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‘TREATED WITH INDIGNITY: PERSPECTIVES OF A WOMAN-LED,  
NOT-FOR-PROFIT SERVICE ORGANISATION WHEN FUNDRAISING’

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article explores the challenges faced by a not-for-profit, woman-led social enterprise in Atlantic Canada, specifically the barriers encountered when gaining funding to support their agenda. The research reveals that the misalignment of values between funding agencies and the organisation, particularly regarding dignity, played a significant role in these challenges. The conventional fundraising model often imposes unnecessary burdens and arbitrary expectations, whereas there is an opportunity for funders to act like investors, valuing and trusting the organisation's expertise to utilise funds effectively with fewer restrictions. Hurdles faced by the organisation included reduced, delayed or cancelled programming, which placed a strain on provincial healthcare and social service systems. While there is a growing discourse on dignity in business and management literature, few studies have focused on its perception within women-led social enterprises during the funding acquisition process. This research contributes to the literature on small business, management and gender leadership.

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## INTRODUCTION

The current research explores the barriers to service delivery, with a focus on the perception of dignity by a woman-led not-for-profit social enterprise when fundraising. A not-for-profit social enterprise typically raises capital through corporate sponsorships, individual donations, grants from foundations and government agencies, events and social media/online (Herbst and Norton, 2007). For social enterprises and not-for-profits, the funding effectiveness can be maximised through adding multiple channels, better communication, stronger relationships by showing impact and targeted online management (Nageswarakurukkal et al., 2020); effective persuasion in fundraising messaging (Das et al., 2008); and planning that reflects social value (Heyman, 2016, Brooks, 2008). The role of gender in philanthropy had expressed women to be more relational, placing greater onus on care and relationships (Skoe et al., 2002); funding altruism as a status measure (Mokos et al., 2023); women leaders exhibiting greater self-censorship (Adamska et al., 2022); and the necessity for women's programmes to measure impact and influence to justify and validate funders concerns (tangible data, organisational pulse, external drivers and consequential results) (Engle and Moline, 2008, Sargeant and Shang, 2010). Extant literature highlights a contrasting role of gender within fundraising, yet few have explored the deeper psychological impact on individuals, and as an extension, the implications it has on social enterprise service delivery performance.

The concept of *dignity* has rooted in human psychology and is highly debated, but gradual consensus of the ideology shows that individuals assign meaning to serve their cause (Glensy, 2011, Shultziner and Rabinovici, 2012). Much of the extant literature in business and management explores the role of dignity in ethics and human resource management as it pertains to how leaders treat employees (Dierksmeier, 2015). Not-for-profit research tied to dignity primarily focuses on accountability structures (Mosley and Park, 2022) and economic contributions, such as the crowding-in and crowding-out debate with government funding bodies (Brooks, 2000, de Wit and Bekkers, 2017). The business and management literature currently lacks substantial contributions on the topic of humanistic management, particularly concerning social businesses and their experiences of receiving undignified requests during the fundraising process. Humanistic management focuses on the human condition and the propensity to engage in the development and betterment of people's lives (Melé, 2003). While examining the development of ethical business leaders, Hicks and Waddock (2016) explained that dignity can be learned, where wellbeing can be a core fundamental value, which in the funding community that helps not-for-profit organisations and could be more humanistic for the common good (Harman, 1974, Pless et al., 2017, Pirson, 2020). If funders took an investment approach to funding social enterprises in a dignified manner, would the consequence result in more effective service delivery because of the flexibility in allocating funds as the organisation sees fit? And, with greater efficiency and effectiveness in resource allocation, would it ease pressure on the social healthcare system resources?

The current research adopted a narrative inquiry approach to data collection, which is analysed thematically to provide a more holistic view of the organisation because it can capture the experiences of different stakeholders, such as employees and supporting agencies. The not-for-profit women-led social enterprise under review (here within known as the 'Organisation'), has a culture of connection, help and support where staff are both exposed to systemic pressures of operating a small non-government organisation and seek support to do their job well while assuming the weight of their client's hardships when working in close environments. Five women

from the Organisation, through grounded, semi-structured interviews, suggest that perceived dignity is a primary barrier to service delivery as it restricts the capacity to offer more effective programming and research.

Given the structure of corporate enterprises supporting their work, the funding process is often stunted by standardised corporate quotas (limitations or requirements) that unnecessarily consume the limited resources of the small social enterprise. Instead, the Organisation suggests a more effective approach to funding is to invest in the business by dignifying the people that are experts in their field (and clearly business survival) to use the funds with less restriction. Taking this dignified approach would prospectively meet the values of both companies and have a greater positive social impact on the communities they both serve. By reframing the status quo of funding to a behaviour of investment, it could give greater stability, autonomy and legitimacy to not-for-profit social enterprises, which could remove additional stressors from the social healthcare services. The current research hopes to draw attention to the importance of dignity, especially as it relates to women leaders in funding acquisition within not-for-profit social enterprises.

## **DIGNITY IN BUSINESS**

The literature review conducted for this research focused on the seminal understanding of dignity and the role of dignity in business operations. Articles under consideration were required to be peer-reviewed, written in English, accessible to the researchers while maintaining some interest in the academic fields of psychology, social psychology, business, management and entrepreneurship. The search used keywords within the title and abstract fields (in interchangeable variations) that included dignity in business, management, not-for-profit organisations, funding and power dynamics. Using EBSCOhost Business Source Complete on March 03, 2023, the searches produced 658 articles, of which 78 applied to the general topic of dignity in funding acquisition by a not-for-profit organisation. To the best of the author's knowledge, no articles assessed the role of perceived dignity in funding acquisition by women-led not-for-profit organisations, including within the growing discourse on humanistic capitalism and management. The rest of this section focuses on the discussion of dignity as it relates to fundraising within business and management.

Given the personal nature of dignity, there have been multiple definitions offered, but ultimately it is people assign meaning to serve their cause, which renders disservice to the concept by making it a generalised basic ideal (Glensy, 2011, Shultziner and Rabinovici, 2012). Hicks (2019, p. 68) reflects on this issue, 'Philosophers were knowledgeable about the meaning of dignity, but they were more concerned with defining and dissecting it than working with it to bring an end to conflict.' Today, people associate dignity with humanistic socio-economic status (Waldron, 2013); social currency (Zawadzki, 2018); religious constitutionalism (Moyn, 2014); human rights (Igras et al., 2021); worth (Kant, 2017); as well as recognition and respect (Debes, 2009). The current study builds on Hicks (2019), to highlight that dignity in the individual is relative to how people value themselves and nurture their own dignity while inspiring others to grow. In a social enterprise (organisation), dignity rests in the culture of the company's morality, collectively adopted by the individuals within, to engage in bettering the community that is bound through a social contract (Dierksmeier, 2015, Aguado et al., 2017).

In their systematic literature review of not-for-profit funding academic articles, Schatteman and Waymire (2017) revealed that, from the 619 articles identified, 415 were published in management journals across ranging disciplines on topics related to not-for-profit management; public administration; accounting and economics/finance. The topic ‘ethics’ was not listed in their table of the top ten words in each of the four disciplines mentioned previously, which raises questions around interpreting dignity within ethics and morality. The field of business ethics (Hahn, 2012, Mea and Sims, 2019) and human resource management (Melé, 2003, Melé, 2005, Mazur and Mazur-Malek, 2021) dominates literature on dignity in business. Within the identified not-for-profit articles, topics include accountability structures (Onishi, 2015); government funding (Keesling and Kaynama, 1996, Lu, 2015, Lu and Zhao, 2019, Lee, 2020); minority funding (Adediran, 2022) and enterprising activities to ensure long-term survivability (Bryson et al., 2001, Devalkar et al., 2017, Smith et al., 2012, Grizzle and Sloan, 2016). Given the relative importance of not-for-profit social enterprises, the review illustrates the opportunity to explore dignity as a barrier to fundraising.

The capability approach expands on the concept of humanism by emphasising the importance of empowering and supporting stakeholders through the responsible and dignified development of their potential (Bertland, 2009, González-Cantón et al., 2019, Westermann-Behaylo et al., 2016). If we apply this approach to funding, why do agencies persist in applying accountability models that knowingly jeopardise small-scale not-for-profit agencies when compared to willingly surrender their investment without control in stocks or bonds? (Piotroski, 2000, Baker and Ricciardi, 2014). Goncharenko (2021) in their assessment of Norwegian advocacy NGO’s echo this sentiment by revealing that donor demands, drawn for institutional and corporate logics, enforce their own policies and practices, which restricts, limits and challenges the delivery of services and trustworthiness of these community service organisations. Taking this information into account, it questions the role of dignity in fundraising regarding the motivations of lenders to make impactful, charitable investment; or is this satisficing policy or marketing agenda of corporate social responsibility like greenwashing? (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020, Delmas and Burbano, 2011). Funding bodies pose an integral part in the operations of a not-for-profit, but does the act of charity perpetuate indignity by not empowering the organisation to make real-time changes? (Caviola et al., 2014, Moore, 2008). These changes, such as adjusting the budget slightly for craft supplies, which while may be interpreted as arbitrary by the funder, can make a substantial difference in the programme’s delivery according to their growing needs.

Funder restrictions/limitations on allocating resources to wages/salary, was found to be a persistent contributor to the gender pay gap as women continue to account for 75 per cent of the personnel within not-for-profit organisations (Conry, 1998). The finding is troubling, as the employees are trained professionals and their invaluable experience in the subject and their contributions are undermined by such funding restrictions. By prioritising dignity in the funding process, funders and organisations can place higher value on the relationship by showcasing trust in the organisation’s capability to accomplish their mission of creating a positive community impact that can be achieved through effective resource allocation, which would contribute to shattering the glass ceiling (Dale, 2017). Dignity surrounding gender in leadership compounds further when considering how the women in women-led social enterprises and not-for-profit organisations are truly valued by the funders that claim to work alongside them (Stelter, 2002). One cannot help but identify systemic tokenism throughout reports of communication and a top-down relationship (funder-to-organisation), with endless examples of disrespect and lack of

attention to accomplishing goals that are in line with the proclaimed shared mission (King et al., 2010). Despite publicly expressing enthusiasm for supporting women-led organisations, these funders cannot honour and respect the women who are carrying out the work they claim to support. As a result, the women in leadership positions within these organisations often feel drained and exhausted, often attributing their success to their own resourcefulness, despite facing challenging dynamics with funders who openly display deep-seated and unfair distrust in their ability to lead the organisation (Krimmel and Gormley, 2003).

Regarding the research agenda at hand, the articles of utmost relevance explore the interconnectedness between accountability structures and funding requirements, objectives and expectations set by government and private funding entities. For instance, Dolamore and Kline (2020) adopt a collective impact perspective by using a grounded theory approach with a large health and human services not-for-profit organisation (mid-Atlantic, USA) to find that funding agencies continue to perpetuate the status quo and consequently reinforce the region's racial and structural inequalities for small-size, community-based health and human service organisations. Dale (2017) explored the gendered nature role in fundraising to suggest that these positions are often feminised (tied to humanitarianism, democracy, participation and community) that clash with capitalistic values and are devalued in patriarchal societies (such as North America) where being a woman may limit their perceived credibility and power in fundraising activities. Keddie (2021) suggests accountability of these organisations draws on a three-part framework: Imposed; Felt and Adaptive that are often externally driven, internally moderated, quantitative and formalised to account for resources use and impact. Like many of the articles reviewed, the organisation has male-dominated leadership.

The literature review highlights critical concerns related to not-for-profit fundraising. There is a notable absence of contributions from small-sized women-led organisations that delve into the humanistic aspects of fundraising negotiations and acquisition. It is crucial to start a more extensive public discourse on incorporating dignity in corporate civic responsibility. By effectively integrating human capability and stakeholder management, we can foster enhanced social wellbeing and facilitate meaningful interactions between funders and recipients, where trust and empowerment serve as foundational principles (Murningham, 2018, Westermann-Behaylo et al., 2016). Not-for-profit organisations heavily rely on fundraising to sustain their operations, yet, in a patriarchal society, these small service-oriented organisations face significant challenges in thriving when confronted with undignified adversities, such as burdensome and unnecessary reporting demands.

The rest of this study aims to investigate and present the methods employed, findings and discussion regarding the examination of how five women within the Organisation perceive dignity in acquiring funding.

## **METHODS**

The researchers take a pragmatic philosophical approach with a subjectivist and social constructivist ontological understanding of dignity (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, Gupta and Awasthy, 2015). Within this philosophical approach, the authors adopted narrative inquiry to data collection aligned with an interpretivist epistemology, where actions and decisions develop a socially constructed environment with unique event(s) or action(s) from individuals' stories to

construct an understanding of each perception of dignified treatment (respect, value and worth) that impacted the operations of the Organisation and ability for positive social community impact (Kim, 2015, Webster and Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry emphasises the stories of individuals or groups, where unique insights into human experiences can be captured and applies to a human perspective (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). By providing a profound understanding of the human experience, narrative research contributes to fostering social justice, or with the current research, recognising injustice that is recalled through the intensity of the Organisation's work with vulnerable women, especially in traumatic events, which can be more notable and easier to discuss (Chell, 2004, Christianson and Loftus, 1987).

This grounded qualitative study used online interviews (Google Meet) because of COVID-19 provincial pandemic restrictions (Rescher, 1996, Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The interview protocol was designed from the literature review, Organisation's magazine, website and first tested with an employee from the Organisation. This study asks the participants to recount their history and timelines through critical events (Carr, 1991, Fowler, 2014, Sarbin, 1986). The participants' stories provide a depth and richness of the individual's understanding, social and organisational settings, which are pertinent values of qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The study had five participants (4 permanent, 1 casual contract, see Table 1 in the Appendix for descriptions), all active staff of the Organisation, which qualitative research methods authors suggest is acceptable (Saunders et al., 2012). All the participants identified as female, had an undergraduate degree, experience working with vulnerable populations and age ranges from approximately 22 to 52.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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The interviews began on March 30, 2021, and concluded on June 29, 2021. Three members were interviewed independently to understand their personal stories and beliefs about funding acquisition and related topics to business operations. Each narrative was scrutinised for authenticity and coherence by asking similar questions throughout the interview, including critical events that could be cross-referenced and validated. These interviews were followed by a roundtable discussion with each to discuss ideas presented, add clarification and provide participants with the opportunity to offer additional details to corroborate the stories. This setting aided in the construction of common themes and experiences used in thematic data analysis. Two additional full-time staff members interviewed, which added robustness to the understanding of dignity perceptions. The details and context provided aided in understanding how their individual stories become part of the organisation's experiences. Total data collection produced five hours of audio recording from five participants, which was imported into NVivo, a computer aided qualitative data analysis software.

Exploring the study through interview narratives (both current and retrospective) receives support from extant literature, where this method offers flexibility, convenience and maintains 'quality' when countries were experiencing significant restrictions to combat the global COVID-19 pandemic (Salmons, 2014, Cassell and Symon, 2011). Retrospective accounts ask participants to reconstruct past situations and events where dignity had a role (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2009, Chandler and Lyon, 2001). Using a narrative approach can present issues,

such as subjectivity and bias of both the participant and researcher (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, LeCompte and Quarterly, 1987), including espousal or over/underestimating events (Chandler and Lyon, 2001, Wilson et al., 2003). Research involving humans inevitably has bias because of their actions, behaviours and emotions (Creswell, 2013, Pronin, 2007) where the opportunity for recall bias is possible (Coughlin, 1990) but maintain the goal of producing *quality* research (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

## Data Coding

Data coding and analysis occurs in three stages. First, data was pre-coded while transcribing the interviews to gain a general idea of what was occurring within the organisation regarding experiences of dignity and (re)develop lines of questioning (Saldaña, 2015, Layder, 1998). Mapping the codes drew three preliminary ideas of the interconnectivity between the participant, staff and the funder experience (delivery, corporate culture and funding). *Service delivery* was a term dominated in the conversations, which is understandable given the organisation. Staff made a point of mentioning *corporate culture* and how important it was to work for a company that prioritised a positive workplace, often comparing the environment to toxic organisations they had been previously employed. *Funding* was identified by staff and the necessity of financial support to continue their operations, including the difficulties in perceived legitimacy and security by funders, had consequential impacts on programme delivery and their employment status.

Initial coding highlighted the determinants, actions and events that shaped the employees' experience of dignity that was coded into elemental parts for the analysis of similarities and differences within the participant's story (Strauss, 1987). Factors were separated into internal and external factors influencing the experience of dignity, including a safe workplace, staff wellbeing, reliable funding, participant access and an ability to provide wrap around supports (see Table 2 for a full example of the factors identified).

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE  
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The categorisation of initial codes according to the discussion topics using thematic analysis to aid in understanding the experiences of dignity specific to the participant. Secondary sources helped to verify and support participant narratives (Gioia et al., 2013, Berg and Lune, 2012). The *Second Cycle of Coding* followed and is significant in developing a deeper sense of the thematic, empirical and conceptual underpinnings of the data to uncover common patterns and regularities in participant narratives to reach a logical conclusion through the general reasoning of testimonials (Shank, 2006, Holton, 1975, Merton, 1975, Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes curated from the analysis process identified *ongoing barriers to service delivery* (including unreliable funding that leads to lacking planning time, disconnection of deliverables between funder and what staff know to be the best practice approach, and low perception of care of outcome for participants from management-level funders). Table 3 (see Appendix) represents the generated themes.

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## FINDINGS

The findings represent a small but powerful collection of stories from the staff at the Organisation. Each narrative had a unique contribution of ideas based on their personal and professional experience of working within the not-for-profit sector. To help understand the organisation outside of primary data collection, content from the Organisation's magazine and website are used to draw parallels in the perceptions of dignity as it relates to interaction with the public, specifically regarding funding agencies.

The narratives highlight barriers to service delivery, with fund development and funder relationships as the prominent factors in discussions. Participants report the perception of not being trusted with the funding they need to operate the organisation and are forced to spend additional time on quarterly and annual reporting and subsequent new grant applications. The excessive time constraints, because of these demands, reduces the organisation's ability to utilise their expertise, expand their network and enhance service delivery by offering more frequent programming tailored to the specific needs of their clients. Ironically, funders are reported to have strict guidelines for whether the Organisation can spend dollars on staff salary, however if they did not require such frequent applications and reporting, they likely would not have to request money in the same frequency. This detrimental cycle places organisations in precarious positions, jeopardising their ability to operate based on their expertise in trauma-informed best practices. The women in the Organisation specifically identify the resilience it takes to collaborate and support each other through providing strategic and meaningful programming despite funder restrictions.

The intentionally positive corporate culture elevates their service delivery, as they understand they cannot serve the community as they wish if they are not well themselves.

Barriers to service delivery are overwhelmingly discussed concerning the limits imposed by their funders, such as who dictates how budgets are spent above and beyond what would be considered as "normal" for a not-for-profit organisation. For instance, the funding could be allocated for materials and not staff salary, despite an expressed need for quality people operating the supportive service. Participants further detailed the need to apply for financial support frequently to sponsor planned projects, often waiting for confirmation of funding immediately before the program starts without security. One participant explains,

*Sometimes people want to start Trade Horizons today, and it just started in January, which means they're not eligible again until January 2022 IF we're able to successfully renegotiate funds. It's very kind of ad hoc and that's I think programs would have to be funded radically different for us to do the intake all the time and then offer the programs based on the intake. Right now, we're not able to do that.*

The participant qualifies their ongoing struggles with private funders as they discuss operating without long-term core funding despite proposals advocating for the need for optimal service delivery and staff wellbeing,

*For us, it's our lack of consistency. We have to renegotiate every project contract year to year, so we can't, like right now, we can't promote for, we couldn't find participants for PropELLE in the fall if we were doing a new Trade HERizons in the winter, because until an agreement is signed, and sometimes the agreement doesn't get signed until the summer and then, but your project happened started three months before that kind of thing. I think if we knew, hey, we're doing this for the next five years and we were doing continuous intake, I do think there would probably be more demand than spots available.*

Participants describe fundraising as time and labour intensive, with individual proposals required for each funder and project. The proposals have specific stipulations forcing the organisation to negotiate each one based on a cost-benefit analysis and overall value alignment. It is noted by participants that upper-level management cannot be closely involved with daily operations during the time-intensive funding process that drains the few resources they have on bureaucracy. An example of this is detailed below,

*Even though we try our best to put the client at the centre, it's often the needs of the funder that have to be put at the centre for us to survive as an organisation. You're trying to balance the needs of both at the same time, even though the funder has a lot more power than the client. That is sometimes where your attention goes.*

They further note the dangerous combination of a power imbalance and disconnect of value between funders and not-for-profits. A result of this power imbalance is the funders' distorted perception of their charitable contribution with terms as more positive than it realistically is. Staff members suggest that not-for-profits ultimately seek investors that recognise the value in the organisation's mission and allow for the freedom and flexibility to designate the funding appropriately. They detail further explanation below,

*Every government I've talked to... when they give money to the private sector, it's an investment. When they give money to the not-for-profit sector, it's funding. In my mind, it's all investments. Until the government sees investing in social, political, and economic health as an investment, they're going to invest in the private sector and they're going to fund the not-for-profit, and those are two fundamentally different things. We're looking for investors, not funders.*

To coincide with funding restrictions, narratives highlight each funder has a list of deliverables. These requirements are not consistent within a trauma-informed lens such as Trade HERizons, a comprehensive operating program. The participants offer examples of disconnecting outcomes below,

*I think every year there's this dance that has to happen. I've seen now, after doing that kind of research on PropELLE too, is where... our funder expects X amount of people in seats and that's all they want to see and they want to see that those people graduate. Whereas... for us, we want to have the people who are going to get the most out of this program there, however many that is. When there's an expectation that we fill 20 seats, there's probably a couple of people there that aren't ready to be there for whatever reason.*

*There's always a desire to have a smaller group, but then it's always this balance with dealing with the funder and trying to check off the boxes, but also trying to facilitate a program that's meaningful for participants.*

*When I was doing research on PropELLE, the primary outcome that I saw was that there was that disconnect.*

*How do we get all the money that we need to run this program with all the facilitators that we need to front runner programs and make sure that the program is meaningful for the participants, but also give the funders the outcomes that they want you to write off? How do we disguise their outcomes and actually fulfil our outcomes?*

The lack of autonomy provided to staff from funding partners is problematic, where management is not trusted to make spending decisions that affect their overall budget. They detail an example below,

*What's so embedded, and [funding agency] is the worst in this, in my opinion, is... community groups are not trusted to manage money, so as a result, there's all of these accountability measures built in, and instead of creating accountability, they destroy organisations. I think a lot of it is there's just a lot of inherent negative assumptions about non-profits, community groups and registered charities, and some of those are very accurate and some of those not at all. Then all the systems get built around that, and it's this mistrust and this. You never feel very empowered to use the money in a way that you see fit. You feel very much like, oh, if we didn't ask to buy five napkins six months ago, then we can't buy five napkins today even though we need them and that's like a bit of an exaggeration, but it's just to say that most funding partners are not actually helping you achieve your objectives, they're giving you the financial resources to do it, but not the trust that you can actually achieve those outcomes.*

Staff struggle with being put in the position where they are forced to either change service delivery that does not suit the clients' needs or meet the deliverables set by the funders. The participants are forced to improvise their spending reports to satisfy a funding agreement that is disconnected from the overall goals of supporting staff and clients.

A consequence of the instability in funding poses a threat to staff retention with only a portion of their employees having full-time positions (facilitators, administrative support and

special project researchers are typically brought on for sporadic contract jobs) and recruiting quality people is challenging because of local competition and financial restraints of applicants. Fortunately for the organisation, staff members suggest that the reputation of the Organisation has helped them access reliable candidates but no guarantee in the future.

Stemming from fiscal constraints, staff explain the limits of their service, being unable to provide transitional supports as they see fit,

*Especially for wanting to... do some changes in the program or be able to do that reach back with participants. If there's only one person who is hired year-round, that's not sustainable.*

*I think especially if you're working with vulnerable populations, being able to have that... the constant [of service] is really important.*

The hope is to create opportunities to stay connected with clients after graduating the programming by offering support during the client's transition to employment and navigating the male-dominated industry of the trades on PEI.

Participants acknowledge the struggle of operating within a community that continues to function from a patriarchal set of beliefs. One participant offers details describing ways to address this,

*The thing about toxic masculinity.... when we change things for women, we change things for everybody, and it benefits everybody, not just the women. What we found is when Women's Network has gone in to advocate with employers about things like flexible work hours or paid sick leave... We advocate for those things, and it doesn't help just women. It helps everybody who has children. It helps everybody who might also be taking care of an elderly parent or has other life situations that it can be useful for.*

The COVID-19 global pandemic presented unforeseen challenges that have devastated families, including the overwhelming fear of a novel virus, job loss, loss of natural supports, limited health care access, including face-to-face peer support. The ability to provide organised transitional supports would have allowed the organisation to be proactive in any crisis response to clients connected to the network. One participant details their view,

*They leave Trade HERizons, but everything that was going on in their life before Trade HERizon is still going to be going on now. If we're wanting to support people fully, what does that look like throughout the course of the year? Not just in programming?*

Another example of a pandemic staff service limitation recalls core funding issues. As staff detailed the need to cancel their PropELLE programme in 2020 because they could not secure funding in time for planned service delivery. Participants also reference an awareness of the service gap because of limited resources for other programs, such as the Newcomers Association.

Staff report knowledge of ongoing barriers to employment and lack of acknowledgement of international credentials as being rooted in systemic racism. A participant details their interest in involvement below,

*We've talked with Newcomers about doing a similar type of work readiness program, but nothing's kind of got off the ground. It is certainly one of those areas for people often end up in jurisdictional neglect because it's the federal government's responsibility, but the province is implementing a lot.*

These barriers to service delivery, existing often in silos with fragmented supports, contribute to staff stress and burnout. The constant tension that exists between meeting funder's expectations and the ability to deliver a meaningful service in line with the Organisation's mission and values is a delicate dance that participants describe as exhausting. One participant described feeling jaded by the experience of interpreting the funders' intentions, whereby committing money to the organisation implies there is care. When that version of care comes with so many stipulations, it questions their integrity and client care versus the optics of supporting a not-for-profit organisation. The staff suggest that the success of programming occurs despite funding contributions and the restrictions imposed on spending allowance. They detail more below,

*I will just say that the way the government's, philanthropists, charities fund this work makes everything we discussed hard and more of a challenge. And so we're often working, it feels like we're trying to work against the same systems that are trying to support the clients that we're working with and that individual organisations in certain programs can only do so much, sadly, because we are so governed by the financial resources we're able to secure and so that... sometimes it feels like any successful program we do is in spite of the system or the funding that we've been given, not because of it.*

The findings above suggest a perceived indignity in funding acquisition that is further discussed below and how it correlates with extant business and management literature.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

One of the greatest challenges of a micro or small business, let alone a social enterprise, is survivability. The literature on fundraising is consistent with much of what management has already explained in the interviews. For instance, promoting government funding support does not increase private donations (Jilke et al., 2019); relationships have a greater impact on funding potential (Lu, 2015); funding amount is correlated with programming size expectation (Lu and Zhao, 2019); 'payment' for results attitudes (Sharma et al., 2021); crowding-in versus crowding-out, where the former sees public investment as also trigger private investment (Friedman, 1978); and saving is neglected when expecting funding support (Handy and Webb, 2003), whereas generating a financial buffer for unforeseen circumstance is often seen as negative by funding

agencies. Coinciding with the pressures of operational survivability is overcoming the challenges presented in fundraising outlined above.

Through this study, a substantial body of evidence was uncovered, shedding light on the obstacles impeding service delivery. The focus primarily revolved around fund development and funder relationships, which posed challenges to program delivery and staff wellbeing. These findings hold significant relevance when considering Professor Jeremy Waldron's work on dignity. They emphasise the importance of recognising the value of respect and empowering individuals through autonomy, providing them with the resources to operate more effectively, ultimately leading to a more positive societal impact. It is crucial to acknowledge that the agencies being funded are experts in their respective fields, requiring funders to place trust in their ability to utilise resources appropriately.

The women participants expressed their perception of being distrusted by funders, who showed a lack of confidence in their business acumen and ability to utilise resources responsibly. This perception was believed to be associated with the fact that the Organisation was led by a woman with women employees that collectively focused on supporting vulnerable individuals. Employees were burdened with tedious and time-consuming reporting and application requirements, which, when submitted to the funders, reflected a lack of respect and understanding for the organisation's objectives and deliverables, which is consistently found in the academic literature (Dale, 2017). Although the funders attempt to hold the organisation accountable, the requests are counterproductive and detract from the Organisation's ability to grow the network and continue to improve service delivery through more frequent programming curated to the clients they serve. This sentiment is echoed in extant literature, who also found arbitrary funder requests because of the funding bodies' political and policy requirements (Goncharenko, 2021, Dolamore and Kline, 2020). This unfortunate cycle leaves organisations in vulnerable positions where they risk not having the ability to operate according to their experience through trauma-informed best practice. The women within the Organisation notably acknowledge the resilience required to collaborate and support one another in delivering strategic and meaningful programmes, despite the restrictions imposed by funders. This article contributes to the existing body of research on assessing dignity in funding by emphasising that the unnecessary demands imposed by funding bodies generate feelings of indignity among the women within the organisation and ultimately result in ineffective utilisation of resources.

The concepts of charity and care were notable when reviewing participant testimony as they described the disconnect between the perceived level of care of their funding partners; however, when attempting to educate funders on their perceived needs, funders are not only dismissive but emphasise deliverables that are important to the funder (such as the ratio of graduates) compared to the mission and vision of the not-for-profit. The Organisation has survived for 37 years, showing a legitimacy and expertise in their business operations, yet their expertise is placated by funders who ultimately control the narrative as they control the funding and financial value (Rendtorff, 2009). This leaves questions of whether these funders legitimately care about the work they sponsor or are they are satisfying a corporate social responsibility mandate? These women understand that the overuse of 'charity' destroys a person's dignity and maintained the self-awareness of how to meet their own needs. This finding echoes Mosley and Park (2022) and extends the extant literature by highlighting that in this negotiation between parties, the people asking for financial support want to be treated with dignity and desire the autonomy and support to be trusted to manage the resource(s) responsibly. This approach requires some funders to change

corporate policy to allow these organisations to help their communities, which often has wide-ranging community micro- (participant specific) and macro-level (healthcare, social services, education, child and family, economic systems) positive effects that can be unquantifiable.

Transitioning the behaviour of funding or charity to being an *investment* legitimises the impact of the work that the Organisation performs in the community, rather than upholding the illusion of a charitable contribution to a less fortunate group of people stigmatised with certain connotations. As an investment, the language reinforces that the funding agency believes in the work that the not-for-profit organisation does. Maintaining that the contribution is funding or charity leaves the funder exposed to the inference that they are hiding behind a veil of compassion to satisfy an ethics agenda. Internal to the organisation, an investment also shows to the economic market that the organisation is trustworthy and reliable, which consequently gives greater stability to the not-for-profit and would improve the wellbeing and dignity of the staff (González-Cantón et al., 2019). Investment and autonomy in the allocation of funds affords the organisation the opportunity to explore new innovations and *proactive projects* that typical funding requirements constrain, limiting the organisation's longitudinal support of the women who transitioned from the programme into the community. This paper identifies a need to evaluate the current funding structures of legitimate organisations, who have shown competence and capability for over 37 years. This finding echoes Bertland (2009), suggesting a need for institutions to help people enhance dignity through developing the Organisations' capabilities.

The current study contributes to the wider academic dignity research in business and management by drawing attention to how the current trends in funding represent an imbalance of power between the funder and the not-for-profit organisation. This may not be directly from malicious intent, rather the structures and policies in corporate governance maintain a status quo of imposing quantifiable accountability measures that are counterproductive for effective operations and staff wellbeing in client-centred service delivery. A second contribution highlights the delineation between investment and funding, whereby investing in the not-for-profit organisation affords the people within the respect, dignity and autonomy, while legitimising the organisation to use the resources effectively to influence greater micro- and macro-levels of change. The last contribution suggests that changing the way we support not-for-profit women-led organisations through investment confirms their legitimacy and empowers the employees to engage with their expertise in real-time without unnecessary barriers. Collectively, the article illustrates that the perception of dignity plays a prominent role in the funder/organisation relationship that has consequential implications for service delivery effectiveness.

## **Limitations**

Limitations of the current research include reliability and espousal of current and retrospective accounts (Chandler and Lyon, 2001). Participants discuss their experiences as vivid and unforgettable because of their emotional involvement and ongoing impact on their role in the organisation (Christianson and Loftus, 1987, Ebaugh, 1988). Scholars infer that people closest to an event have the most accurate levels of event memory (Pezdek, 2003). While this does not absolve the potential bias of event recognition, it illustrates how the participants are likely to recall the significance of such autobiographical events. Despite the many advantages of interviewing, interviewer bias (because of incorrect interpretation) and misunderstanding of information given by the participant can give inaccurate accounts (Babbie, 2015). Scholars dispute the number of participants that make a robust qualitative study. In study studies, some suggest four to 15 to reach

data saturation (Creswell, 2012, Guest et al., 2006, Bertaux, 1981). Other qualitative methods scholars suggest conducting as many interviews necessary to accomplish data saturation, but admit the number of interviews depends on the research purpose, saliency of data, and investigator's philosophical position (Saunders et al., 2012). Although relevant in every facet, this is only one study of a woman-led not-for-profit organisation and cannot infer these behaviours as consistent with the average organisation of the same composition and industry.

### **Future Research**

Future research on dignity in management could explore the importance of dignity and self-care, specifically nutrition and wellness, as it relates to the burdens of fundraising. There is the opportunity to further explore the funding accountability restrictions placed on not-for-profit agencies to gauge whether there is flexibility in creating an effective fundraising and delivery system. Updated research on gender inequalities can help to shed insight on the development of strategies to transition from fundraising donations to strategic investments in the values of the not-for-profits the funding body is supporting, highlighting the relationship between dignity and appreciation.

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## TABLES

| Participant | Position                                        | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1           | Executive Director, Female                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 years front line experience with vulnerable communities and responsible for overall management of the organisation.</li> <li>• Rarely involved in day-to-day frontline outreach, instead focussed on long-term strategy development and fundraising (fiscal management, report and grant writing) to include partnerships development, committees, media and directly responsible to the board of directors.</li> </ul>                                           |
| 2           | Frontline Research Project Co-ordinator, Female | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for grant projects on community-based initiatives, particularly gender-based violence and healthy masculinity for boys and young men.</li> <li>• Educated in conflict resolution, team building, navigation for community resources and continued support for programme alumni.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                               |
| 3           | Facilitator, Female                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivered front line programming and a systems navigator for women's economic empowerment.</li> <li>• Contributes to research when programming was delayed or cancelled (lacking funds).</li> <li>• Daily role preparation, delivery and debrief in addition to offering personalized 1:1 check-in for people who need individualised support.</li> <li>• Educated in Social Justice Studies, with a Political Science Master's Degree in Global Affairs.</li> </ul> |
| 4 and 5     | General Management, Female, Female              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created, managed and delivered the programmes with close contact to the service users for daily operations, including candidate selection process.</li> <li>• Co-ordinated with community partners, conflict management, team building and wrap around support.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                           |

**Table 1. Participant Descriptions**

The table gives a brief background of the participants interviewed for the current study.

| Initial Coding Results                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Client-centred Strategies                                                                   |
| Women's Network PEI Staff Responsibilities                                                  |
| Women's Network PEI Policy and Programs, Reflexive Strategies                               |
| Communication and Connection                                                                |
| Accessibility of Services and Programming                                                   |
| Balanced Support, Boundaries                                                                |
| Women's Network PEI Staff Integrity, Flexibility, Trust, Respect, Values, Autonomy          |
| Women's Network PEI Staff Value Alignment                                                   |
| Resource Sharing                                                                            |
| Women's Network PEI Consistency, Commitment to Providing Support for Staff and Participants |

**Table 2. Initial Coding Results Top 10**

These initial codes emerged in relation to the frequency in which they were mentioned within conversation at the interviews. The researcher was mindful of marrying like terms that existed within a similar thread, creating a more robust code that represented an overall essence. An example of this is line 7, which combines integrity, flexibility, trust, respect, values, autonomy.

| CODE                                                                                                             | Files | References |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------|
| Financial management, resources, budget planning and projections, grant writing                                  | 3     | 21         |
| Staff limits of service                                                                                          | 2     | 21         |
| Gaps in resources, federal government responsibilities                                                           | 2     | 19         |
| Timing of services offered, reporting deadlines                                                                  | 3     | 17         |
| COVID-19                                                                                                         | 3     | 13         |
| Deliverables to funders                                                                                          | 2     | 13         |
| Organisation's financial expectations and challenges (profits, struggles, fund development, funder restrictions) | 3     | 13         |
| Staff stress and burnout                                                                                         | 3     | 10         |
| Investment vs Funding differences                                                                                | 2     | 9          |
| Service silos, fragmented support, strict lanes                                                                  | 2     | 9          |
| Power imbalances                                                                                                 | 3     | 5          |
| TOTAL                                                                                                            |       | 156        |

**Table 3. Ongoing Barriers to Service Delivery Themes**

The table above represents the codes that represent the 'Ongoing Barriers to Service Delivery' theme. The codes are in all three fully transcribed interviews, with financial management and staff limitations sharing the greatest number of mentions. This theme emerges 156 times in the narratives.