

# An Exploratory Study of Dignity with a Conceptual Model

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**Abstract-** The study adopts qualitative research paradigm for studying the concept of dignity from different perspectives from the Indian workforce. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 personnel representing different occupations to encapsulate their concept of dignity emanating from their experience. Interesting patterns emerged through content analysis of the interview scripts. Based on the analysis of the results a 3N model of dignity has been developed.

**Index Terms-** Dignity, Dignity at the workplace, 3N Model, Human Dignity,

essential situation of dignity is being “*treated as an end in oneself, at least in part, and not merely as a means to someone else’s ends or as substitutable for someone else*” (Sayer 2007, p. 568). Despite that achievement of dignity is little difficult as an employee generally got hired for the fulfillment of some instrumental role the achievement of dignity becomes inherently problematic in employment relationships.

Dignity as a word most used in contemporary work. Hodson (2001) identifies four means or practices which contribute towards the experience or denial of dignity at work. These include *mismanagement and abuse, overwork, incursions on the autonomy and contradictions of employee involvement.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dignity is a common word frequently used by people, but its connotation is not the same. People often amalgamate the meaning of dignity with self-respect or human rights. Dignity is all about people and is not only intrinsic but also relational and is created between and among people. Most people dismiss and ignore it or pay attention to it despite violence against women like rape, which affect their dignity (Sharma et.al, 2014).

Poor working environment, workplace bullying, ill-treatment and harassment, long hours, have a direct relation with dignity and making *dignity* as a complex phenomenon (Hodson, 2001; Rayman, 2001; TUC, 2003). Dignity has crucial significance that has divided upon—both implicitly and explicitly — just to recognize the environment of labor and work (Bolton 2007; Sayer 2007). Given on emphasizing ILO (1947) placed it on the constitution and positioned it as a fundamental human right. “*All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity*”. Although putting Dignity into a definite framework and giving one definition is difficult to work and because of these difficulties, it lacks a specific definition (Lee 2008; Sayer 2007). Therefore, Dignity as a phenomenon is an important area of study as it varies culturally and occupationally. Hodson (2001) connect “*Dignity as an ability which helps in establishing a sense of self-respect and self-worth and to realize the respect of others*” (p. 3). Lee (2008) offers a similar definition “*the state of being treated with respect or honor, with a sense of self-worthiness and self-esteem resulting there from*” (p. 5). In today’s world when the working hour and pressure are so high, the employee spent major time either at the workplace or thinking towards work. In this situation achieving dignity at work become, indispensable for self-worth (see also Bolton 2007). Although the achievement of dignity is not simple. Citing a Kantian perspective, he explains that an

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- a) To study different perspectives of workplace dignity in the Indian context.
- b) To analyze the meaning of dignified person and dignified work in the Indian Context.

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How people in different occupations conceptualize and experience dignity.
2. When one calls oneself as a dignified person and one's work as the dignified work.

## IV. SAMPLE

After consulting a number of people the following occupations were chosen for sample selection. From these occupations, random sampling was done for the selection of the final sample. Army Personnel, Doctors, Social worker, Businessman, Manager, Student, Acid attack survivor, Contract Waiter, and Labor. A sample of 20 was randomly selected from different occupations. The sample comprised 50% female, 50% male participants. The further breakup, of the female sample constituted 2 doctors, 3 acid attack survivors, 3 students, 2 labors. The male sample comprised of 2 businessmen, 2 managers, 1 waiter at the hotel, 2 social workers, 2 soldiers and one labor from the construction site.

## V. PROCEDURE

A combination of inductive and deductive approach where the researcher used both structured and semi structured interview to collect data from each respondent on dignity.

Qualitative research is more suitable when there is a need for unfolding what surrounds a phenomenon (Carson et al., 2001). Interview questions were developed through dignity literature. A set of questions was generated and checked by experts, so none of the important factors could be missed. The questions were designed to be open-ended and interviewers had the flexibility to follow-up and probe further using additional non-scripted questions whenever new themes or information appeared. The questions were designed to solicit information related to each of the major content areas of the study. During the beginning of the interview demographic data were collected.

## VI. DATA COLLECTION

At the outset, the participants were made aware of the objectives of the study. Their informed consent was taken. Researcher established rapport before the interview and all the respondents were secure that their responses would be held in reserve.

During the interview, researcher asked each participant to identify the most painful part of their life. When permission was granted, interviews were audiotaped. To get into the real context all the interviews were conducted in face to face situation. Each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes.

## VII. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

KMS uses as a technical/ rational artifact, a depository system which can be used for codifying, retrieve, store and distribute their knowledge (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Knowledge management systems (KMS) is a type of information system used by employers to create, distribute and utilization of knowledge, which finally could impact on the organizational competitiveness (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Alavi et al, 2006; Kulkarni et al, 2007). Though, research says up to 70% of KMS does not meet up organisational objectives (Malhotra, 2005). A few studies have shown that culture plays a major role when KMS are deployed outside Western countries (Voelpel & Han, 2005; Ardichvili et al, 2006). These cultural issues are quite common as KMS generally reveal the Western values of the designers (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Considering the above and keeping in view the importance of context in pursuing the objectives of the study, manual analysis has been conducted by the authors, which was considered to be most appropriate for the largely descriptive interview data. Also, any qualitative software focuses on the words and thereby ignores the context; therefore, the software was not used at this stage. Besides, the aim of the study was to capture the context in the study of dignity and dignified work therefore, context should not be ignored. Thus, for enriching the output, context needed to be captured and this was done through manual analysis.

There are majorly 3 types of content analysis in use, Conventional, Directed, and Summative content analysis. During

the current study, we rely on conventional analysis; in this case, the aim was to know how one perceives dignity in his/ her work life. Conventional analysis has been used mainly in the studies which do not have existing theories and also a limited research. (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), alternatively allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data. Researchers submerge themselves in the data to permit original insights to appear (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), in addition explained as an inductive category development (Mayring, 2000).

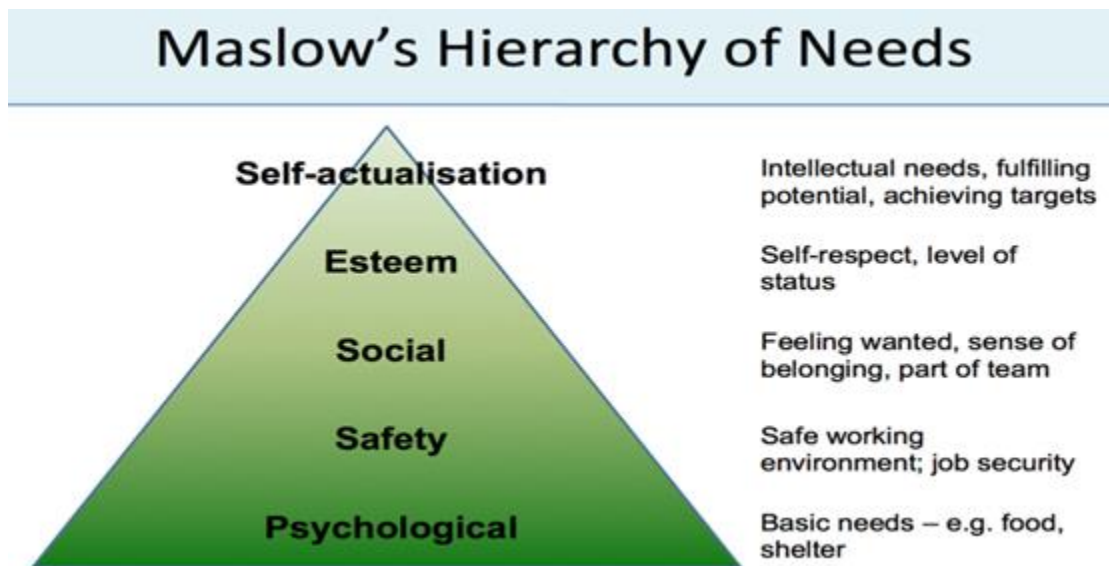
## VIII. EVOLVING A CONCEPTUAL MODEL: 3N MODEL OF DIGNITY

Based on the literature, we identified majorly two types of dignity 1, intrinsic 2, extrinsic (Brennan and Lo, 2007; Hodson, 2001). However, intrinsic one is defined which has no outer connection and extrinsic has defined with the support of the extrinsic environment. The whole interview process was based on these two concepts. All the concept of dignity has been linked with the Maslow's need theory as well. Based on characteristic we divided the 5 basic needs into two parts. Likewise, psychological, social and safety needs on one group and name as Extrinsic need, the last two as self-actualization and esteem needs in one group called as intrinsic dignity. Based on this separation, we re-conducted our interview in a semi-structured way. But after the interview, the whole model changed and emerged as a 3N Model. This model is a pure outcome of interview analysis. Firstly, our data were tabulated; the essence of the interview was conceptualized and coded to draw a meaningful implication regarding the meaning of dignity.

### Data Analysis < Insert table 1 >

### The Outcome of Interview analysis < Insert table 2 >

After taking views of 8 working segments of the society we divided it into three parts on the basis of "Maslow's hierarchy of Needs" (Figure 1). **3N** express as, **N- Nascent Dignity, N- Nether Dignity, N- Noble Dignity**. However Nascent describes the basic need which consists of food, shelter, and cloth. We connect these needs to the psychological and safety need of the Maslow's models may also be called as the dependent dignity. The dignity of labor, waiters, and Acid attack Survivors fall under this. The students, businessmen, managers major parts fall under Nether dignity as it consists of social and esteem needs from the Maslow's hierarchy also called as the developed dignity. The last part is Self-actualization, which consists of social workers and Army personnel. These professional groups of the society have a noble view of dignity as 'helping others' which in their view is the most dignified work also called as nether or independent dignity (Figure 2).



Themes emerging from the Data <Insert table 3 >

### 3 N model of Dignity



Figure 2  
Source: Developed by the authors

#### IX. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The most surprising fact which we got throughout the interview, that dignity is a dynamic word which keeps changing its connotation. Everyone relates dignity with one's current work: a student has a connection with a teacher, a doctor has a connection with the patient, and low wage worker has a connection with the owner. So for a different societal group, the

definition of dignity is different. For the labor class getting a fair wage comes as a dignity. For the educated group, dignity is coined as the self-respect, satisfaction, achievement, happiness, and trust. It is equivalent to the human right as well. For those who are fighting for their survival, dignity means, how society is accepting them, and getting equal treatment or not? if they perceive the fair and equal treatment, they call themselves dignified but if they do not perceive it their dignity is at a

vulnerable stage. So the common themes which emerged were equality, in terms of equal pay or equal treatment, trust, happiness, and satisfaction. The results of the exploratory study reveal that culture has been one of the major factors which could give another shade to the definition of dignity. This paves the way for future research in the field of dignity. The study has a sample size as one of the limitations, besides interview as a methodology and cultural context. A larger sample and other methods of data collection would lead to greater generalizability of results. Nevertheless, the study has explored an emerging area of study which is pivotal for the sustainable growth of organizations and the society and had developed a 3N model of dignity.

The whole research has been placed in one culture in another way culture could enrich the color or meaning of dignity, the status in the society may also have an impact on it one needs to search and do further research on it.

## X. CONTRIBUTION AND CONCLUSION

When we analyze the data it emerges as three needs and these three needs falls into the Maslow's hierarchy and there for the contribution of this paper is to convert 5 needs into the three needs. Dignity is an integral part of one's life, but many compounds it with human rights. Kant had a provided philosophical perspective, but it needs to be operationalized for organizations and society. The present study has developed a need-based 3N conceptual model of human dignity. As an area of scholarship, it is at the nascent stage and needs to be explored and developed.

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## Data Analysis Table 1

Occupations	Description	Codes
Social worker 1.	Making yourself Proud, Self-motivation,	
Social worker 2.	Social justice, Righteousness, The importance of once life,	Wholesomeness.
Businessmen 1	Achieve it from others, continuous improvement, earn your self-respect, hard work pay, Society enrichment.	
Businessmen 2	Respect in other eyes, Satisfaction, Seeing others happy, Family happiness.	Satisfaction
Businessmen 2	Gain respect, big empire, More employees, output achievement, Spending more on CSR activities. The accomplishment of mission and vision	
Manager 1	Self Trust, Peer group Trust, Acceptance, Appreciation, integrity.	
Manager 2	Supervisor Trust, Acknowledgement, Target Achievement.	Credence
Army personnel 1	Code of conduct, Pride in Nation Flag, Nations Welfare, Fight for the nation,	Pride

<p>Army Personnel 2</p>	<p>Support system at the time of emergency,                  Save society, respect within and outside organization.</p>	
<p>Waiter</p>	<p>Persuade promise, full payment,                  Respectful behavior, timely payment.                  365 days of work, full money, shelter,                  nutritious food.</p>	<p>Empathy</p>
<p>Labor 1</p>	<p>Break during the work, get the opportunity                  to feed our children, some freedom, equal</p>	
<p>Labor 2</p>	<p>pay.                  Equal job opportunity, shelter, respect.</p>	<p>Fair-minded</p>
<p>Labor 3</p>	<p>It's a two way process, patient satisfaction,                  respect in the eyes of the patient.</p>	
<p>Doctor 1</p>	<p>Successful treatment gives us immense                  pleasure and happiness, the joy of giving,                  delightful experience.</p>	<p>Happiness</p>
<p>Doctor 2</p>	<p>Acceptance of your decision, Equality, get                  an opportunity to work together, a sign of</p>	
<p>Manager at café (Acid Attack                  survivor 1)</p>	<p>acceptance,                  Job opportunity, acceptance of our                  services, equal pays for equal work,                  learning opportunity.</p>	<p>Adoption</p>



<p>Worker at café (Acid Attack Survivor 2)</p>	<p>Teamwork, Freedom of expression, Freedom to use resource.</p>	<p>Sensitivity</p>
<p>Supervisor at café(Acid Attack survivor 3)</p>	<p>Respect, appreciation of efforts, hard work, hand-holding.</p>	
<p>Student 1</p>	<p>Listening, appreciate my thoughts, understand my constrain, the freedom of learning, freedom of thoughts, Trust on</p>	
<p>Student 2</p>	<p>me, convince myself, Decision taking, work can't be dignified but the journey is dignified. Authenticity in your work, Truthfulness.</p>	
<p>Student 3</p>	<p>Successful outcome, Acceptance by teachers, Respect for my work.</p>	

Source: Developed By Authors

**Table 2 Outcome of Interview analysis**

Occupation	Emerged Themes
Army Personnel	Pride
Social worker	Wholesomeness.
Businessmen	Satisfaction
Manager	Credence
Waiter	Empathy
Labor	Fairness
Doctors	Happiness
Acid Attack survivor	Acceptance
Students	Sensitivity

Source: Developed By Authors



Maslow's Need	Themes	Occupation	Needs/ Dignity
{ Self-Actualization }  { Esteem }  { Social }  { Safety }  { Psychological }	Pride, Wholesomeness	Army personnel, Social Worker	Noble
	Satisfaction, Credence, Sensitivity.	Managers, Doctors, Businessmen, Student.	NETHER
	Fair-Minded, Empathy, Adoption	Acid Attack survivor, Labor, Contract waiter.	NASCENT

Themes emerging from the Data

Source: Developed By Authors

