reduction of human nature as it puts a strong emphasis on dA, *homo economicus*. In the humanistic perspective, the dA needs to be in balance with the other three drives, dD, dB and dC, in order to contribute to a personal sense of dignity and well-being (Pirson, 2018). Melé (2016) termed this holistic view on human beings *homo integralis* which "entails considering the human to have a variety of possible motivations" (Melé, 2016, p. 41). Truly humanistic leaders therefore should appeal to all human drives that underly motivation; through reward systems (catering to the dA), and performance management processes (catering to the dD), while simultaneously attending to people's need to feel embedded in a group (dB) with whom they share a sense of purpose (dC) (Nohria et al., 2008).

Lawrence and Nohria's drives are not prescriptive principles of human dignity. They leave room for moral deliberation based on different value interpretations. As we each experience the world based on our inner drives and desires - which in turn steer what we value, what we believe is right and good (Williams, 2012) - we each attribute different strength, weight, and priority to each drive.

The Experience of Human Dignity at Work

How people experience human dignity at work has been investigated by various scholars. Three of them have had a major influence on the humanistic management realm. Melé (2014) proposed a scale showing different treatments of people in organizations depending on whether dignity is ignored, protected or promoted and suggests a range from maltreatment (1), indifference (2), justice (3), care (4) to development (5). The human quality treatment scale is incorporated implicitly in the humanistic management model (Pirson, 2017), supporting the concept of the human dignity threshold and the promotion of well-being.

Lucas (2015) studied dignity at work by focusing specifically on aspects of interaction in which dignity manifests. She found that inherent dignity is recognized through respectful interactions such as politeness and civility, while earned dignity is recognized through messages of competence and contribution. Lucas introduces a third concept of dignity which she calls 'remediated dignity', with which she refers to the common manner in which people in organizations conceal the instrumental and unequal nature of work. The notion of remediated dignity resembles Sayer's concept of mixed motives, meaning that instrumental relations in organizations are not necessarily uncaring, as instrumentality and care are not mutually exclusive values. In this view, managers could contribute to the experience of human dignity by balancing system values (e.g. transactional relations) with lifeworld values (e.g. friendship) (Habermas, 1987).

Finally, Hicks's research (2018) introduces ten elements of dignity and ten temptations to dignity violation at work and co-established the most recent Dignity Scale (2023), operationalizing dignity on three levels; personal dignity, managerial dignity, and organizational dignity (Pirson et al., 2023).

Human Dignity in Culturally Diverse Teams

Culturally diverse teams are not only diverse in terms of culture, but also differ on other identity related categories such as gender, age, ability, characteristics which are present in any team (Mahadevan et al., 2020). As "diversity categories are not free of culture, culture is not free of diversity categories, and both involve differences in values, meaning and power" (Mahadevan, 2025), being part of a team inherently creates equivocality (Blomme, 2012), as different personal and social identities present within and between team members lead to moral multiplicity (Lücke, 2020). This creates fault lines that require both integrative and generative leadership practices; simultaneously acting as unifier, aiming to create positive team dynamics at the 'intersections of different cultures', while also acting as generator of new perspectives and meanings from the rich diversity present (Lücke, 2020). The multiplicity present in diverse teams should not just be researched as a complex challenge to business and its leaders, but as an opportunity to address social challenges and sustainability issues, creating positive social change (Lücke, 2020; Gray, 2023).

As human dignity is a thick concept (Waldron, 2009), characterized by an open texture (Appiah, 2007), human dignity should be understood flexibly and culturally specific, without denying inherent human dignity to certain individuals or groups across time and space. Human dignity is also a highly personal concept, influenced by an individual's personal view of what constitutes of living a good life (Smith, 2010). As free moral agents, people make different choices. Socio-cultural environments influence these choices. Intrapersonal and relational approaches to dignity are embedded in societal and organizational contexts (Gibson et al., 2023). This makes human dignity a pluralistic concept which is

universally significant, yet subjectively experienced, and context specific (Mitchell, 2015). Although different cultures have different conceptions of flourishing and well-being, views on well-being are not merely subjective (Sayer, 2011). Subjective views and feelings are about objective states of being that are independent of the self (Sayer, 2011). "There are many kinds of well-being, but not just any way of life constitutes well-being" (Sayer, 2011, p. 135). This objectivist conception of well-being (and dignity) does not assume universalism; it is compatible with pluralism, but not relativism (Sayer, 2011). Neiman (2023) stresses this point in her critique on tribalism as opposed to universalism; a shared human dignity does not imply that we are all the same, it just implies that we are connected by our shared humanity and strengthened by cultural pluralism (Neiman, 2023, p. 54).

Although the inherent and universal element of dignity remains important, it is the performative and interpersonal aspect in which dignity manifests in everyday organizations that can actually be empirically investigated (Mitchell, 2015). With the research presented in this article, we aim to contribute to the limited pool of empirical research on the potential of the humanistic management model to support leaders in culturally diverse teams. By taking a relational approach and zooming in on the micro-context of intercultural interactions at work, we focus specifically on the experience of human dignity of culturally diverse team members at work.

Methodology

Approach

The research presented in this article is grounded in a hermeneutic conceptualization of human dignity, in which meaning is constructed in a social, intersubjective context (Adler, 2021; Gergen 2009). The use of semi-structured interviews[1] fits the hermeneutic research approach, as the focus is on the experience of and meaning participants attribute to the notion of human dignity in the context of culturally diverse teams (Palmer, 1969).

Sampling and Selection

We selected four culturally diverse teams, which we defined – for pragmatic reasons – as teams with team members from at least three different national cultural backgrounds, in two private organizations. We selected 29 team members, representing 12 nationalities, 16 men and 13 women, ranging from 27 to 62 years of age. The teams were diverse in various other aspects as well, which we learned more about from team members during the interviews, yet we did not investigate this upfront. Following Laurence Romani and her project team[2] who take a critical perspective on cross-cultural management, we understand culture as a socialization process, 'any learned and social way of how one is expected to do or perceive things' (Mahadevan et al., 2020). Therefore, cultural differences "might also arise, for instance, from interactions between professional, ethnic, religious or organizational groups, or might involve diversity categories such as gender, age, tenure or others" (Mahadevan et al., 2020, p. 2).

The organizations volunteered to participate, as they aimed to learn how their organizational and leadership practices might be improved to protect human dignity and promote well-being for their (culturally) diverse staff. Both organizations are listed multinational corporations who are active on a global scale. Organization I is originally Dutch with subsidiaries in 40 countries, with local and global headquarters in the Netherlands (physically in the same office building), organization II is originally Japanese with subsidiaries in 49 countries, with European headquarters in the Netherlands. Both organizations were in some sort of transition during the study. Organization I was reorganizing due to financial pressures and in a transition towards becoming a global matrix organization. Organization II has grown explosively in the last few years, both in number of employees and in turnover, leading global

[1] All interviews were conducted by the first author.
[2] Stockholm School of Economics, Center For Responsible Leadership

management to push European management for higher achievements through increased efficiency. Each functional team operated in a different organizational support function, three of them as part of the headquarters, one on a separate location.

Data Collection

Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews[3] with team members of culturally diverse teams. The interview questions were structured around three different contexts of the experience of human dignity at work: the general experience of and meaning attributed to human dignity in the context of work, the experience of human dignity in the specific context of team diversity, and finally, the general experience of human dignity in the context of the dominant anthropology of homo economicus in the context of work. The interviews were guided but not limited by prepared questions in each of these contexts. Each team was briefed prior to the interviews through a joint information session. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participating. Additional written consent was collected from participants quoted in this article. The interviews were held at the office of the organization where the participant was employed, in a separate and private room to support confidentiality. The interviews were planned for 90 minutes each, the shortest took one hour, the longest almost 2 hours, resulting in 40 hours and 45 minutes of interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, member checked, partly censored if requested, and saved with password protection. The interview recordings were transcribed in thirty text documents and uploaded into Atlas.ti software for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis aimed at exploring the experience of human dignity in team members working in culturally diverse teams. We used a directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), a form of thematic analysis in which deductive and inductive methods are combined to analyze the data following the hermeneutic circle (Van Staa & De Vries, 2014; Palmer, 1969). Our analysis was based on a deductive, theory driven analysis (Van Staa & De Vries, 2014). We set aside the quotes that did not fit the existing theory, and continued with an inductive, data driven analysis with room for open coding of emerging themes (Gioia et al., 2013).

Using predetermined codes based on existing theory to structure our analysis, we began by analyzing a small sample of interviews. The analysis of the first interview clearly indicated that our coding structure needed more nuance, and we adjusted our coding from 7 main codes and 16 sub-codes to 7 main codes and a total of 55 sub-codes. After analyzing one more interview, we added two more sub-codes, and after analyzing the first eight interviews, we could define 7 main codes and 58 sub-codes, indicating we were approaching data saturation. After finalizing analysis of all the interviews we obtained 7 main codes and 62 sub-codes, in which we categorized 2638 quotes relevant to the experience of human dignity. Our directed content analysis resulted in a total of 73 themes and 14 themed clusters (King et al., 2018; Brooks et al., 2015). To illustrate our data analysis process, examples of our coding process are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

[3] See appendix 1 for the interview template.

Table 1

Thematic coding example

Quotations	**Predetermined code(s combined)**	**Theme**
"they take the private person into account, they see you"; *"we radiate to the outside what we do on the inside";* *"they focus on employee health, they care about you";* *"they really care for their employees";* *"a lot of support to employees on sick leave";* *"they care about wellbeing";* *"corporate policy of respect, openness, tolerance";* *"employee surveys, they want to know what we think"*	Positive experience of human dignity On an organizational level	Organizational culture

Table 2

Clustering themes example

Predetermined code	**Themes**	**Combining codes**	**Theme selection**	**Cluster**
Manifestation of human dignity in a context of team diversity	Essentialism, cooperation, communication, hierarchy, remote work, adjusting to a norm, awareness and appreciation of difference, no judgment, conflict resolution, empathy, sensitivity, privilege, dominance, minority /majority, bias/prejudice, in/outgroup, authenticity, equality, discrimination/exclusion, stereotyping	Manifestation of human dignity in context of team diversity on a **team level** Related to socio-cultural identity based on **culture** or **ethnicity**	Awareness and appreciation of difference, no judgment, communication, authenticity, empathy/sensitivity Discrimination exclusion, adjusting to a norm	Inclusion based on the freedom to be different

Findings

Based on the humanistic management model and its conceptualization of human dignity as a balance between four universal human drives, we explored differences and similarities in the experience of human dignity among team members working in culturally diverse teams. Participants' responses to their experienced human dignity at work could be clustered into seven clusters of contributions to human dignity, and seven clusters of violations to human dignity. The clusters support findings from existing research on human dignity at work (Lucas, 2015; Hicks, 2018; Lawrence and Nohria, 2002; Pirson, 2017; Adler, 2021) and are summarized in table 3.

Four of the clusters match the (lack of) fulfillment of Lawrence and Nohria's universal four drives (2002), and they include most of Hicks' elements of dignity (or temptations to violate dignity) (Hicks, 2018). In addition to the clusters matching the human drives, three relational clusters emerged, which resonate with Melé's Human Quality Treatment (maltreatment, indifference, justice, care and development) (Melé, 2014), and Adler's concept of (lack of) freedom to express the authentic self as part of the experience of human dignity (Adler, 2021).

Table 3

Clusters of contributions to and violations of the experience of human dignity at work

Cluster of contributions to human dignity	**Experience**	**Clusters of violations to human dignity**	**Experience**
Rewards and recognition (dA)	Experiencing fair rewards and recognition	Lack of recognition (dA)	Seniority gives privilege (not quality of work), career growth is limited
Trust and connection (dB)	Optimistic outlook on humanity: "people are naturally good"	Mistrust & isolation (dB)	Negative outlook on humanity: "people only look out for themselves"
Safety and protection (dD)	Experiencing safety, security, feeling protected	Insecurity & fear (dD)	Uncertainty, no information sharing, lack of control
Purpose and meaning (dC)	Experience of being useful; contributing to something greater than oneself	Lack of purpose and meaning (dC)	Experiencing work as meaningless
Relations based on inherent dignity and equal value of every human being	Everyone in the organization feels treated in a humanizing way (justice, equality)	Relations based on reduction	Dehumanizing, people are reduced, e.g. to a human resource, or to one social identity
Relations based on freedom to be and express who you are	Experiencing a sense of inclusion (awareness and appreciation for differences between people, freedom to be and express authentic self, no prejudice or bias)	Relations based on uniformity	Fit in or opt out (Ellemers & Gilder, 2022), differences are not tolerated

Relations based on genuine care	Being seen and cared for as a unique individual (empathy, kindness, sensitivity, respect)	Relations based on (abuse of) power	No care for the need or wishes of the individual

Human Dignity and the Universal Human Drives

Our analysis revealed that all team members recognized each of the four drives as important for their experience of human dignity. They did not view themselves as *homo economicus*, driven solely by self interest and rewards addressing their drive to acquire (dA) and their drive to protect themselves (dD). Although the shared recognition of all drives by team members indicates its potential as a shared language to help reflect on the experience of human dignity, not every team member experienced the same balance between the drives as contributing to human dignity.

When analyzing participants' reflections on the drives, different patterns emerged. Some were happy to accept a lower pay check or slower career pace (less dA) as long as they experienced a sense of safety (dD) and connection (dB).

> *"I've had the opportunity to switch [employers], and I have applied out of curiosity. [DH. Yes and, what ….what held you back?] Yes, the uncertainty. That I think, should I do it, don't focus on what you don't have, but on what you do have."*

Others experienced a lack of safety and protection (dD) in their leaders, while some did not experience this lack as violating their dignity.

> *"The pressure is getting higher and higher, so to speak, and then it is usually played in such a way that people realize that it is really the best choice to accept it, which I think is very nice, and that is also part of it. It is also just a business*."

The drive to trust and connect on a team level (dB) was deemed important for (almost) everyone.

> *"The whole social aspect is also very important to me. It's not just work work work for me, but also the people I work with, that makes the work fun, so to speak."*
> *"Sitting with a few hundred people in a room like that, a town hall meetings, all wearing a [same color] jacket. Then I feel genuinely proud to be part of such a club."*

And although a sense purpose and meaning (dC) is deemed important, some participants indicated they are not searching nor experiencing it at work.

> *"I want to know. It's important to know if you have to explain to somebody else outside of the company what you are doing, what's a bigger picture behind it. […] [for me] it's not that important. It's good to know that you are backing up a good company."*

Our research suggests that the four drives underlying the human dignity threshold in the humanistic management model, were recognized as universally relevant for the experience of human dignity although participants expressed different preferences in terms of strength, priority, and interpretation of each drive. Furthermore, our study indicates that the meaning of work itself varied across team members; some were satisfied with their job as a means to meet their need for safety (dD), others were more career oriented, aiming to meet their needs for safety and achievement of status and

material gain (dD and dA), while still others experienced work as their (higher) calling (dB and dC) (Guillén, 2021). This implies that not everyone seeks for their drives to be fulfilled *at work*.

Human Dignity Manifests on Different Levels of the Organization

Our research builds on Pirson and Hicks' work (Hicks, 2018; Pirson et al., 2023) by connecting different organizational levels to experienced contributions to and violations of human dignity[4]. Our objective was to explore *personal* experiences of human dignity. We found these experiences manifested in different levels in the organization. Our mapping includes three levels on which a personal sense of dignity manifested: the organizational, the team, and the managerial level. Each level still represents a relational manifestation of a personal experience.

Our findings indicate that contributions to the drive to acquire (dA) and violations related to the drive to defend (dD) manifest mostly on the organizational and management level. The drive to defend (dD) is not one of the top clusters contributing to the experience of human dignity and may be considered somewhat of a 'hygiene factor' at work, at least in this context (Herzberg et al., 1959). Furthermore, the drive to bond (dB) is related to experienced contributions *and* violations at the team level. The drive to comprehend (dC) is not found as a top cluster, neither contributing to nor violating the experience of human dignity.

Besides the (lack of) fulfillment of the four drives, three relational clusters support (or inhibit) the experience of human dignity. Relations based on inherent dignity and being of equal value support the experience of human dignity mostly on an organizational and management level, while relations based on instrumental views on human beings violate the experience of human dignity (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015; Lucas, 2015; Melé, 2014). Relations based on the freedom to express who you are support the experience of human dignity on a team and management level, while relations forcing people to fit-in or opt out violate the experience of human dignity (Adler, 2021; Ellemers & Gilder, 2022; Melé, 2014). Relations based on genuine care for the individual support the experience of human dignity on a team and management level, while relations based on (abuse of) power violate the experience of human dignity (Lucas, 2015; Melé, 2014).

Mapping the personal experience of human dignity by its manifestation in relations on different organizational levels can prove helpful for teams and team leaders aiming to improve experienced human dignity in their teams, as it allows pinpointing where dignity 'gaps' may be present and thus where interventions should be targeted.

Human Dignity in Different Organizations

Contributions and violations to human dignity are experienced differently and on different levels of the organization when comparing the two organizations participating in this research[5].

The nature of the experienced violations and contributions differ in the two organizations. In Org I, the main violations to the experience of human dignity are related to a lack of security (dD) because of organizational politics and a lack of transparency, and managers displaying an instrumental attitude towards employees. In Org II, team members experienced unequal relations based on (abuse of) power as the main violation to human dignity. We suggest that at least a proportion of these differences may be caused by the influence of different organizational archetypes (Pirson, 2017).

The teams participating in this research represented two organizational archetypes: an enlightened economist organization with a preference for achieved leadership, and a paternalistic bureaucracy with a preference for ascribed leadership (Pirson, 2017; Parsons, 1951). These

[4] Please refer to appendix 2, table 8, for an overview.
[5] Please refer to appendix 2, table 8, for an overview.

organizational archetypes and corresponding leadership styles influence how team members experience human dignity in the work context.

In Organization I, achieved leaders (Parsons, 1951) follow meritocratic principles; team members feel trusted and empowered, yet only as long as they keep delivering. There is no loyalty to the person, only to the output. This attitude puts dD at risk if financial pressures rise. In this organizational archetype called enlightened economism (Pirson, 2017), dignity seems important, yet people are actually just a means to an end (transactional relationships). Under financial pressure, the focus on profit prevails. As the interviews took place during the transition Organization I was going through (mainly caused by financial pressures and their transition towards becoming a global matrix organization), it was a lack of experienced safety[6] (dD) and the instrumental relations that caused the experienced violations to human dignity at work.

> *"I felt so unsafe there that I could no longer express what I actually wanted. […] Because I noticed that I was actually not taken seriously […] in the sense that they just looked more at the company and what the company needed than at what I needed."*

Organization II is an example of an archetypical bureaucratic paternalistic organization (Pirson, 2017): dignity is not the primary focus, wellbeing is. This is achieved through paternalistic, bureaucratic and authoritarian leadership, where hierarchy is based on ascribed leadership (Parsons, 1951). Team members mention how this more 'Asian' way of leading is presumably affected by the Global HQ in Japan, where paternalistic leaders are generally appreciated (which is confirmed by the GLOBE leadership research, see House, 2004). The company is run 'like a family', where things like 'safety of the tribe' and 'healthy community' are important (Pirson, 2017). Hierarchy matters, and men more frequently than women are making key decisions (Pirson, 2017). Education is often aimed at the elite (Pirson, 2017), which indeed is reflected in the results through a lack of recognition experienced on the organizational level.

> *"Right now there is a program it's, it's a talent program, a success talent management program. And it's only starting for levels [salary scale], so they only looking at those levels. […]. So they wanna see who is the best talent for the future in the company, like predicting. […] And what I don't like is that they're looking for people who already have their careers made."*

These organizations attract (and match with) people with a strong drive to feel protected (dD) and embedded (dB); those strongly driven by dA feel frustrated.

In this type of organization, it is authoritarian leadership that is experienced as a violation to human dignity at work. Furthermore, ascribed leaders in paternalistic bureaucratic organizations can abuse their position(s); accusations of harassment indeed were mentioned by team members from both teams in Organization II involving managers[7].

Human Dignity in Diverse Teams

Referring to their work experience(s) in their current teams, participants shared various examples from organizational practices that either contributed to or violated their experience of human dignity in their culturally diverse teams. These experiences were clustered in the relational clusters found in the general

[6] Although layoffs following restructuring and reorganization form a real threat in Org I, the Dutch state regulations in which both Org I and II are embedded are acknowledged by participants as still offering quite some legal protection and security. Even when people lose their job, their livelihood is not at stake. This more coordinated market economy is perceived as 'better' by participants than the liberal market economy in Anglo Saxon cultures, creating a more humane and dignified context for the possibility of unemployment (Stahl et al., 2020).

[7] These harassment cases were in the past, were dealt with by the organization through use of external research companies, and did not take place between team members and current managers of the teams that took part in this research.

exploration of the experience of human dignity at work. They are summarized in tables 4 and 5, where they are matched to corresponding organizational practices, as well as the experienced underlying values.

Table 4

Clusters of contributions to the experience of human dignity in a diverse team context

Cluster	Experience	Organizational practice	Human dignity / HQT*
Relations based on inherent dignity and equal value of every human being	Relations based on inherent dignity of every human being, everyone in the organization feels treated in a humanizing way (justice, equality)	Humanizing	Protect human dignity
		Based on equality (value of being)	Justice
Relations based on freedom to be and express who you are	Relations based on freedom to be and express who you are, experiencing a sense of belonging (awareness and appreciation for differences between people, freedom to be and express authentic self, no prejudice or bias)	Inclusive	Respect human dignity
		Based on the freedom to be different	
Relations based on genuine care	Relations based on genuine care, being seen and cared for as a unique individual (empathy, kindness, sensitivity, respect)	Caring	Promote human dignity
		Based on care and development	Care & development

* Human Quality Treatment (Melé, 2014)

Table 5

Clusters of violations to the experience of human dignity in a diverse team context

Cluster	Experience	Organizational practices	Human dignity / HQT*
Relations based on reduction	Relations based on reduction of the human condition, people are reduced to a human resource, or to just one aspect of their identity	Dehumanizing	Ignoring & violating human dignity
		Instrumentality (being of value)	Indifference
		Bureaucratism (system over people)	
		Essentialism (reduction to one social identity)	

Relations based on uniformity	Relations based on demanding adaptation, fit in or opt out, differences are not tolerated	Excluding Based on demand for uniformity	Ignoring & violating human dignity
Relations based on (abuse of) power	Relations based on (abuse of) power, no care for the need or wishes of the individual	Dominating Power based	Ignoring & violating human dignity Maltreatment

* Human Quality Treatment (Melé, 2014)

Participants mentioned various diversity characteristics in the interviews which they experienced as important in the context of human dignity at work, ranging from culture and ethnicity, to personality, gender, language, disability and illness, caring duties, LBG[8], political view and age. The experienced contributions and violations to human dignity in the context of team diversity relate to different organizational levels (organizational, team and management), and appear in different frequencies with regard to different diversity characteristics. Table 6 summarizes the most frequently mentioned diversity characteristics in relation to the various levels of the organization, linked to experienced contributions or violations to human dignity in the context of team diversity.

Table 6

Contributions and violations to the experience of human dignity in a diverse team context, linked to diversity characteristics on different organizational levels

	Organizational dignity	**Team related dignity**	**Managerial dignity**
	Personal sense of dignity in relation with the organization	Personal sense of dignity in relation with the team	Personal sense of dignity in relation with the team leader
Contributions	Humanizing	Including	Caring
	Caring duties	**LGB**	**Personality**
Violations	Dehumanizing	Excluding	Dominant
	Culture & ethnicity	**Culture & ethnicity**	
	Gender	**Gender**	
	Personality	**Political view**	
	Language		
	Age		

Table 6[9] shows that the contributions to the experience of human dignity are related to humanizing organizational practices towards team members with caring duties (e.g. flexible work hours, being able to work from home), an inclusive team attitude towards LBG team members, and a caring management stance towards different personality types. Experienced violations to human dignity are

[8] LesBiGay: lesbian, bisexual, homosexual orientation. We prefer the term LBG rather than LGBTQ+ as our research did not include people identifying as transsexual or queer. It was pointed out by participants that LBG persons may have quite a different experience of dignity at work compared to transsexual people. Based on this feedback, we chose to specify sexual orientation rather than gender experience.

[9] Please refer to appendix 3, table 9, for a detailed summary.

related to dehumanizing organizational practices and excluding team practices towards team members based on team members' cultural and ethnic background and gender. Experienced violations to human dignity based on dominant and power-based leadership seem to be related more to the organizational culture and the personality of the leader, than to characteristics of those being led, and can be labeled as identity indifferent, although gender and age are of influence to the level of experienced dominant behavior. Although the dominant leaders' behavior may be experienced slightly more by young women, it is recognized that this type of leadership is not reserved for team members with specific characteristics.

A few specific diversity characteristics stand out when it comes to the experience of human dignity at work.

Culture and Ethnicity

Cultural and ethnic background is perceived as the most relevant aspect of diversity in the context of the experience of human dignity at work. Although cultural differences are often mentioned as a source of conflict, mistrust and general miscommunication in teamwork (Lücke, 2020), there seems to be a simple exclusion mechanism at play. When cultural or ethnic diversity is present in the team, the dominant culture – in this case, the Dutch – sets the norm, and those belonging to the dominant group expect others to adjust. The Dutch organizational and managerial context seems to be more influential than the actual team composition, as some teams did not have a majority of Dutch team members, and still found the Dutch culture to be the norm.

> *"I think, there are times that I have sensed since I came to the Netherlands that sometimes that people they think that what they think, is right. [...] And even in my in my previous student jobs they … they were always like correcting me, like telling me how things should be right, and … and here I feel like it might be the same. That there's some sort of superiority complex going on."*

Participants mention that this expectation has advantages, as the Dutch are liked for their egalitarian management and open communication style, while other participants tend to see disadvantages, perceiving the typical 'Dutch style' as being overbearing, loud, and even rude.

> *"I feel here Dutch are usually considered as straightforward people. That's why people like, people like us who come from other nations, it's quite difficult for us because they're … back then at our, like in our culture and our, you try to be diplomatic sometimes, even if you don't like something. You try to revolve around that and you just say it's nice, it's looking nice or OK, this is OK, but here people are quite straightforward and I like that fact, although they may sound rude at that point of time like this is not working out, be it, be it at work or be it at personal point of view. But I think that's, that's nice."*

What stands out upon closer analysis, is that the experience of those who are not part of the Dutch culture is a very similar one, even though they represent eleven different nationalities from three different continents; they feel connected to each other as they share a mutual feeling of not being part of the dominant group. In this research, cultural minorities are not discriminated for who they are, but for who they are *not*, leading the non-Dutch employees to form a new kind of 'in-group' with each other, based on a shared outsider status.

> *"Sometimes I feel that I don't know, maybe they feel that they … they lack their own culture. They lack because the team is so diverse, they don't have any … for anybody from their, from their culture."*

Personality

Team members experience that they are expected to adapt their personality to what the organization (and manager) sets as the norm. Where this means being outspoken, loud, visible, extraverted - as mentioned by team members in Org I – an extra difficulty arises for team members who are not from the dominant Dutch culture. For people from other cultures than the Dutch, this behavior can feel quite unnatural. Their personality may not only be more introvert than extravert, some participants mentioned that in their cultural upbringing it is frowned upon to act very outspoken, loud and visible; this behavior is interpreted as disrespectful, especially when communicating with a superior.

> *"I will be vocal only if I'm totally sure about that point at work. So if not, I don't have an opinion. I don't want to. I'm not like a person that give opinion for each and everything. Just because that's being discussed, I'm not such a person, but I've seen people around like also do that, and because they are more vocal, their voice is being heard. That's the … I get sometimes not heard."*

For some expatriates, the Dutch management expectations felt as a liberation; finally they could speak their minds and their input was heard and appreciated. This is experienced as a caring and potentiating management practice that contributes to experienced human dignity. However, for some, the Dutch expectations are impossible to meet, as it does not fit who they are, not personally, nor culturally, resulting in a violation of experienced dignity as they do not feel equally valued as those who do 'meet the standards'.

> *"Of course there are people who would not speak up for even themselves, and would keep more to themself. But that's, that's their general nature, but. But the most important thing for the team is, I mean, it's a diverse is not diverse background, it's diverse, is also people with, with different uhm, different behavior, right. So it's important that everybody feels comfortable enough to, to speak up when they, when they want to."*

Gender, Caring Duties and Age

Some diversity characteristics intersect. Gender related experiences of dignity violations are often related to caring duties; people feel parenthood especially is a bigger cause for discrimination than simply not being a man. Experienced discrimination happens at the intersection between gender and care; women are expected to adjust their work to their caring duties, including part time work, working from home and attending to sick children or others in need of care.

> *"It's not the company, it's more the way of thinking of … of some people I think. But it's … it's not yeah, it's not [the organization], but somebody, so. What I think is still to the women in general, […], they are expecting that we do more."*

Both men and women[10] reported that organizational practices that supported caring duties such as flexible office hours contributed to the experience of human dignity.

> *"The company gives a lot. I mean, in my, again, in my personal situation, I find that they're very … very accepting, very … not that I am... Not that I have personal issues every single*

[10] In this research, all participants identified explicitly as male or female.

week, and I'm like, oh, I can't come or things like that, but they know, should I need it, and no questions asked."

The experienced discrimination based on gender takes place in different directions; women without children or a family to take care of also experience discrimination, as they supposedly have 'all the time in the world', and are expected to opt for the occasional late night or weekend shifts. Another intersection is found at the crossroad between age and gender, as team members report that younger generations treat women and men more equally than older generations.

"Whenever I collaborate with the males, females in the organization they're my age, it's … it's totally fine."

We found that age also influences how team members experience specific violations of human dignity differently. Younger generations expressed more frustration with a dominant management style (in Organization II), as they could not advance their careers at the speed they desired; management was 'holding them back'. On the other hand, older generations showed more acceptance of an instrumental relation with their employer (in Organization I), looking at their employment as an inherent transactional relation that did not feel as a dignity violation, but simply represented a mutual agreement. These results however could also merely reflect a (lack of) matching drives and values between team members and their employers; in general, younger employees did not work in the company very long, older employees did. It makes sense that people stay where they feel they fit best.

"Those friends of mine, they really look at that, they say: man, you guys are all so stupid there [at the organization], that you've been working for the same boss for so long. [...] But in the end, that's a flip side, you can tell a lot of good stories about the company. I always do that with pride, so they say: yeah, that's a really great place to work."

Discussion & Conclusion

Summary of findings

Our findings suggest that the four drives (Lawrence & Nohria, 2002) underpinning human dignity in the Humanistic Management Model (Pirson, 2017) are recognized as universal dimensions of human dignity by team members of culturally diverse teams. In addition to the (lack of) fulfillment of the four drivers, violations and contributions to the experience of human dignity manifest in relations on different levels within the organization.

Table 7

Manifestations of experienced contributions to and violations of human dignity in relations on different levels of the organization

	Organizational dignity	**Team related dignity**	**Managerial dignity**
Experienced contributions	Personal sense of dignity in relation with the organization	Personal sense of dignity in relation with the team	Personal sense of dignity in relation with the team leader
	Humanizing	Including	Caring
	Based on equality (value of being)	Freedom to be different	Care & development
		Diversity is the norm	Relations before tasks

	Recognition of the human condition as holistic		Actualizing potential as a goal (for the person)
	All drives		
Experienced violations	Dehumanizing	Excluding	Dominant
	Reduction	Fit in or opt out	Power based / authoritarian
	Instrumentality (being of value)	Uniformity is the norm	Tasks before relations
	Bureaucratism (system over people)		Developing potential as a means (for the organization)
	Essentialism (reduction to one social identity)		

As illustrated in Table 7, humanizing relations on the organizational level, based on the conviction that every human being is of value, driven by a complex particular and unique balance and substantiation of all four drives, protect human dignity. Inclusive relations in the team, based on the freedom to be and express who you are, respect human dignity. Caring relations with management, based on genuine care for the development of the unique individual, promote human dignity.

Dehumanizing organizational practices, reducing people through instrumental or bureaucratic relations in which human beings are perceived as a resource or essentialized to one social identity, are indifferent of human dignity. Team practices that exclude people and demand adaptation, 'fit in or opt out' (Ellemers & Gilder, 2022) and do not tolerate differences, violate human dignity. Power-based management practices, a 'perversion of authority' based on power and disregard of the needs and wishes of the individual, harm human dignity (Meyer, in Adler et al., 2023).

Although the drives are universal, the balance that contributes to the *experience* of human dignity is not. Team members balance the set of drives differently by prioritizing, interpreting and expressing the (lack of) fulfillment of each drive in their own specific way. The experienced violations and contributions to team members' personal sense of human dignity are related to different organizational levels (organizational, team and management), vary between organizations, and are experienced in different frequencies by team members with different diversity characteristics.

Theoretical Implications

Our findings indicate that power differences and resulting inequalities have different effects on the experience of human dignity, depending on the type of organization and corresponding leadership style. Lucas (2015) points to general inequality as one way in which organizations violate the experience of human dignity, yet she does not make a distinction between ascribed and achieved types of leaders. In environments characterized as enlightened economism (Pirson, 2017), transactional relationships (another dignity violation inherent to work Lucas points to) are embodied in achieved leaders; human dignity is promoted as a means, not a goal, and meritocratic principles add to the possibility of fulfilling dA, while putting dD at risk. On the other hand, in environments characterized as bureaucratic and paternalistic (Pirson, 2017), hierarchy and authoritarian leadership is embodied in ascribed leaders; wellbeing is promoted, and a family-like loyalty and safety is safeguarded, fulfilling dB and dD, while putting dA at risk: career opportunities are limited and require a lot of patience. Both organizational archetypes potentially violate dignity, yet in very different ways. We also point out that, depending on the preferences of the individual employee, dignity might not be experienced as violated at all, as some

people are perfectly happy in an environment that puts more emphasis on dA over dD, or vice versa. Using universal dimensions such as the drives may help understand the different aspects of the experience of human dignity, yet universal dimensions do not create universal experiences.

Workplaces form a risky context for human dignity, as instrumentality and inequality are inherent properties of the organizational business context (Lucas, 2015; Sayer, 2007). Our research confirms a third threat to the experience of human dignity at play in culturally diverse teams, which is the need for uniformity, limiting team members' freedom to express their authenticity (Adler, 2021; Dierksmeier, 2018). Despite these challenges, the experience of human dignity can manifest in intersubjective relations that attend to all four drives, in humanizing, inclusive and caring relations on different level of the organization.

Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that team members with certain diversity characteristics – e.g. being a member of a cultural minority, being a woman - are confronted with violations to their experience of human dignity more often than other team members. Understanding better how diversity characteristics are related to experienced human dignity can help organizations to (re)evaluate their diversity policies and practices on different organizational levels. For example, how can organizational practices support employees with caring duties even better? Or, how can managers support their teams in order to avoid excluding team members who belong to cultural minorities? However, making one particular social identity salient can lead to various negative intergroup dynamics. A perception of 'social separation' may occur between certain identities, and individuals become more sensitive to identity threat[11] (Lee & Schneider, 2020). Defining people in essentialist terms does not do justice to the complexity of human beings (Blomme & Bornebroek, 2012; Appiah, 2018), reduces them to only a fraction of their full selves, and often leads to more experienced violations of human dignity through exclusion and discrimination (Romani & Holgersson, 2020). Following Foucault's argument on classification as a negative expression of power, Romani and Holgersson claim that current diversity management practices are deeply unethical, leading people to feel unfree, as the external essentialist classification is internalized and defines the self too narrowly (Romani & Holgersson, 2020). Ethical diversity practices should not focus on any type of categorization, but should encourage equal treatment of all employees without ignoring differences, creating a culture in which "people of all social identity groups [have] the opportunity to be present, to have their voices heard and appreciated, and to engage in core activities on behalf of the collective" (Wasserman et al., 2008, p. 176, in Romani & Holgersson, 2020). This argument resonates with Adler and her colleagues (2013), who argue that human dignity is an expression of authenticity, and should be taken as "the core of diversity concerns at work" (p. 1). As every individual is part of various groups and cannot be reduced to one social identity without harming inherent dignity (Appiah, 2018; Adler, 2013), the four drives may serve as a language to discuss a deeper level of diversity without the need to reduce people to one social identity (Atkins, 2008). By taking human dignity as a basis for managing diverse teams, the focus shifts from the diversity characteristics of individual team members to the diversity within teams.

Limitations

Our study is limited in two important ways; by its sample size, and by its method of data analysis. First, using a small sample within a case study setting implies limitations to generalizability of findings. However, as Flyvbjerg (2011) argues, general, theoretical knowledge is not necessarily more valuable than more specific case based knowledge, especially when studying people. In social science, all knowledge is by definition contextual and rules out any positivist theory development that is

[11] Social identity threat arises when one feels that the social group to which one belongs is not valued (Lee and Schneider, 2020).

'explanatory and predictive' (Flyvbjerg, 2011). A small sample of cases can be very valuable and contribute to scientific knowledge development through a process of 'falsification' in which observing only one case in which the theory does not fit a scientific proposition, must be revised or rejected (Flyvbjerg, 2011). This is exactly what our research aimed to do using a critical case, in which team members did not share the same cultural background. Would the four drive theory (Lawrence & Nohria, 2002) still hold in this different empirical context? The short answer is: yes. However, universal drives do not lead to universal experiences. The four drives operate differently on different levels of the organization. And, depending on which diversity characteristics are at play, people experience different frequencies of violations or contributions to their experienced human dignity at work. Our case study research does not falsify the four drive theory, but does nuance it in a context of cultural diversity to include relational aspects beyond attention for internal drives.

Second, our method of data analysis can limit reliability. Using a directed content analysis has the advantage of being able to explicitly contribute to theory building, helping researchers to avoid getting lost in details and brings focus (Van Staa & De Vries, 2014), however, the method of analysis is criticized for its positive bias as it is steering research through a theoretical framework. This means researchers have to be very aware that they leave room for contextual aspects in the data (Van Staa & De Vries, 2013). In our research, we have not only confirmed the theory, but contextualized it in an empirical context of team diversity by separating the experience of human dignity on different organizational levels.

Conclusion

Our research indicates that the (lack of) fulfillment of Lawrence and Nohria's four drives indeed represent universally recognized elements of contributions or violations to human dignity, yet this does not create a universal experience of human dignity. Contributions to and violations of the experience of human dignity manifest in relations on different levels of the organization. Different organizational archetypes and corresponding leadership styles influence the experience of human dignity in different ways. Furthermore, the experiences of human dignity vary between (groups of) individuals with different diversity characteristics.

Our findings suggest that team leaders can influence the experience of human dignity in their culturally diverse teams by attending to and balancing the four human drives (Lawrence & Nohria, 2002), and by balancing the tensions found between dehumanizing, excluding and power based system values (Habermas, 1987; Parsons, 1951) with humanizing, inclusive and caring organizational practices (Adler, 2021; Lucas, 2015). How this can be achieved is a research direction worth pursuing.

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