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Dignity surpassing Self: The role of Character Strengths

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Abstract

The concept of dignity, rooted in a sense of worth and respect within humanity, permeates various facets of life. In today's dynamic workplace environment, daily challenges can either strengthen or undermine it. Dignity issues, stemming from factors like powerlessness and communication barriers, profoundly impact employees. Drawing from philosophical underpinnings of dignity and a comprehensive review of literature, this work tries to establish the pivotal role of character strengths in going beyond the sense of 'Self' and navigating dignity related challenges. By elucidating the link between character strengths and dignity, this study contributes to management literature amidst complexities like technological disruption, emphasizing the transformative potential of character development in fostering a more dignified and resilient society.

Keywords – Dignity, Workplace, Character Strengths, Self, Perception

Track – Organisational Psychology

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1. Introduction

Dignity refers to having a sense of worth and respect. It is associated with the inherent value of being part of this humanity (Hodson, 2001; Lucas, 2015). In our day to day life, be it home, workplace, every individual seeks respect, love, and care. However, not every situation is favourable. There are good and bad situations which one may experience. Resistance, struggle and effort bargaining are present on a daily basis in context of workplace (Hodson, 1996). Any behaviour which impacts employees negatively in their workplace concerns their dignity (May and Daly, 2020). Powerlessness, humiliation, work overload, ignorance, identity based crisis (LGBTQ) are some of the reasons which erupt dignity issues in the workplace (Berg and Frost, 2005; Stuesse, 2010; Baker and Lucas, 2017). The most common dignity issues generate from communication problems, especially when people fear to speak up (Hicks, 2002).

It is essential to integrate the literature on psychology and philosophy while discussing topics such as morality, ethics (Anscombe, 1958). Therefore, we first delve into the philosophical underpinnings of the concept of dignity. We present that ‘dignity’ has been looked upon in three perspectives – ‘Self’ which involves personal values, actions and strengths which determine the dignity of an individual, ‘others’ in which the people around the individual, community, organisation determine the dignity and ‘universal’ wherein the inherent value of every living being is respected. Furthermore, we comprehensively review the literature on dignity and workplace. We considered studies between years 2010 to 2024 and also a few seminal articles. We organize the review in the following manner – 1) Antecedents to Workplace Dignity 2) What Workplace Dignity can lead to 3) Why Workplace Indignity 4) What Workplace Indignity can lead to 5) Individual Coping Strategies 6) Organisational Remedies. The finding which emerged in the process indicates that dignity is associated more with ‘Self’ and ‘intention’ at all job levels.

Importance of character strengths has been laid upon in the management literature through the works of (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) and (Crossan, Mazutis and Seijts, 2013; Crossan et al., 2017). Scholars have stated that character strengths are unlike personality traits. Personality traits are assumed to be stable characteristics in an individual (McCrae et al., 2000; Judge, Piccolo and Kosalka, 2009). Whereas character strengths are influenced by events and experiences in life (Sosik and Cameron, 2010). Therefore, it is likely that character strengths may influence an individual’s sense of dignity. Taking the perspective of ‘Self’ further in our research, we pose the following questions on both perpetrator and receiver end –

RQ1: Can character strengths help an individual keep a watch on their intentions and think beyond ‘Self’?

RQ2: Can character strengths help an individual maintain a sense of dignity in the face of setbacks?

To give an example with respect to our question, let us assume in a meeting an executive is not given the chance to speak up even though he or she has some wonderful ideas. This is also not the first time that this incident occurred. In a normal circumstance, the assumption would be that this executive may feel not recognised and thus his or her sense of dignity is affected. However, let’s add more information i.e., the organisation has bureaucracy where superiors are preferred ahead. The feeling of indignity might not come with this knowledge. Also, if this executive is someone with humility and understands the situation, the person would not feel bad because he or she would know their chance is bound to come in future.

Therefore, through this work, we theorise that irrespective of the nature of the situation, the sense of dignity of an individual depends on his or her perception of the situation and intention

to act which would differ based on their character strengths. We contribute to the overall management learning by exploring the extant literature associated with dignity of employees and its connection with character strengths. This is essential in today's paradigm where there is intense competition and technological disruption. This work brings forward that how developing character strengths would enable greater transformation towards a better society.

2. Self, Others and Universal Perspective on Dignity

The schools of religion place importance on the inherent value of human beings. The Judeo-Christian belief is about everyone deserving respect as a community and greater humanity (Melé, 2012). Islam preaches about fairness, justice, and equality (Richardson, Sinha and Yaapar, 2014). Hinduism takes a bigger scope by stating that society and cosmos are interconnected (Ashok and Thimmappa, 2006). Then, comes a Self-perspective on dignity which lays importance on personal character and actions. Aristotle described dignity is deserved by those people whose actions are respectable of praise (Bal and de Jong, 2017). Similarly, Confucian belief is about personal strength to act virtuously, and duty bound work ethic (Lin, Ho and Lin, 2013). Sayer (2007) also stated that dignity is a result of Self-command rather than control over others. Buddhism follows a more pragmatic approach wherein they focus on cause and effect. It is about cultivating wisdom and spirituality through practices like mindfulness which would ultimately lead to ethical behaviour (Guillory, 2000). The 'law of karma' within the Hinduism context states that individuals get what they deserve based on their actions (Krishnan and Mulla, 2022). Thus, an individual needs to have more control over themselves and their actions to have a greater sense of dignity.

Immanuel Kant posed a mixed view. According to Kant, dignity is inner and unconditional. Human beings are free beings who possess the capability of making the right decisions. This conception of Kant influenced the 'Universal declaration of human rights' (Sarlet, 2021). However, Kant's views received criticism from Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. According to Marx, dignity is a result of free creativity in the labour process where there is no bondage of the capitalist (Healy and Wilkowska, 2017). According to Durkheim, dignity is not a moral obligation rather it must be socially desirable. Social forces lead to development of rational awareness and required conduct. On a similar note, Weber describes dignity in an individual's life based on Self-realisation of values based on their experiences in the society (Hodgkiss, 2013). Therefore, all three of them state that even though human beings are working under social forces and based on their experiences they construct their own meaning. On similar lines, Jacobson (2009) state that dignity has two forms – 1) human dignity which is abstract and universal 2) Social dignity which is socially constructed. Social dignity is based upon respect among individuals and collectives. Tadd et al. (2010) state the following elements of dignity – 1) Merit which is based on the social position in the society 2) Moral status which is guided by moral principles 3) Identity which is based on Self-respect like there should not be any violation of human beings emotionally, psychologically, and physically 4) Legal aspect which means the legal rights of people should not be violated.

In context of workplace, Hodson (1996) stated that dignity is composed of task related factors which include – job satisfaction, pride, insider knowledge, effort bargaining. Bolton (2010) stated that there are subjective and objective dimensions of work. Objective dimensions are those which any employee would definitely look for in an organisation. These include security, reward, equality, voice. Subjective factors include aspects like meanings, respect, autonomy. These factors were posited in the form of 'dimensions of dignity'. Lucas (2015) conceptualised dignity into three categories – 1) Inherent 2) Earned 3) Remediated. Inherent dignity is associated with genuine respect for everyone and respectful interaction. Earned dignity refers to one which emanates from messages of competence and contribution. If employees are

affirmed about their contribution, they feel recognised, and their dignity is enhanced. Remediated dignity comes from social interaction. Employees know that there are inequalities, but they seek remediated comfort. E.g. – Manager while talking to his team interacts equally with everyone in spite of difference in the team member’s performance. Scholars have highlighted various reasons on what leads employees to develop sense of indignity. These include – furlough (Hamilton, Harness and Griffin, 2022), inappropriate use of power and oppressive tactics (Hodgins and McNamara, 2017; Ryan and Turner, 2021), inequity in pay (Hicks, 2016), dehumanizing employees (Crowley, 2012; Väyrynen and Laari-Salmela, 2018), misbehaviours from customers (Cruz and Abrantes, 2014) etc.

From the literature it is evident that dignity can be looked in three ways – ‘Self’ perspective which includes individual actions, personal values, satisfaction, derived meaning. The dignity here is derived by an individual. ‘Others’ perspective which includes social status (religion, gender, race) whichever one belongs to, societal values (ideology, governance) of wherever one resides, interactions with others (respectful, misbehaviours), organisations (culture, security, rewards). These factors are beyond control and define the dignity of an individual from outside. ‘Universal’ which includes the whole humanity and other living beings. This is an all pervading belief. The functioning of UN and many International organisations is an example of this. They see to dignity of everyone at a broader level.

Self	Others	Universal
Actions	Social Status (religion, gender, race)	Humanity
Behaviours	Societal Values (ideology, governance)	Living beings
Personal Values	Interactions with others (respectful, misbehaviours)	Cosmos
Meaning	Organisations (culture, security, rewards)	
Satisfaction		

Table 1: *Self, Others and Universal Perspective on Dignity*

3. Methodology

We adopted a systematic approach do a further literature review (Mitchell and El-Gayar, 2022). The relevant literature was searched to understand what recent studies on dignity or related variables have happened and what do they suggest for future. We used Scopus to begin our search. There are two reasons for choosing Scopus – 1) It has wide coverage as it includes research work from even smaller areas. 2) Scopus has more options to filter specifically towards a topic with authors. In addition, Scopus has 20% more articles indexed than Web of Science (WoS) for social sciences and management fields (Singh and Verma, 2022). We have added two figures to demonstrate the process and how our articles were identified.

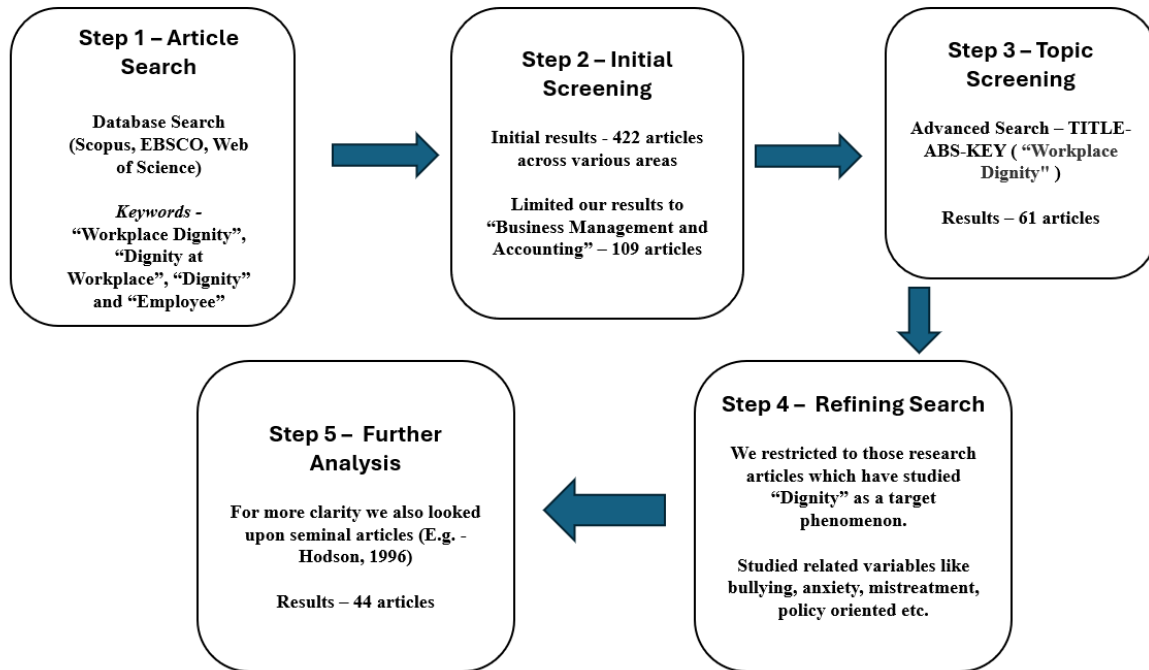


Figure 1: Process for synthesising the review

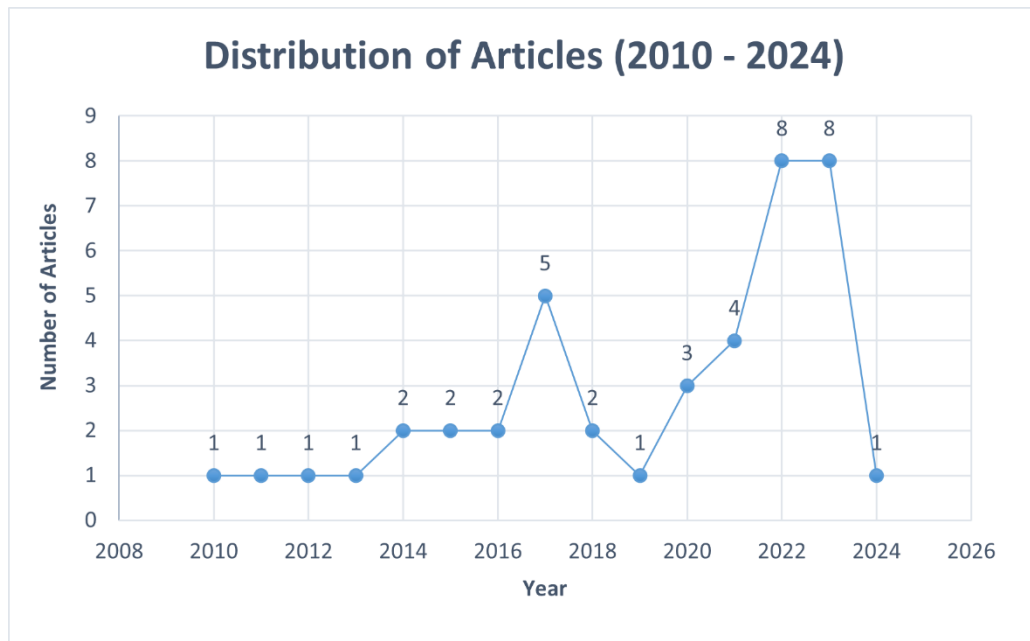


Figure 2: Distribution of articles

We conducted our search by looking for results related to “Workplace Dignity”, “Dignity at Workplace”, “Dignity” and “Employee”. The advanced search option in Scopus brought us to total 422 studies across various areas. We filtered and limited our results to “Business Management and Accounting” and limited research articles. The subsequent results displayed 109 studies. Then, we restricted to those research articles which have studied “Dignity” as a target phenomenon or those which have studied related variables like bullying, anxiety,

maltreatment etc. and described how dignity is impacted. For more conceptual clarity we also looked upon seminal articles (Hodson, 1991, 1996, 2001). We particularly focussed on the studies which happened between 2010 – 2024 in order to keep check on the recent developments in this field of research.

4. Organized Review

A pattern emerged based in our review. We organize the literature in the following themes – 1) Antecedents to Workplace Dignity 2) What Workplace Dignity can lead to 3) Why Workplace Indignity 4) What Workplace Indignity can lead to 5) Individual Coping Strategies 6) Organisational Remedies.

4.1. Antecedents to Workplace Dignity

Mertz et al. (2023) in their study on frontline service employees found that work-life balance is an important contributor to workplace dignity. It indicates that if workers are able to distinguish between their work and personal obligations their perception of dignity enhances. Secondly, if the leaders in the organisation act as role models, try to be fair in their actions and take responsibility towards fostering greater good, this translates into greater perception of dignity for the workers. Thirdly, if the workers view that their work also positively impacts their coworkers there is an increase in perception of dignity. There are three clear antecedents which come up – work-life balance, social impact, and ethical leadership. Gupta et al. (2023) found in their study that perceived supervisor support is a significant indicator of employee's workplace dignity. Further, employees experience of dignity would influence their attitudes and behaviours. Many of the change initiatives taken by the organisation depend on employees affective reactions. Rahmadani & Schaufeli (2022) investigate a Javanese-Indonesian concept called "*diuwongke*", which refers to being treated humanely and irrespective of the status of the individual he/she could participate in decision-making. This is synonymous to the concept of dignity. Alanzi et al. (2022) stated that employees need to have basic knowledge of rules and regulations; otherwise, they would be denied the required protections. Proper knowledge of administrative law would enable employees to perform their jobs well and generate a sense of pride. Esteem and pride also emanate a sense of dignity.

4.2. What Workplace Dignity can lead to

Iqbal et al. (2023) state that better esteem and positive experiences in the workplace induce employees to display more extra-role and Self-sacrificial behaviours indicating that a fair environment would enhance better social exchanges, dignity, and lead to tacit knowledge sharing. Tacit knowledge sharing involves helping your colleagues with novel ideas and competencies. Positive sense of dignity would lead employees to feel psychologically safe and identify more with the organisation thus leading them to carry out knowledge sharing Selflessly. In context of hotel industry, Wang et al. (2021) studied the response employees show when they receive more tips. They found that if employees receive higher than expected tip, there is an increase in their social dignity i.e., a recognition which is earned through social interactions. Even if the tipping size is small if the manager praises the employees there is enhancement of dignity. This further leads to exhibition of organisational citizenship behaviours. Scholars have also highlighted that presence of dignity leads to increase in organisational commitment (Mertz et al., 2023), readiness towards change initiatives (Gupta, Sihag and Pangtey, 2023), increase in work engagement (Rahmadani and Schaufeli, 2022), better task performance and also increase in constructive deviance i.e., causing deviation from standard norms towards better results (Alanzi, Sulphrey and Jnaneswar, 2022).

4.3. Why Workplace Indignity

Scholars have highlighted many reasons through qualitative and quantitative studies regarding why employees suffer indignity. In a more recent study, Tilton et al., (2024) expound on the

reasons behind employees perceiving dignity threats at three job levels. At lower level, employees perceive indignity when they are disrespected, devalued, demeaned and dehumanized. At middle level, they perceive indignity when they are undermined in their respective work, criticised which affects their confidence and when reputation is discredited. At upper level, it's more of a matter of prestige i.e., if they are dismissed of any special expertise which they possess or if they are denied of any special rights (e.g. – representing the company in a top sales pitch) they perceive indignity.

Hamilton et al. (2022) studied the problem of furlough i.e., temporary suspension which employees from three sectors - Hospitality, Retail and Heritage sector faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. They found that senior management is usually inconsistent with respect to employee decisions like who is to be furloughed, who is to be called back. There was also display of power when questioned. Similarly, Hodgins & McNamara (2017) explored the lived experiences of workplace ill-treatment of administrative and technical staff in the higher education sector and found that power was being exercised inappropriately for example, using the position to dictate work. Hicks (2016) stated in their study that management asked employees to take pay cuts for 5 years but then themselves ended up taking big bonuses after unexpected rise in stock price. Doherty (2011) also stated that employees do wish to take pride in their work, but it is often obstructed by manager's negative perceptions. This is also impossible by their inability to supervise well and the abuse they deliver. Ryan and Turner (2021) studied the CSR statements of firms to examine whether there is any display of symbolic commitments to safeguard the interests of employees as important stakeholders. They find from empirical examination that there was clear gap between what the espoused values were and what they practiced in real. Therefore, from the above mentioned studies, it is clearly visible that dignity issues can erupt due to systemic unfairness, differential status, and power imbalances.

Väyrynen and Laari-Salmela (2018) state that there are different types of maltreatment which employees face are very much embedded within the organisational practices. These practices form the ethical climate of an organisation. They checked the relationship between perceived trustworthiness and perceived humanness and found that dehumanizing employees can diminish trust within organisations. There are two forms of dehumanization - Mechanistic i.e., ignoring 'interpersonal warmth', 'emotional responsiveness', and other characteristics related to interpersonal relationships; Animalistic i.e., the 'violations against the cultural layer of humanness', diminishes the perceived integrity of the employer. Cruz and Abrantes (2014) studied the commercial cleaning workers and found that their dignity is threatened by devalorizing manners in which customers behave. The daily interaction between the employees and their supervisors is also tense due to various forms of insecurity on part of employees and sense of hostility on part of supervisors. Cleaners seek dignity through personal bonds and affection with employers and users of cleaned areas. Yagil and Shultz (2017) state that moral dilemmas can be caused by conflict between organisational and employees values. This happens when employees have to showcase organisational values like courtesy towards abusive customers which hence impacts their dignity. There is a need for interactional justice.

Laaser and Bolton (2022) develop a model signifying labour process level and state that respectful recognition, core autonomy and derived dignity are associated with individual experience of meaningful work. Armaroli (2022) studied with respect to trade unions and found that inputs provided by employees and their participation in work related decisions have a role to play in employee Self-determination and human dignity. Promoting direct employee voice can play proactive role in organisational innovation. Concerning employee voice, Hicks (2016) stated in their findings that it is not easy to speak up, in fact one of the respondents mentions

“It would be career suicide if I spoke up to my boss.” They also state that if there is no opportunity given by the organisation to discuss issues, to be heard and show any accountability towards wrong doings then it showcases the gross culture of indignity. Ryan and Turner (2021) also stated that the use of union oppression tactics by the companies such as intimidation, discipline and dismissal of union activists and the use of legal systems to thwart attempts to establish trade union recognition were widespread.

Scholars have also highlighted the aspect of ‘digital privacy’ and how this impacts the dignity. Habisch et al. (2022) found that companies doing cybervetting i.e., obtaining online information on job applicants creates ethical issues. There needs to be a limit in organisation's access to personal information. Leclercq-Vandelannoitte (2017) state that ethical issues that come up due to ubiquitous IT i.e., mobile computing, computerised monitoring and going beyond company's boundaries can have negative consequences on employees such as deviant behaviours, increase in anxiety, fatigue, aggressiveness. Leidner and Tona (2021) explained the relationship of personal data digitalization to human dignity through ‘CARE theory’ (claims, affronts, response, equilibrium). They also state that how behavioural dignity, ‘meritocratic dignity’, and ‘inherent dignity’ can be claimed, and threatened, through the personal digitalization encounters of knowing and showing of the Self and of others. Dignity affronts are experienced not only by the data users themselves but also by others who might be non-users, resulting in the three forms of dignity disequilibrium: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and associative.

4.4. What Workplace Indignity can lead to

Hamilton et al. (2022) highlighted that due to indignity there is presence of fear and anxiety, not being recognised, marginalised, and showcasing of emotional reactions like anger and grief. Similarly, Tilton et al. (2024), state that employees generate emotions such as ‘shame’, ‘frustration’, ‘shock’ etc. Yagil and Shultz (2017) categorise the suffering of employees into two kinds of emotions – suffering emotions (compassion, empathy, sympathy) vs others condemning emotions (Anger, displeasure, rage). Mertz et al. (2023) also stated that workplace dignity is negatively related to turnover intention which means presence of indignity would lead to higher turnover intention. De Clercq et al. (2020) state that workplace incivility causes depersonalization towards employees along with job-related anxiety. This is because employees who face incivility on a regular basis are anxious about their place in the organisation and further their dignity is threatened due to everyday disrespect. Baker and Lucas (2017) studied the LGBTQ employees and found four broad identity-sensitive dignity threats which they experienced. These include – 1) Social harm 2) Autonomy violations 3) Career harm 4) Physical harm. Social harm is associated with disrespectful interactions. Respectful interactions doesn’t mean ‘mere pleasantries’ but should acknowledge an individual’s Self-worth. Autonomy violations happen when other employees encroach into their privacy and private information. An example stated in the paper is of a lady who identifies herself as a bisexual, but her boss would keep creating awkward situations by constantly bringing up her sexuality in the office conversations. Career harm happens when because of gender and sexuality your performance is not acknowledged and there comes a fear of losing jobs. Physical harm happens when they feel endangered towards physical safety. In the paper, they state an example of a gay police officer who is constantly ignored whenever he asked for backup. In addition, peer officers feared to ride along with him.

Even though autonomy is being positively associated with workplace, Lucas et al. (2017) studied the dimensions of ‘dignity in work’ and ‘dignity at work’ with counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs) and came across an interesting finding. It is only when the basic material needs of an employee is fulfilled that an employee could think of engaging in CWBs. Those

who are economically more vulnerable and lie at the threshold of performance would avoid such behaviours. Therefore, exhibition of such behaviours comes with the privilege of having a safe, secure, and higher autonomy jobs. Indignity at the workplace broadly leads to experiencing negative emotions, which impacts an employee's well-being.

4.5. Individual Coping Strategies

Scholars also highlight how individual employees cope with the dignity threats they face in their work. Wieland (2020) states how soon-to-be terminated employees created and maintained resilience by decentring themselves, framing the future optimistically, affirming their value, keeping work in perspective, and caring for one another. They also suggested that holding conflicting emotions and interpretations in tension was a crucial aspect of maintaining resilience. Kensbock et al. (2016) studied the room attendants in 5-star hotels and found that recognizing and celebrating their own values, perceptions, beliefs, motives, displaying values such as honesty were the ways by which room attendants found dignity. They also make positive Self-evaluations which enables them to earn some Self-respect. Baker and Lucas (2017) found that LGBTQ employees deployed four strategies to cope with dignity threats – seeking safe spaces to work, presenting a different identity than the targeted identity, emphasizing on instrumental worth i.e., with respect work and engaging in resistance and advocating support to coworkers. Hodgins and McNamara (2017) state that employees in higher education sector cope by enhancement of Self through new activities such as educational courses, mindfulness classes, and skills training. Laaser and Bolton (2022) also state that individual experience of meaning is associated with derived dignity.

More recently, Tilton et al. (2024) talk about individual coping at three levels. At lower levels, employees try to endure by trying to forget negative incidents, by seeking support from others and in worst case misbehave. Similarly, at middle level, employees try to adapt, negotiate, confront and avoid. At upper levels, people try to rise above normal feelings by focusing on their own Self-dignity, or by taking perspective and helping others. Therefore, it is clear that maintaining positivity, being more resilient, displaying care and support for other coworkers, engaging in Self-development related activities are some of the coping strategies that are effective in workplaces.

4.6. Organisational Remedies

The literature also expounds upon remedies undertaken by organisations and discusses the other possibilities. Organisations role starts with putting strong policies and relevant procedures to report incidences. Negative actions like mobbing, bullying are also related to agency problem because they reflect absence of good governance (Sunder, 2013; Tilton et al., 2024). Armaroli (2022) state with respect to trade unions that employee input and participation in work related decisions have a role to play in employee Self-determination and human dignity. Promoting direct employee voice can play proactive role in organisational innovation. At a strategic level, Roszkowska and Melé (2021) reflect upon business scandals in the past and propose the notion of 'organisational moral structure' which can aid towards securing human dignity and wellbeing. It has seven constituents – 1) 'leader's values and character' – leader's positive attitudes and behaviours get transmitted at the lower level 2) 'vision and exercise of power' – the way manager's actions impact employees performance 3) 'corporate control systems' – primarily the way goals and evaluation standards are set 4) 'internal network of influence' – organisational links, interdependences and interactions among the individuals 5) organisational culture – the shared beliefs built up by the leadership 6) 'internal and competitive pressures' – the pressures which are directed towards its employees with respect to work accomplishments and 7) external influences – the legal, political and social context. Hicks (2016) have also suggested dignity based interventions which must be implemented

organisation wide. They are – creating dignity leadership team, teaching employees about dignity, conducting dignity assessment and creating a culture of leadership. Employers have a moral requirement for decent termination in cases of mass layoff, especially when the employees do not have any fault otherwise it puts their dignity at stake. Mere severance pay in case of mass layoffs isn't justified (Kim, 2014). Dignity with respect to workplace covers all spheres i.e., basic rights, equality, freedom, protection, better conditions of life (May and Daly, 2020).

Table 2 and 3 present the summary of the review.

Antecedents to Workplace Dignity	What Workplace Dignity can lead to	Why Workplace Indignity
Work life balance	Reduced Turnover Intention	Hierarchical power (Systemic unfairness, differential status, power imbalances)
Ethical Leadership	Organizational Commitment	Communication deficiencies
Social Impact	Affective Commitment to change	Recognition gap
Perceived Supervisor Support	Organizational Identification	Lack of employee voice
Engaging leadership	Psychological Safety	Espoused practice vs Oppressive tactics
Knowledge of Administrative Law	Tacit Knowledge Sharing	Imposed discipline
Transformational leadership	Work engagement	Online privacy
Inclusive leadership	Constructive Deviance	Dehumanization
	Task Performance	Disrespected
	Organizational citizenship behaviour	Devalued
	Organization-based Self-esteem	Demeaned
	Discretionary work effort	Dismissal of special expertise
		Denial of special rights
		Bullying (Mobbing, harassment)
		Customer Misbehaviour
		No platforms to bring up grievances
		Termination without employee's fault (Mass layoff, Furlough)
		Supervisor hostility
		Employee Insecurity
		Manager's negative perceptions
		Dirty Work
		Undermined Work
		Undermined confidence
		Undermined reputation

Table 2: Summary of the review

What Workplace Indignity can lead to	Individual Coping Strategies	Organizational Remedies
Reduced Employee Engagement	Meaning	Employee Autonomy
Fear	Resilience	Employee participation in decision making
Anxiety	Caring for others	Developing Moral Structure
Anger	Self-isolation	Safety and Security
Insecurity	Engaging in skill-based activities	Ethical climate
Shame	Mindfulness training	Just Rewards
Frustration	Positive Self-evaluations	More than severance pay (in case of mass layoffs)
Shock	Displaying honesty	Policies and Procedures to report
	Forget about it	
	Seek support	
	Misbehave	
	Confront	
	Negotiate	
	Adapt	
	Avoid	
	Focus on Self-generated dignity	
	Take perspective	
	Help others	

Table 3: Summary of the review

5. Key Finding

The perpetrator of indignity is in some position of superiority over the receiver. In some cases, these were related to supervisor or leadership levels (Crowley, 2012; Yagil and Shultz, 2017). In other cases, gender and differences with colleagues (Baker and Lucas, 2017; Hamilton, Harness and Griffin, 2022). Surprisingly, the receivers kept the incidents to themselves without reporting because they feared they would get highlighted, lose respect, and even lose their jobs. In addition, the level of dignity threats vary at job levels. Tilton et al. (2024) state that at lower levels, employees perceive dignity threats more harshly whereas at mid and upper levels, dignity threats are subtle. The perpetrators would intentionally interfere in their jobs or deliberately doubt their competence.

6. Character Strengths

Character is a foundation towards enhancing competencies (Hannah and Avolio, 2011). In the recent times, the role of character is being emphasized in business leadership (Mohan, Seijts

and Miller, 2023). Character of a leader is considered an important source of trust by the subordinates because consistent display of moral behaviours gives that soft signal to employees as well (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). According to Aristotle character is about a desirable mean state i.e., excess of strong character may lead to reckless behaviours whereas deficiency may display inability to act (Crossan et al., 2017). Character brings the aspect of ‘being’ (Cameron, 2011). Peterson and Seligman (2004) did seminal work in this regard by identifying 24 character strengths such as wisdom, gratitude, perseverance, courage, humility, justice, curiosity etc.

Gillham et al. (2011) found that character strengths help students reduce the perception of stressful life events towards their subjective wellbeing. E.g. – Courage would help a student to work harder when confronting a challenge. Crossan et al. (2017) stated 11 dimensions of character which are essential for effective leadership. These are – Judgement, Courage, Drive, Collaboration, Integrity, Temperance, Accountability, Justice, Humility, Humanity, Transcendence. They also stated some interesting findings. Integrity, drive, and accountability were found to be the most necessary. Though humility, humanity did not turn out to be significant dimensions it turned out that humility does support the dimension of temperance and important in leadership. Out of all the dimensions, judgement is the central dimension because it signifies practical wisdom. Adept judgment by making timely, informed decisions rooted in critical analysis, considering broader contexts is also an essential characteristic of effective leadership. Monzani et al. (2021) investigated this model with follower positive outcomes – subjective wellbeing, resilience, organisational commitment, and work engagement. They found that judgement and drive fit well with the positive outcomes. Hendriks et al. (2020) found that trust is a significant mediator between employee’s perceptions of their supervisor’s virtuous leadership, job satisfaction and work engagement. Seijts et al. (2020) used utility analysis to prove that developing character based leadership and promoting those managers who display good character have a positive effect on employees below. Therefore, it is evident from the current research that the disposition of character has positive implications on an employee or leader’s organisational outcomes.

7. Key Proposition

According to Crossan et al. (2017), ‘humility’ is the ability to not see oneself more important than others and thus being able to examine own thoughts and respect everyone. ‘Temperance’ is the ability to maintain calmness in both good and bad situations. ‘Courage’ refers to the ability of doing the right thing even though it is discouraged. ‘Justice’ refers to the ability of treating everyone fairly by keeping aside personal opinions and biases. ‘Transcendence’ refers to the ability to appreciate the beauty and having an expansive view. Humility is an important character strength which negates the aspect of indignity. Prior research also supports this fact by stating that humility is an important indicator of performance (Crossan et al., 2017) and also shows relation with the dimension of temperance (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Owens and Hekman (2012) have also established in the past that leaders who show humility are well appraised by their subordinates. Courage, justice, and transcendence are also important character strengths which emerged in these examples.

In businesses when we talk about mergers and acquisitions, it primarily started with the idea that firms want to reap the benefit of being a single large producer (Fatima and Shehzad, 2014) or with the aim of becoming a conglomerate by friendly or hostile means (Golubov, Petmezas and Travlos, 2013), or seeking global expansion (Kouser and Saba, 2011). There is always some amount of reciprocity involved here. What has been missing is the presence of supporting a failing business for a greater cause i.e., to save people’s employments, their livelihood. In similar lines however, there have been cases where failing businesses have been revived by

investments from giants, e.g. – State Bank of India invested in Yes Bank in 2020 to avoid any financial collapse. Large scale philanthropy, done by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Reliance Foundation, Tata Trusts are other notable examples. Small startups with good ideas are also being promoted by many angel investors. In India, angel investing by Ratan Tata in companies like OLA Electric, CarDekho, Lenskart are notable examples (Dutta, 2023). Therefore, character of a leader also matters in today's business world. German idealist philosopher Hegel also stated that a person with good character looks at his own dignity in other's eyes and thus sees dignity in everyone (Sebastian and Hühn, 2023). Therefore, we propine the following proposition –

Proposition: Individual employees and leaders with developed character strengths such as humility, temperance, courage, justice, and transcendence will surpass their sense of 'Self', and look for greater dignity to improve the overall welfare of their organisation and society.

8. Conclusion and Implications

Through the survey of literature, we were able to establish three broad perspectives by which dignity is experienced. We understood that an individual's understanding of 'Self' is a precondition towards interpreting the external social elements. Development of character is a journey within this larger notion of Self-understanding. More specifically, the dimensions of humility, temperance, courage, justice, and transcendence appear significant. Humility would enable display of altruistic care. Temperance would ensure clam observation of a situation. Courage would enable an individual to take bold decisions. Justice would enable to keep a check on personal biases. Transcendence would ensure looking for greater possibilities. In leadership, we encourage people to have a strong vision. Parameshwar (2005) stated in her analysis that how some of the great figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Viktor Frankl, Aung San Suu Kyi, Kwame Nkrumah, Karl Marx etc. were able to transcend their ego in any circumstance due to higher purpose. Their actions also enabled to inspire their followers by deepening their commitment. Crossan et al. (2008) stated a framework on transcendent leadership which spans over Self, others and organisations. It is a leadership view where the prime focus is to add value at societal and global level. As a leader this is necessary in today's time.

Hegel also emphasized on the development of good character through the process of Self-awareness (Ashley and Reiter-Palmon, 2012). This is because when we reflect on ourselves, we think of ourselves from a moral perspective. Individuals who have excellent character strengths have through reflection developed dispositions expressed in virtuous actions, supported by virtuous sentiments (Sebastian and Hühn, 2023). Taking examples from our modern times, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela have also showcased that adhering to good character strengths and translating them into virtuous actions would always contribute towards a greater cause and thus making a great leader. These leaders were able to surpass their sense of dignity at individual level and translated their efforts into constructive actions towards greater good. From the perspective of leadership, the business world has also seen a plethora of issues over the years. There has been a trend to mass layoff employees during times of recession without giving a thought over the aspect of dignity and welfare of others. During the Covid-19 pandemic many companies furloughed their employees (Hamilton, Harness and Griffin, 2022). People were forced to work remotely in their homes, which caused disaffection and alienation among the workforce across the globe (Sikali, 2020). Companies like Amazon, Yahoo, Spotify laid off employees in huge numbers (Jose, 2023).

We propine through this work that in today's business schools importance has to be laid upon building education based upon good character. Podolny (2009) had highlighted this issue of

developing code of conduct for B-Schools in his article. Subjects like ethical leadership, values based management, positive psychology, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, sensitivity training etc. have to be brought in as mainstream courses. This will help ignite those crucial dilemma situations which erupt in business scenarios. Such discussions would also add to the tacit knowledge of learners. In conclusion, we would like to state that character strengths developed in an individual can help think beyond Self, surpass their sense of dignity at individual level to a universal front, and make them a better human being.

9. References

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