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The cultural similarities of work as dignity: bringing sense of community in business organizations

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Dignity of position adds to dignity of character.

Introduction

The pursuit of the culture of work as dignity is rarely a central focus of scholarly writings. One dominant, widely shared and accepted cultural value of work ethic is the belief that it is work that accords dignity to a human being. While seemingly neglected in traditional management research, the concepts of dignity and well-being have experienced renewed attention from the humanities and social sciences. The ability to utilize this sense of dignity becomes a critical role of human resources in advancing self-worth and self-respect. Schools of management describe different nations as having distinct cultures that lend meaning to everything. Culture being evolutionary is a function of a highly complex set of values and, by 1952, was defined in 164 different ways, making it a notoriously difficult concept to come to terms with (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952). Institutions impress upon students that an understanding of cultural differences improves business performance and gives meaning to various issues. Students are further taught that management activities result in a competent and willing workforce. The bases for these claims are mixed at best. This study considers the relationship between worker and management and incorporates the role of cultural similarities and dissimilarities.

The importance of cultural similarities and dissimilarities

Corporations function outside a specific national identity. Studies indicate that countries have different cultures and it would seem that these differences should be important. However, cultural differences play a less meaningful role as employees become more alike than unlike. Hofstede (1984), in identifying four work-related cultural dimensions, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity, to analyze work-related cultural values in different countries, concludes that organizations are “cultural-bounded”. Societies and cultures appear more alike as a result of worldwide market engagements and advancements in information communication and technology. Work as dignity could be equated to a universal property like the doctrine of modern democracy that is enjoyed by other societies. Together with the dictates of modernizing technology, there is a measure of uniformity to how everyone approaches the world. In an increasingly globalized marketplace, the identification of cultural similarities may be just as important as that of differences (Bailey and Spicer, 2007). An individual's national culture may be a strong predictor of attitudes or behavior but culture may prove to be of little significance in actual work experience. Cultural dissimilarities may therefore be overestimated and the similarities may be underestimated.

If culture is the conscience of human life and identity, then corporate culture gives meaning and identity to organizations in their pursuit for success. Two questions drive this paper:

- Q1. Would an understanding of detailed cultural patterns better help in understanding how the world of management works?
- Q2. Should management ignore cultural differences and formulate a new corporate culture identifying work as dignity?

Pluralistic ideologies of multiculturalism suggest that group differences should be recognized and celebrated. Concomitantly there is a call for group differences to be minimized. Multinational corporations manifest collective groups of individuals that have shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors and artifacts. The search for similarities and for a common ground of human values that transcend the cultural differences becomes necessary in the face of global challenges.

Since the Middle Ages, the notion of work as dignity and its intrinsic value has been central to the quest for human rights, democracy and the establishment of proper forms of governance. These beliefs and values are most important in all cultures. Individuals in the West usually identify themselves in terms of what work they do. The source of identity in Gulf Countries is to identify oneself in terms of who they are based upon family heritage. The viewpoint of economic historians is that work as dignity is a central success factor of economic and social progress in the West. Candidates possessing the culture of work as dignity are at least risk when confronted with a business culture that does not support the notion. However, businesses that identify the culture of work as dignity create high-quality work environments and are able to support creative and hardworking individuals.

High-performance versus high-quality workplace

High-performance workplaces are consistent with high-commitment management, high-involvement systems, transformed workplaces and flexible production systems. In such workplaces, employees experience:

- clear sense of purpose and vision;
- established performance standards that are concrete, measurable and timely and becoming accountable;
- continuous support and guidance for works group and employees; and
- relationship with employees is used to broaden and deepen the leader's influence on employee behavior.

The culture of work as dignity is consistent with moving high-performance workplaces to high-quality workplaces which entails employees:

- feeling valued, respected and appreciated – one's presence and opinions become paramount;
- having a sense of interpersonal connection and belonging where leadership and colleagues are concerned about holistic welfare;

One dominant, widely shared and accepted cultural value of work ethic is the belief that it is work that accords dignity to a human being.

- engaging in work that is personally meaningful and provided with opportunities to strengthen job competencies; and
- possessing a sense of personal power in work groups and experiencing a sense of security, fairness, equity and justice in the workplace.

Typically actions *exacting* the best from individuals are associated with high-performance workplaces. Individuals *give* of their best in high-quality workplaces where work is identified as socially valuable and existentially engaging. [Table I](#) presents a summary of typical managerial actions in both high-performing and high-quality workplaces.

Maintaining the dominant culture of work as dignity

If culture is a set of core values shared by a majority, a corporate culture identifying work as dignity becomes a dominant identity in business and has a profound impact on its strategic direction. Dignity is a manifestation of a group's behavior, ethics, etiquette, values, vision, working style, beliefs and habits. Businesses' profound support for work as dignity becomes observable, making it an adhesive that enjoins organization goals and creates common grounds for teamwork, company's well-being and success.

Support for work as dignity

Identifying the culture of work as dignity is as important for organizations as it is to employees. The acceptance and understanding of this culture predicated the acceptance of dignity at work which should be viewed as a basic employment right. This view is, to some extent, supported by legislation that protects employees against discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender, race, age, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation. The concepts of fairness, equity, justice and reasonableness are further embodiments of the notion of work as dignity. Work becomes a fundamental part of achieving a life well-lived. Mismanagement and managerial abuses pose challenging obstacles that corrode self-respect and impact negatively on the culture of work as dignity.

Managerial responsibility in promoting work as dignity

Attaining and maintaining the culture of work as dignity becomes a management prerogative. Notwithstanding the many denials of dignity faced in the workplace, workers still strive to do their best, to take pride in their work and to defend themselves against indignities from employers and coworkers. Because new challenges are emerging in the form of technological and organizational change and by the unrelenting drive for profit maximization, management's judgment in terms of fairness, equity and justice cannot be overlooked. Management's promotion of work as dignity is the foundation for a fully realized life that brings greater meaning to work. [Hodson \(2001\)](#) presents causes, consequences and patterns of workers' efforts to maintain this. He finds that even in workplaces where abuse is common, workers continue to create meaning in work to achieve self-respect.

Table I Managerial action within workplace

<i>Managerial action</i>	<i>Form of recognition</i>	<i>High-performance workplace</i>	<i>High-quality workplace</i>
Dealing with work-life balance	Individual need	Negotiating benefits	Valuing ways of life
Respect for Cultural identity	Universal value	Legal compliance	Creating climate for self-expression of differences within a community of equals
Compensation	Reward for labor	Pay for performance	Recognizing excellence, individual and group self-esteem
Motivating	Engaging process	Exacting the best from employees	Employees giving of the best

“If work accords dignity to a human being, the ability to establish a sense of employee self-worth, self-respect and to enjoy the respect of others becomes a critical objective of management.”

Keywords:

Development,
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Conclusion

Aristotle enshrines happiness as a central purpose of human life and a goal in itself. Happiness depends on the cultivation of virtues like dignity. If work accords dignity to a human being, the ability to establish a sense of employee self-worth, self-respect and to enjoy the respect of others becomes a critical objective of management. This notion results in moving high-performance workplaces to high-quality workplaces resulting in managerial conduct that is fair, equitable, reasonable and just. This article is a call to rethink management theory from a humanistic perspective and highlights the role and protection of human dignity as a cornerstone in management theory.

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