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HUMANISM IN BUSINESS SERIES

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# Dignity in the Workplace

New Theoretical Perspectives



Matthijs Bal



# Humanism in Business Series

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Matthijs Bal

# Dignity in the Workplace

New Theoretical Perspectives

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# Foreword

This book was written largely during 2016, which marked a year of great change in the Western world. England and Wales voted to leave the European Union, the United States voted a fascist as new president, an increasing amount of countries across the world transformed from democratic states into totalitarian regimes, and the world watched how Syria's civil war continued with devastating consequences, including millions of people fleeing their country in search of safer places to live. It might be that 2016 will be a year that will enter the history books as a pivotal year of change, and while many scholars and intellectuals have compared 2016 to 1933, with the election of a new American president alike the rise of Hitler in the early 1930s, it should not be underestimated that the current times also reflect the late Soviet era, something I will explore later in the book. Yet, given all the changes in society and global affairs, it has felt difficult at times to speak of dignity in the workplace. With wars continuing and spreading across the world, with totalitarian leaders in power across so many countries in the world, with mass immigration resulting from climate change, poverty and war, it is not strange to experience a profound dissociation in being a management scholar and at the same time a citizen observing and reading

the news. Often I have felt a senselessness and urge to quit when writing about dignity and the potential of the dignified workplace when reality is so much more inclined to tell the other story, that of social Darwinism and the revival of the strongest, the quickest, the most adaptable. However, there is also the realization of the need and urgency to tell the story of dignity, and not only to tell the good, but also to expose the imperfect, to show what is not working and the need for change and the possibility to formulate a way to improvement. I have always remembered myself during the writing process to think of the speech of the character Homer in Wim Wenders' movie *Himmel über Berlin* (in English: *Wings of Desire*), who in looking at the pictures of a destroyed Berlin after WWII, realizes that although the world is sinking into dusk, one cannot stop telling the epic of peace. Especially in times where the message of peace stands in the shadow of those who call for walls and borders to be raised between people, Homer reminds us of the duty to listen to the children (and the movie does so), who unconstrained by psychological walls, have unlimited imagination. This movie was shot in 1987 in West Berlin, 2 years before the Wall came down, which was unimaginable at the time. In those dark days, the movie reminded one of the duty to imagine, and this should also lead our current thinking. A comparison between the current era and the years before WWII can be made easily, but it is our duty to imagine another way out, and *Himmel über Berlin* offers the opportunity to do so.

A Foreword also provides the opportunity for a more personal note. Dignity has been on my mind for some years, and it was in 2011 that I started thinking about it in a more structured way. Dignity offered an alternative to a discourse in management (and especially work and organizational psychology and HRM), which had become narrower and simplified over the years, and more ideological without acknowledging so. I saw individuals in the field of management having strong values, having ideals that led them to being an academic, but they were unable to explicitly incorporate that into their work, through which a system was sustained that incentivized the opposite, and encouraged people to neglect their values. Dignity provided a small light at the horizon, something I could work towards in order to grasp that which was still latent in my own thinking. I have been in academia for a bit more than

10 years, and it is only now that I feel I have a voice, that I am able to express that which I always wanted to say. There are no regrets of what I have written before, and in everything I have done in my work (e.g., in my research on psychological contracts or older workers), there was the idea of dignity and respect for individuality, yet it has always been latent, invisible, due to my own inability to find the words that I wanted to use to express the fundament underpinning true management. It is only now, after these years, that I feel I have insight into the ‘truth as it really is’, yet this is not a result but a task, a duty to explore and investigate. This book is a starting point, an interpretation of the world as I have seen it, and more deeply, how I have experienced the world and people. I strongly believe that more people in the world prefer dignity over self-interest, yet, we feel ashamed to admit that dignity may come at the expense of our own outcomes. We feel a loss of status by acknowledging that we may inflict harm upon ourselves by living in dignity, and it is this loss of status that one has to acknowledge. The true task therefore is to realize that *it* does not matter, whatever *it* is that describes us. It has been said in many ways, including the inability of eternal growth, the necessity of lower consumption, and a rebalancing of what is important in life, but it comes down to the point where people have to acknowledge that accumulation of more is no longer possible, that we cannot assume that solutions can be found in a context without losers, that utopian ideas really have the potential to be inclusive without costs. In the meantime, the world becomes only more exclusive and creates only stronger dividing lines between the haves and the have-nots. Yet, one cannot function without hope, and that hope is materialized through contemplation and thinking about alternative realities.

This is my first proper published book, after writing a Ph.D. with the chance to add an acknowledgement describing the state of mind I was in at that time, and two edited books which primarily served to add to scientific debates within specific domains (of aging workers, and of idiosyncratic deals). I wrote this book while leaving one university for another, and leaving one country back to my home country to follow my partner’s wish to pursue her career in the country where we had lived all of our lives until moving to the United Kingdom to extend our



own borders. Returning home with a son made us realize that nothing stays the same albeit in the stability of lives lived around us. The role of duty would never have been so prominent in a theory of dignity without having a child who requires a future from his parents, and thus a responsibility to see in 2016 a 1987 rather than a 1933, with borders and walls around us which are doomed to collapse rather than to sustain and to prohibit a person to look beyond. This book is written for Jens, and for Olivia, but even so for anyone I have spoken to or met in the past and who inspired the idea to formulate what is true dignity in life. For instance: Luc for our conversations in which logic was always reversed, Sjoerd my student in Rotterdam who was the first one to work with me on formulating dignity, Hans and Simonetta for giving me feedback on chapters, Stefanie and Katharina for inspiring me in Bath to think beyond the borders and to overcome limitations of oppression, Simon for co-authoring and thinking with me about dignity in HRM and OB, Craig for hiring me in Lincoln and giving me the opportunity to work on dignity with so many inspiring people in Lincoln (too many to mention), and Tuğba, Xander, Herbert, Inge, Thushel, and Ravindra for working with me to develop your Ph.D.s and spending so much time together and developing ideas around management and people in organizations. There are so many other people I have met over the last 10 years that I feel hugely privileged to be an academic, travelling around the world, working with people around the world, and meeting so many people over the years. Having both experiences of what the dignified workplace could look like, and how dignity violations may be widespread in contemporary organizations, I could not have formulated the theory without those experiences and I wish to express my gratitude not only to those close to my heart, but also to those who have shown me the negative aspects of organizational life and thus taught me the relevance of dignity in the workplace.

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# 1

## Introduction to Workplace Dignity

### 1.1 Introduction

Why the need for a new theory on workplace dignity? Currently, there is not *a* theory of workplace dignity, which could help to understand the issues and challenges of the contemporary workplace. Hence, the need for a new theory must be resulting from an observation that current models, paradigms and theories are insufficient to explain the current economic situation. More importantly, there are hardly any new theoretical developments taking place regarding how the future workplace should and could be structured, organized and developed. This book is not by far not the first which claims that our current economic-political paradigms are insufficient to help us through the twenty-first century, and that contemporary society is in desperate need of new ideas to shape the workplace of the future (Bauman et al. 2015). This chapter will outline what is lacking in relation to our past and current thinking and theory about workplaces and management. From this analysis, it will propose an alternative paradigm on the notion of ‘workplace dignity’, a theory which will be developed in this book. Workplace dignity builds heavily on

the notion of human dignity, but is conceptualized within a framework that fits the idea of the organization and organizing (as a process conducted by human beings), and places dignity in a particular philosophical framework, building on work of philosopher Kant (1785/2012), and interpreted by contemporary thinkers such as Kateb (2011) and Rosen (2012), but more importantly adds a Daoist approach to dignity (Qing-Ju 2014) through postulating not just the dignity of man, but of the workplace as such. This will be explained in great detail in Chap. 3 where a theory of workplace dignity is formally introduced. It is necessary to distinguish notions of human dignity and workplace dignity, as the former has links with specific philosophical and religious streams, not all of which are applicable to the current conceptualization of dignity. Introducing the notion of workplace dignity allows to conceptualize dignity in a much broader framework (ironically enough), encompassing not only the dignity of human beings, but also the dignity of the process of organization (or the dignity of work; Hodson 2001). Hence, conceptualizing dignity around the notion of work (and in particular the workplace, as a physical or virtual–global space, where people come together to create and connect), allows us to formulate a theory that not only revolves around human beings, but more importantly, around the relationships among human beings, as well as the relationships of human beings with their environment (that is, the earth and all that is around us including less tangible matter such as finance).

The thesis of the first chapter is that this relationship is fundamentally damaged, if not completely broken, and is in great need of restoration. To do so, it is no longer possible to trust on familiar paradigms, and no longer is it possible to rely on notions of capitalism or neoliberalism (Harvey 2005; Mason 2015), nor is it possible to formulate an alternative solely on the notion of communism, Marxism, or socialism (Žižek 1989, 2009). These ideas, which were developed primarily in the twentieth century, do not help us to fully understand the problematic nature of the contemporary organization. Capitalism, in its dominant neoliberal form, creates huge inequalities, which destabilizes the global system, and creates a system of a small minority of winners, and a large majority of losers (Stiglitz 2012), who only accept

their inferior position through a continuous stream of propaganda and a false belief in meritocracy, or the possibility to escape the inferior position and to become part of the 1% of winners (Seymour 2014; Varoufakis 2015). Marxism, however, does not provide a viable alternative, even though some thinkers may claim so (Seymour 2014; Vidal et al. 2015). The fundamental problem with Marxism that it was inherently a sociological (and in extension political-economic) theory, which neglected the role of psychological factors that need to be taken into account. For instance, the idea of collectivizing private property (see the Communist Manifesto; Marx and Engels 1848/2002) has proven to be a disastrous intervention, as it undermined the psychological notion of ownership as a fundamental human need, a psychological factor that has to be taken into account when forming theories of organizing. Hence, while many of the observations of Marx have been to the point, such as the exploitation of workers, and are still relevant today, they have also shown their weaknesses in trying to come up with a practical theory, one that works in daily life. The twentieth century has been full of great ideologies (Žižek 1989), all of which have been disastrous for human well-being, be it either communism in Soviet Union and China, fascism in Germany and Italy, or capitalism in the US and Europe, as all of these were essentially about power struggles and domination of elites over large groups of people (Varoufakis 2015). The very idea of ideologies leading to a particular world view in which the sacrifice of individuals can be legitimized as necessary in the pursuit of a greater goal is systematically violating human dignity, and we have seen this happening throughout history, and on an unprecedented scale in the twentieth century. Thus, the question is whether new paradigms have any relevance in creating a more dignified world, and whether progress is really possible and achievable in the twenty-first century. Any new paradigm has to take into account the limitations of ideology (Žižek 1989, 2009), and be aware of the implications of paradigms on both individual, meso (e.g., organizational), and macro, collective, level. When workplace dignity is introduced as just another ideology with its dominating notion and its inherent flaws, it will only contribute to misunderstanding and abuse of the term. Too often, ideologies and political-economic theories have been

subject to biases and assumptions that would never hold in real-life. For instance, economic theory has been criticized widely (e.g., Sedlacek 2011) for assuming that people are rational agents and utility maximisers, or in other words, that people in every decision that they make, are behaving strategically, based on rational arguments, and only acting out of self-interest. As any psychologist will know, this assumption is untenable and ultimately dangerous as economic planning and regulation (or deregulation) has been built around this very notion. It is this fundamental flaw within ideologies to understand human nature that has led to crises, misery and wars. In building a sustainable and viable alternative paradigm, the major flaws within the current economic-political system will be analyzed systematically, and henceforth an alternative paradigm is proposed and developed using a bottom-up approach (Kostera 2014). A bottom-up approach is central to this book and current thinking about workplace dignity, as it constitutes the only viable way through which progress may occur. As the current hierarchical, top-down forces are dominated by large corporations and corrupted politics (Jones 2014), it is difficult to imagine a self-correcting process to emerge in the near future in which positive change is established. The election of the Greek party Syriza as government in 2015, and their inability to change circumstances in Greece due to the political pressure from Europe for the status quo, shows that even through democratic means it has become complex, if not impossible, to change things radically for the better. Hence, while prominent thinkers such as Stiglitz (2012) have called for more government regulation, this cannot be the complete story, as bottom-up change is needed as well.

Varoufakis (2015), who for a short while was part of the Syriza government in Greece but who was pushed out by European technocrats, argued that viable solutions for Europe which have been available will not be implemented to correct the economic inequality within Europe. When systems of surplus recycling mechanisms (where rich countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, transfer economic surpluses to poorer countries, such as Greece and Portugal) would have been implemented, Europe would economically be in much better shape, but the current forces prevent such action to be taken. The general point here is that distributive fairness is impossible in the current system, as the

forces for maintenance of inequality and instability of the system are much stronger. The most likely way out is via mobilization of people, who can either force change through democracy, through revolution, or through gradually changing behavior. Especially the first and the last will be the main ways this book proposes change to be sustainable and positive, while revolution, whilst sometimes necessary to evoke change in society, has too often been associated with violence, either through direct use of it during revolution, or through escalating conflicts which end in violence. None of these constitute dignified ways to provoke positive change, hence, the focus on democracy and gradual change in the current book. In sum, to establish a need for an alternative paradigm for management studies, this chapter will outline the main problematic features of the contemporary workplace and the context in which it operates. On this basis of this analysis, it is achievable to postulate the contours of the new theory, and ascertain which factors should be taken into account. Therefore, the chapter addresses the role of neoliberalism, individualism, profit maximization and shareholder value climate change, poverty, income inequality, political indifference, the rise of lobbyocracy and corpocracy, the rise of the surveillance state, lack of integrity in leadership, and corporate greenwashing, as major factors that warrant management studies to develop a new paradigm on which theory, research and practice can be founded.

## 1.2 Overview of a Malfunctioning Global Society

All of the above mentioned factors have culminated into the economic crisis that started in 2007–2008. A lot has been written on the crisis, but in relation to the topic of the current book, it needs to be explained as a focal point in history. The crisis revealed an urgency to formulate new, alternative ideas but so far little has been done over the last 10 years in postulating alternatives. The economic crisis presented itself not only at the symbolic level as the outcome of a system that is inherently broken. As explained before, the economic crisis was the farce which followed the tragedy of 9/11 (Žižek 2009). In other words, the



economic crisis was not an ‘isolated’ event which resulted from specific economic circumstances, but should be perceived within the wider context where societal malfunctioning was brought to light to the wider public. It was only through the economic crisis that it became clear to the wider public that something was inherently wrong. The effects of the crisis have spread across society, from direct effects for shareholders and workers in the financial industries, to indirect global effects causing unemployment, poverty, and ill health (Kentikelenis et al. 2014). Hence, the economic crisis revealed to the general public what was becoming common-sense among enlightened economists; that an enormous housing bubble was created, which was about to explode and which eventually happened in 2007–2008 (Varoufakis 2015). In conjunction with 9/11, it showed the (moral) bankruptcy of the Western (US dominated) hegemony across the world, and only confirmed the need for more inclusive economic and political models, in which Asian, African, and Latin-American countries do not just exist in the periphery to feed the hungry greed of the Western countries, but should be re-envisioned such that we achieve a fairer distribution across the world. However, the crisis only constituted an insight into the visible surface level of the malfunctioning world order, and it can be questioned whether there is general awareness of the ‘real’ causes of the economic crisis and thus, the need to address those deeper factors underlying what is wrong in contemporary society and economy. For instance, the Occupy movements were emerging out of the anger directed towards the immediate consequences of the economic crisis (i.e., inequality, poverty, unemployment), but the strength and the weakness of the movement was that there was a general longing for understanding of the deeper causes of the crisis, which made the global movement first and foremost a collective action of sensemaking after the traumatic experience of the economic crisis. Hence, the collective sensemaking experience constituted a meaningful event for the participants and those closely around it, but at the same time, it was criticized for lacking an agenda to address and resolve the—obvious—manifestations, such as the inequality and rising poverty. This was beyond the scope of the grassroots movement, but at the same time, it paved the way for inequality to be on the agenda, and opened doors for economists

such as Piketty, Galbraith and Stiglitz to debate inequality on the more theoretical level.

Nonetheless, the economic crisis constituted an enormously important formative event, and reminded many of the 1929 Wall Street crisis, which eventually led to WWII. Even though in more recent history other economic crises have emerged as well, such as in Russia, South-East Asia, Argentina, and Mexico, the sheer global scale of the current crisis was a global worry, and the perceived inescapability due to the interconnectedness of countries and financial institutions worldwide, has raised many questions as to the sustainability of the system.

One can further investigate the role or the necessity of the crisis as a formative event to enlighten the broad public of the fundamental flaws in the system. On the one hand, the flaws were destined to present themselves in the unsustainability of current paradigms and the resulting major shocks to the system which were expected to occur, but on the other hand, the shock effect was amplified, and perhaps necessary, in the sudden bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September 2008, which was soon after referred to as Black Monday. For many, this sudden shock, similar to and building on 9/11, constituted, to quote sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, the turn of society from a solid into a liquid state (Bauman 2000). This means that we are no longer living in a solid state of living and working, where things move slowly, changes occur gradually, and society is generally stable. Instead, contemporary society shows itself through fast changes, rapid technological development and increasing insecurity. Hence, for the general public, the economic crisis may have been the starting point of a publicly known liquid era (Bauman 2000), where nothing is secure anymore, and there are no general frameworks (i.e., ideologies) to rely on in our daily functioning. However, digging deeper into this issue, there are (at least) eleven underlying factors that enhances understanding of the causes of the crisis. These factors have mutually influenced each other, and in conjunction led to the great crisis of 2008, and also result or are amplified by the crisis. Notwithstanding the incompleteness of the list of causes, as there were ample other factors that contributed to the crisis, the following are important to understand particularly the relevant factors

pertaining of organizations. Any viable alternative paradigm needs to address these concerns to be able to be theoretically and practically relevant, and it is only through explicitly addressing these concerns that workplace dignity can be relevant. Hence, each of these are discussed below.

## 1.3 Manifestations of the Crisis

### 1.3.1 Neoliberalism

Existing not so much as a well-established ideology which people claim to be proponents of, neoliberalism has been used as a general framework to understand post-WWII economic-political behavior of primarily the US (See Harvey [2005](#) for an excellent introduction to neoliberalism; Morgan [2015](#); Varoufakis [2015](#)). Neoliberalism has guided internal and foreign politics of the US since the 1950s, when the US sought to find a strong counter-ideology to Communism, which at the same time provided an economic alternative to prevent a reoccurrence of the 1929 Wall Street crash. Influenced by economists such as Hayek and Friedman, the US followed a path of neoliberalism since the 1950s, and after experimenting with it in Chile after the coup which replaced Allende with the dictator Pinochet, used it as their primary export product. While there is no strict definition of what neoliberalism is, and while it exists in many hybrid forms (Harvey [2005](#)), there are some key features to the paradigm which transcends the US, and which can be perceived to exist globally. The key philosophical idea underlying neoliberalism is unlimited economic freedom for individuals, and beyond this, economic freedom extended to corporations (Harvey [2005](#); Jessop [2002](#); Morgan [2015](#)). Unlimited economic freedom, however, is impossible as freedom is limited by nature, as we in our contemporary world intuitively perceive those limits, be it either through prohibition of things such as child labor, or as the limitation of one's freedom where it touches upon someone's else freedom (more about this in Chap. 3). In other words, there is even a layman's intuition that unlimited economic

freedom is bounded by morality, hence it cannot serve as a viable paradigm to construct economic life.

However, beyond the obvious limitations of such a paradigm, there are other, more important features that define neoliberalism and which have been influential in ways economies have been operating and thus how organizations and workers have experienced the ‘market’ and their fundamental experience of work. To achieve ‘full’ economic freedom as proposed by neoliberal thinkers, it is necessary that governments create open markets and stimulate free trade and private property (Harvey 2005). To do so, governments should deregulate, privatize, and withdraw from social benefits (i.e., unemployment, health care benefits etc.) so that the invisible hand of the market can do its work, and provide opportunities for everyone who works hard to achieve success. This myth, propagated since the 1950s and in particular during the 1970s and 1980s by Reagan in the US and Thatcher in the UK, has become enormously influential in determining economic policy (Morgan 2015). Deregulation has been a relevant phenomenon to study, as it indeed became one of the central policies in the latter half of the twentieth century, and led amongst others to the rapid financial innovation at Wall Street (e.g., embodied by Collateralized Debt Obligations and Credit Default Swaps which became the primary financial products that spurred the crisis). However, at the same time, we may observe the regulating tendencies from large corporations towards government policies. Hence, under neoliberalization, governments became primary means of redistribution, but no longer in the traditional way of distributing economic surplus towards the poor, but actually the reverse, where selective deregulation favors large companies (e.g., through various tax agreements), and at the same time, stricter regulation is biased towards the favor of corporations over the ordinary citizens (Harvey 2005).

Global neoliberal institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, have contributed to this very aim. This point is important to address as the hybridity of neoliberalism has blurred the reality, in tight conjunction with propaganda. For instance, the war in Iraq (the one started in 2003) could be sold as a war to prevent dictator Saddam Hussein to use weapons of mass destruction (which he did not have), while in fact it was (yet another) experiment to neoliberalize a country, which

has led to great instability and civil war in the country that has continued to this day (Klein 2007). Meanwhile, instead of blaming the US for the intervention and destroying any possible stability in the country, a propaganda war has evoked and strengthened a strong anti-Muslim sentiment across the Western world. The rise of ISIS (or IS; Islamic State) cannot be seen without the US intervention in Iraq (and previous wars in the area), and in total being part of a larger neoliberalization across the world. It has been well-documented that when the US invaded Iraq in 2003, they did not attempt to involve the Iraqi people or army in the rebuilding of the post-Hussein country, but instead preferred private contractors, primarily from the US (Stiglitz 2008). It is not surprising that the unemployed army, with little job prospects, were vulnerable to radicalization and a deep hatred against the West, and indeed came to form ISIS. It is the same weapons and military equipment that the US used to invade Iraq and left behind after they returned home, which are now used by ISIS in a new domination in the region. Meanwhile, it is the private companies (such as Blackwater which is now Academi) that have made huge profits on this war, a too often forgotten back story into the reasons of warmongering of Western countries.

Many authors have pointed towards the effects of neoliberalism on the economy and society (and its assumptions about human behavior; Jessop 2002; Klein 2007; Sedlacek 2011; Seymour 2014; Van Apeldoorn and Overbeek 2012). Yet, it is necessary to relate neoliberalism to work (and management studies) to understand how economic-political paradigms have influenced theory about work and workers. One work-related effect of neoliberalism has been the focus on financialization (Mason 2015; Thompson 2003, 2013), which is described by the notion that companies, starting with financial institutions and spreading across to other corporations, obtained an increasing amount of their profits not by selling 'real' products, but through financial engineering. There are several changes involved with the financialization of society (see e.g., Mason 2015), but the general notion here is that through financial products, companies are able to earn profits without having to produce anything. Money can be created artificially, and then lent to individuals or other companies not to invest in the real economy but to remain within the financial realm.

At the same time, company profits are invested to remain in this financial sphere to create further profits. As Mason (2015) has shown, the rise of financialization has co-aligned with stagnating wages (see also Wisman 2013), or in other words, workers across the Western world generally have not seen their real income increased over the last decades, while there has been a huge increase of money flowing through the financial systems. The important lesson to be learned here is that the financial economy is increasingly operating in a separate space from the workers, or the real economy. Hence, profits and financial investments are made without any value being added to the real economy, to people or to collective well-being or welfare. The possibility to gain profits with complete absence from any real value (economic, symbolic and so on) is an essential aspect of neoliberalism, as fairness, justice or dignity are not taken into account as outcomes in itself. Solely the capability to make a profit in the financial sphere, and a very limited number of people (the 1%) who profit in reality from this forms the basis of financialization (Thompson 2013). Subsequently, this is sold to the public through propaganda of a trickle-down effect where the argument is that profits made among the top will trickle down the economy through investment for the 99% (Varoufakis 2015). The most problematic feature of this is the absence of true value, and the notion that huge profits can be taken out of an artificial financial system that coexists in an exclusive way, which is not attainable for the large majority of people, who need to work hard for a salary. At the same time, it is these people who are led to believe that initiatives such as the basic income (Mason 2015) are unattainable as it separates the idea of an inherent relationship between work and income. It is evident that this relationship is already broken completely, when a minority is able to accumulate huge profits at the expense of society. However, financialization is not the only neoliberal effect on work, but commodification of work has gone hand-in-hand with it.

As neoliberalism proposes economic freedom as the ultimate tool towards human progress, this assumes that any aspect of human life can be commodified (and brought to the market). This has increasingly been the case, and has had two main effects. First, labor is commodified (Harvey 2005; Morgan 2015), where the meaning of work and

the value of labor for human beings have evaporated, and which are replaced by the idea of the disposable worker. Labor is nothing more than a commodity, which can be exchanged in the labor market. This idea has had profound effects on what labor means to be in the contemporary labor market. In the early 1990s, the first signs of what would be called the 'new psychological contract' emerged in the management literature (e.g., Sims 1994), which was nothing less than a neoliberalization of employment relationships, or in other words, the commodification of labor. The old psychological contract, which was defined by stable relationships between workers and their organizations and characterized by collective representation by trade unions, job security and gradual career opportunities within a firm, was replaced by a transactionalization of the employment relationship (Rousseau 1995). As employment relationships were no longer aimed at the long-term, there was an increasing need for bureaucracy, as organizational memory ceased to exist with people job-hopping, staying briefly with their organizations, and moving quickly between organizations. To retain control over how things should be done in organizations (as there were fewer experienced seniors with extended knowledge about the organization and its practices and ways of working), a system developed based on procedures, bureaucracy and rules, which is currently particularly notable in the UK.

While only very few authors directly linked neoliberalism with changing employment relationships (Harvey 2005; Morgan 2015), the two have been strongly linked to each other. But the commodification of labor has been extended on many levels which have been discussed previously: how neoliberalism has influenced general theorizing in the field of work and organizational psychology (Bal 2015, 2016), how workplace flexibility has been primarily a function of neoliberalism (Bal and Jansen 2016), and how individualization has operated as a neoliberal outcome (Bal and Lub 2015). Hence, neoliberalism has had a major influence on contemporary management theory, even though this has been largely neglected in the literature. In sum, neoliberalism as an economic-political paradigm has had a huge effect on societies worldwide, and at the same time influenced workplace practices to such an extent that it has been overlooked in the management literature.

However, neoliberalism has created many societal and ecological problems, which will be discussed in some more detail below to understand what an alternative paradigm needs to build upon.

### 1.3.2 Individualism

Closely related to the rise of neoliberalism is the individualization of society (Bauman 2000). Individualization can be traced back to the nineteenth century with the rise of psychology (the scientific interest in the individual human being) and art as the individual appreciation of a person towards the world and what is created in the world. This replaced the idea of the human being as primarily being part of a collective group of people (Oyserman et al. 2002). In a philosophical sense, a century earlier Immanuel Kant raised the interest in the value of the individual human being, in his theorizing about the categorical imperative and the notion of human dignity. These trends have led to the conceptualization of what it is to be a human being in terms of personhood, identity and self-awareness, such that it is common to describe oneself first and foremost as an individual, a *me*, rather than a *we*, that is, the identity of a person is defined by the group of which the person is part of (Barresi 2012). This has far-reaching implications for how people function in the contemporary world, but this cannot be understood without the neoliberal twist to individualization. As neoliberalism defines its goals within private property, and the enhanced liberties of the individual human being, neoliberalism has been not only an economic theory, but also a theory of individualism. Neoliberalism proposes that each individual is responsible and accountable for her or his own actions (Harvey 2005). The ultimate consequence of this idea is that the collective as such no longer has a real meaning (cf. Thatcher's 'There is no such thing as society'), and thus individuals are becoming self-reliant. This is played out on an instrumental level, where people are now individually responsible for having a job, obtaining education, housing, health care and pensions, as the state no longer provides it collectively due to deregulation and withdrawal from the social system (Bal and Lub 2015; Harvey 2005). Beyond this, it also operates



at the symbolic level, where individualization is deeply ingrained in how society functions (Bauman 2000). People are now perceived to be responsible for their own affairs, and everything that is part of human life is individualized to the responsibility of the person, including someone's well-being, health, chances on the labor market, physical appearance, and so on. Luck and ill fortune are no longer attributes of chance but become personalized; people doing well are doing so because they worked hard for it (i.e., the false idea of meritocracy), and people suffering from illness or by not having a job, should attribute this as their own failure, in their inability to care for themselves.

Collective protection or representation no longer provides individuals with a safety net to fall back to as they carry an individualized responsibility for their well-being. Alcoholism, drug addiction, obesity, unemployment, and homelessness are all consequences of the individual not managing her or his own life well. They are to be blamed, and beyond this, ill fortune, sickness and so on are now increasingly seen as individual problems, not extending to the collective level (Bauman 2000). For instance, in the UK, it is hardly acknowledged that there is 'a drinking problem' across society, while at the same time individual alcoholics are singled out and their problems are attributed to their incapability to manage their own lives (e.g., as a result of traumas experienced in childhood; Louis Theroux 2016). In sum, individualization acts through different ways into perceptions of how society is constructed, and how individual behavior is analyzed and judged upon.

In relation to the workplace, individualization has had a major impact on how employment relationships are constructed and perceived to operate (Bal 2015; Bal and Lub 2015). It is not only through research that directly focuses on individualization of work relationships (e.g., research on individualized agreements; Rousseau et al. 2006), but also more fundamentally in many of the underlying paradigms of research in management that individualization constitutes the unacknowledged basis of normative views concerning the implementation of employment relationships in organizations. For instance, popular topics such as proactivity, engagement, psychological contract, idiosyncratic deals, job crafting, flexibility, and even leadership have been conceptualized in dominant individualistic tendencies, operationalizing these topics as individualistic

experiences of workers, but at the same time attributing individualistic responsibilities towards workers to maintain and negotiate these aforementioned behaviors in the contemporary workplace. Hence, contemporary research not only finds differences in proactivity among workers, and how these differences may explain different levels of career success, but also recommends that workers need to become more proactive so that they survive and thrive in the modern workplace. This no longer questions the validity of the need for proactivity, but legitimizes its existence and contributes to a wider belief of individualized responsibility to become proactive, if possible at all, as these constructs can only exist in relative distributions where certain people tend to be more proactive than others. The more important question here is about the role of proactivity in the workplace, and in particular its changing role under a dignity-paradigm, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chap. 7. In sum, individualization under a neoliberal paradigm has increased the individual responsibility of workers to be self-reliant and to ensure their own success in having a job, negotiating their working conditions, and be employable. As ample research has shown, this belief is unattainable for the majority of workers, who are then pushed into job insecurity and precarious employment (Bauman et al. 2015).

### 1.3.3 Profit Maximization and Shareholder Value

As stated above, one of the key aspects of neoliberalism has been the commodification of labor. In other words, the notion of labor and the potential meaning of work have been reduced to a mere instrumental perspective on work and the role of workers. Meaning has disappeared as a valued of work itself, and jobs contribute primarily to organizational goals, rather than having an intrinsic value (Thompson 2013). In some ways, we observe a return (or continuation of) the Taylorist era of the late 1800s and early 1900s, where an organization can hire workers when necessary, and does so on a flexible, contractual basis. The organization retains the opportunity to fire the employee when no longer in need (Bal and Jansen 2016). In conjunction with digitalization and advancing technology, the rational organization strives to make

workers redundant, replace them by robots which tend to be more reliable in delivering a standardized product, and over time are much cheaper than workers (Harvey 2005; Mason 2015). This is not a new discovery, but represents the ultimate business logic: profitability is the ultimate goal, and through prioritizing this goal, any mean is acceptable. Such a perspective legitimizes the use of tax havens, construction of complex financial products, laying off workers, hiring workers solely on a short-term contractual basis and preferably through zero-hour contracts which give the organizations ultimate flexibility over their workers without any obligation beyond paying them for work delivered, refusal to provide any training or development to workers unless there is a direct case for return on investment, refusal to hire older workers who tend to be more expensive, outsourcing to cheaper countries, use of child and slave labor in third-world countries, and so on. All of these practices, which can be questioned on an ethical basis, become normalized in a system where people are all obsessed with consuming cheap products (Bauman 2000; Gabriel 2015), resulting from a paradigm where organizations only exist to make profits, and in extension to serve the purposes of shareholders and/or top managers. While financial viability is an important criterion for the success of any organization, the overly myopic focus of organizations on maximization of profits (e.g., by various constructions to avoid paying tax and offshore profits to tax havens), is not only endangering the system as such, but also its own viability in the long run. It does not need to be explained in full detail how the avoidance of paying taxes by organizations deprive governments from making necessary investments in infrastructure and social justice to maintain a decent society. By actively withdrawing from their role in society beyond profit-making machines, organizations have lost their ability to define organizational performance in ways other than profit maximization. Hence, they lost their relevance in terms of societal functioning, and related to financialization, have placed themselves outside of society in another corporate sphere where finance seems to be the driving force of any action (instead of following or facilitating the achievement of goals). The limitations of this approach are currently visible in the general malfunctioning of global society, as evidenced in trends such as climate change, inequality and rising poverty.

### 1.3.4 Climate Change

The general lack of environmental concern by large corporations is well-known and documented (e.g., Klein 2014). Notwithstanding the obvious lack of concern in authoritarian regimes for combatting climate change, it is also apparent how climate change is not sufficiently addressed in capitalist democracies. The link between neoliberalism (or capitalism) and climate change provides an explanation of why real change is not likely to occur when it comes to organizations acting upon what is best for the environment and the long-term concerns of the world, with increasing evidence of a relationship between neoliberalism, climate change and violent conflict (Hsiang et al. 2013; Kelley et al. 2015; Solow 2013). For instance, there is a perverse link between business and climate change to be seen in the melting of the North Pole, and the possibility to lay new superfast fibre-optic cables between London and Tokyo across the Arctic. This cable will increase the speed of data communication between London and Tokyo with 60 ms, which is primarily useful for high-frequency traders on the stock market (New Scientist 2012). Hence, this shows that climate change is primarily aiding (high-frequency) stock trade, and without taking into account any ethical issues, the two are merely in constant conflict with each other. When business interests dominate in the political domain, and when large organizations dictate the agendas of politicians, one can assume that any agreement on combatting climate change is limited by the powers influencing the negotiators around the table. Hence, reversing or alleviating the damaging impact of climate change on countries, cities, and the natural environment is not the primary responsibility or the *raison d'être* of large organizations. In contrast, large organizations are still dominated by profit motives and are generally unwilling to change their practices and vested interests. For instance, the propaganda which is used by for instance oil companies to proclaim that they invest in green energy is only used to mask their real profit basis (which is still oil and gas), and generally represents only a fraction of their total expenses. Moreover, their lack of commitment to really tackle climate change (even as a business model to generate profit), is resulting from

a situation where their power basis is deeply ingrained within existing structures, such as government and even royalty.

It is estimated that the Dutch royal family has about 5% of the shares of Shell (when individuals have more than 5% of shares within a company, it has to be made public) and therefore has considerable links with the company (which is one of the largest companies in the world). It is therefore not surprising that the Netherlands is lagging behind in the green revolution as compared to other European countries; the financial stakes for the company are too high to really address climate change, and thus they spend much effort into influencing public and political debates. The real problem concerning climate change is that it also results from neoliberalism and the way organizations are functioning, as profits at the expense of the environment is in no way discouraged or illegal (Klein 2014). As organizations are driven by profit motives, there is a strong incentive to exploit natural resources as long as it delivers immediate return-on-investment. There is no clear incentive for organizations to change their direction and commit to combatting climate change, which is another clear sign of a broken system (i.e., the physical world is destroyed for the benefit of a small minority), and at the same time, more radical solutions are needed beyond vague agreements such as being made at climate conferences (e.g., like the COP21 conference in Paris, 2015; see also Lomborg 2015).

### 1.3.5 Poverty

In the context of the topic of this book, it is easy and well justified to condemn global and unequal distributed poverty, while taking into account the overall global economic surplus and food availability to feed the world (Gustavsson et al. 2011; Hall et al. 2009). Hence, as suggested before, it is not so much the case whether enough food is produced to feed the world, but how it can be distributed in a fairer way such that hunger is reduced globally while at the same time local economies are stimulated and jobs are created for the people. However, a question of fairer distribution needs to be addressed in the context of global poverty. This poverty has not resulted just from

‘natural’ circumstances, but is also part of a neoliberal paradigm in which wealthy countries have exploited the Global South (Varoufakis 2015). In fact, over the last decades, economic growth has primarily benefitted Western countries, while a decreasing amount of economic growth has gone to developing countries. It has not only been large manufacturers who have benefitted from cheap labor in developing countries (i.e., through cheap labor they were able to exploit local communities while obtaining huge profits themselves), but in general one can observe a neocolonial attitude towards the developing world (which is used in lack of a better term; if there is a clear difference between developed world and developing world, as these term are already problematic in themselves). The fundamental problem here is that global poverty is resulting from inequalities through exploitation of the Global South by the Western countries (US, Canada, Europe and Australia). This includes economic exploitation and domination where natural resources, human capital (e.g., through brain drains), and financial capital are extracted from investment in developing countries towards Western countries and tax havens worldwide (including Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands), and thus are used to increase profitability in the West. However, it also includes a return ticket of Western domination towards developing countries, as ideology (i.e., neoliberalism), dominant views, and practices are exported towards these countries, without enabling a truly multicultural global economy and organizational practices that are tolerant of different cultural traditions and beliefs, rather than exporting a set of predefined neoliberal values from the West across the world. Therefore, introducing dignity to the field of management studies has to take into account the various cultural connotations of the term, and thus be resulting from multicultural perspectives (e.g., Lucas et al. 2013).

### 1.3.6 Income Inequality

It should come as no surprise that income inequality plays an important role in understanding the contemporary workplace, to be able to develop an alternative paradigm for management. While the economic

crisis of 2008 served the general public an insight to the malfunctioning contemporary economic-political system, it was through rising income inequality that the public came to understand the immediate and more visible effects of the broken system (Galbraith 2012; Stiglitz 2012). It was before Piketty released his book (Piketty 2014) which presented a more historical and empirical underpinning of the inequalities within the system, that the worldwide Occupy movement captured the essence of it through protesting the inequality of wealth between the 99% vs. the 1%, the latter being all those who benefit from the unequal structures in society (Graeber 2013). Regardless of the validity of the 99% vs. the 1%, or the true distribution in society, it is the general perception that an increasing amount of people find themselves on the 'wrong' side of economic progress. Global inequality presents itself in many ways. First, it exists as the Western countries' exploitation of the developing world, as outlined in the previous section. This exploitation is still continuing today, with Africa and Asia being the cheap producers of the consumer societies in the West (Varoufakis 2015). Moreover, one can observe inequalities within regions, such as within Europe where traditional dependencies are neglected to create distinctions between the richer Northern countries as opposed to the suffering Southern-European countries, with France in between. These distinctions are created on the basis of economics, GDP growth, and national debt, but these are also used to 'individualize' inequalities; it is individual countries (such as Greece) who are blamed of making a mess of their country. Western countries and corporations apparently have little to do with the situation created in Greece, while at the same time they scavenge on the privatized sectors of the Greek economy where any opportunity to exploit and to earn profits are being taken advantage of (Varoufakis 2015). A familiar neoliberal rhetoric is used here to convince the public that it is morally right to do so, in the meantime blaming the Southern European countries for being greedy and lacking financial discipline. The causes of inequality, however, are largely resulting from neoliberal practices in conjunction with individualization of responsibility (Varoufakis 2015). It were the American and European banks who profited from the introduction of the euro in Greece by tricking the Greek government into purchasing shady financial products, in the same

way as many individuals, municipalities and pension funds across the Western world were deceived by financial institutions to acquire various malicious financial products. The Greeks were no different, but afterwards were blamed as an example of country-level financial recklessness to accentuate inter-country inequality.

A similar distinction can be observed within countries, where inequality co-exists along racial and cultural dimensions; in the US inequality is strongly racially biased, with wealth largely spread among the White population, and poverty among the Black and Hispanic population (Hall et al. 2016). In Europe, poverty and income inequality is biased against immigrants and (grand-)children of immigrants, who have hardly received proper (or dignified) chances to integrate in societies over the decades since the first immigrant arrived, and who have been downgraded to second-class citizens; they are neither Turks or Moroccans, nor are they Europeans (i.e., Belgians, Dutch, Germans, French), and left without a proper identity become victims of discrimination, inequalities, and poverty (Bauman 2000). Hence, it is inequality that cuts through societies, and makes the distinctions between various groups salient and underpins tensions which are seemingly based on racial differences. These distinctions, however, are largely resulting from neoliberalism (Harvey 2005), and result more from inequalities in income and opportunities for social mobility than racial differences per se. It is therefore not surprising that income inequality has been steadily rising since the 1970s (when neoliberalism became an official political doctrine), but enormously in the 1990s and 2000s, when neoliberalism became widespread and invaded European countries and others across the world (Galbraith 2012; Mason 2015).

Furthermore, inequality also manifests on the organizational level. In a neoliberal world which focuses on distinguishing the winners from the losers, another inequality is created between organizations that manage to control and dominate markets through monopolies, and those who are unable to do so, and hence operate in the margin, are taken over by large corporations, or disappear altogether. This is highly observable in the digital-technology economy, where large corporations, such as Google, Apple, and Facebook, have been able to control complete markets, and thereby pushing out or taking over competitors.



Moreover, having established their dominant positions in the market, it is noticeable how they use their positions to influence political processes. For instance, Google has been shown to have strong links with US presidents (Dayen 2016), and while betting for the 2016 presidential election on candidate Hillary Clinton (Barmann 2016), it was remarkable how quickly they turned their attention to the president-elect after Clinton lost. At the same time, through Google's activities and dominant position in the market has the power over many users of their services worldwide. Apple, at the same time, has not refrained from using undignified labor circumstances in the production of their iPhones (Lucas et al. 2013), all to increase their profit margin, and to exert more power over their markets. Facebook controls their dominant position for instance through blocking access on their website to an upcoming competitor (Tsu), thereby using means of censorship to dominate their respective market. The relevant issue here is that through neoliberal dynamics, it is a small minority of corporations that control the market, and when they have achieved their dominant positions, will engage in various activities to maintain the status-quo and their powerful positions. This process undermines the very idea of neoliberalism itself, which is about free markets in which parties can compete against one another openly. Monopolists control their markets amongst others via influencing political decision making, which may favor their positions compared to newcomers and smaller competitors. Through these ways, inequality between organizations is sustained and even increased, leading to markets where a small group of organizations have control over the complete market and blocking any (positive) change, while fiercely protecting the status quo. Additional evidence for this can be seen in the energy market, where a transformation from fossil fuels to renewable energy takes place at a very slow pace, and we have even seen oil companies blackmailing local communities not to reduce gas drilling in response to increases of earthquakes, such as in the north of the Netherlands (Pieters 2016). Hence, inequality in its various forms is often associated with power abuse by those who are able to win the competition, as it seems that the only way they sustain dominance is via undignified practices.

Finally, even within organizations, there is evidence of inequality having an impact on how organizations operate. This is most clearly visible through the rise in compensation of top managers over the last decades, compared to stagnating wages for ordinary workers. Research has shown how not only wages have stagnated for workers since the 1970s (Wisman 2013), but also how debts (e.g., mortgages, study loans, credit card debts) have increased substantially for the working people, while at the same time, top managers have been able to accumulate a higher percentage of company profits, through salaries, bonuses, and shares. Inequality between lower-level employees and higher-level managers has always existed, and as such does not form a fundamental problem to the healthy functioning of organizations. However, as we have seen inequality within organizations increasing over the last decades, this raises two deeper issues. The first issue concerns the relationship between the compensation of lower level employees and the compensation of top managers. Public outrage concerning the compensation of managers in financial institutions and in public organizations (e.g., universities, hospitals) has soared over the last years, but this should first be understood as a relational phenomenon, where the outrage concerns the increasing difference between the pay of the managers as compared to the pay of the ordinary workers, which has been stagnating over the years. As we have seen very little public outrage about the incomes of celebrities, artists, sportsmen and—women, it is not so much an anger directed towards the absolute height of the income, but a disapproval of an income of a manager relative to others in the organization, or the use of public money in rewarding individual managers. In other words, people perceive that the income is undeserved in comparison to the workers, who have been working as hard, or harder for a fraction of the money. Thus, this concerns the relative nature of income itself, and relates to issues of equity (Adams 1965). The second issue, however, concerns the absolute height of the total income itself, and raises the issue of how much is enough. The CEO of Goldman Sachs earned a total salary of \$23 million in 2015, which represents such an artificial number that it no longer relates to any real meaning but only confirms the artificiality of finance. However, all the money that is spent on top managers' income is withdrawn from the system, and comes at the expense

of some lower level workers or people across the supply chain. Thus, the fundamental question here is what should be fair for managers in terms of how they should be compensated, as well as how money earned through organizational activities should be invested and distributed. The \$23 million dollar given to one person is not only drawn from the system (and hence paid by for instance the Greek government, and ultimately by tax payers), but could also be used as investments in society through which it may be transferred from artificiality into real value (for society). However, at the moment, there is no system or incentive to do so, and no theoretical paradigm on which these decisions could or should be made.

In sum, inequality raises questions of equity, fairness and justice, and is about the extent to which a society can achieve consensus as to the differences between those who work hard and have unique skills versus those who have lower needs to excel, put in less effort into their jobs, and are motivated to work until it suffices, or, to the extent it enables them to lead a dignified life.

### **1.3.7 Indifference and Populism in Politics and Democracy**

The next issue pertains to a somewhat distinct feature of organizational life, but represents a fundamental problem of what the organization is and how it can be conceptualized. It is now widely apparent that the political process is disturbed across many different countries. This is not only the result of corrupting forces within politics (to be discussed in the next section), but also from the rising general indifference of the public towards the political process. Consequently, the rise of populist movements in politics can be understood as a reflection of the indifference towards politics, and a mobilization of anger towards rising inequality and corrupted political processes. However, it should also be understood in the mutual reflection between politics and society (Žižek 2001); in other words, the decades of indifference of politicians towards the electorate should be taken into account to understand why populism thrives, as the populist movement takes the electorate serious,

but also represents the reflected indifference of the electorate through legitimizing racism, discrimination and so on in the political discourse. Populist movements generally represent little dignified values, as scapegoating and separating groups within societies based on ethnicity, religion, or race can in no way represent a dignified approach towards the structuring of social reality. The deeper question, however, pertains to how a lack of involvement of the people in the political processes has led to the rise of anger and populism. The analysis that neoliberalism as a political-economic paradigm that has been sold to the wider public as meritocracy (Harvey 2005; Seymour 2014), has caused much of the populist movement, is not a radical one, and shows the inherent contradictions of neoliberalism, or more cynically stated, the ultimate aim of neoliberalism. The rise of populism and the hatred of the people towards the elite are, however, across many populist movements redirected towards the more vulnerable groups in society, such as ethnic minorities (Jones 2014). Populist movements can thus help neoliberal forces in society to distract the public from the real causes of inequality (not the immigrants, but the ruling elites...), but to date this analysis has been effectively counteracted by dominant forces in society through labeling such a statement as socialism, which in the US and the UK can be perceived as a strong attack on a political movement. More threatening is the rising belief that people have become indifferent of politics and inclined towards radical populism as a result of their lost faith in democracy. A widespread belief after the disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the US, was that Iraqi people were unable to implement democracy, as the people were not ready and probably would never be ready for real democracy. A similar argument is often made about Russia, and that Russians strive for strong leaders who may become more authoritarian than democratic, as the people ultimately long for strong leaders. The invalidity of such an argument can be understood when one obtains the knowledge that democracy was never the aim of the occurring changes in these countries (Klein 2007). While the aim of the changes always was to install neoliberalism, it has affected the popularity of representative political systems, and democracy. The inherent danger of democracy has always been that through democratic means

democracy is abolished, and that the people elect leaders who become nondemocratic over time. However, this represents the superficial story to democracy, where democracy is threatened by extremists.

The true danger to democracy, however, resides in mainstream politics which ultimately represents no choice but liberal democracy (or neoliberalism). This is especially notable in (social-)democratic parties, such as the Democrats in the US, Labour in the UK, SPD in Germany, and the PvdA in the Netherlands, which increasingly represent neo-liberal values, and have no problems with cooperating with liberal-conservative parties. As the mainstream offers no real choice to the electorate (all parties represent neoliberalism under the flag of liberal democracy), disappointed and angry people feel forced to move outside of the centre to the extremes of populism. A solution to the rising indifference towards politics and the resulting populist movements, demands that democracy has to be explained, and revived in order to present real choices to the people rather than more of the same in neo-liberal values. Indifference is more dangerous than anger, as it represents a withdrawal from the process, an exclusion of people to what democracy represents. However, ironically enough, the re-engagement of people who had become indifferent through radical populism also shows that indifference can be reversed, and that people may become involved again in the process, and even though it may at glance look like withdrawal, in fact represents an act of re-engagement of the people in politics. The question, then, is how this can be translated into organizational life, or how the indifferent attitude of the modern worker towards (democracy in) organizations can be transformed, not into radical exclusive models, putting blame on vulnerable groups in society, but towards positive changes, inclusiveness of groups into society and organizations and so on.

### 1.3.8 The Rise of Lobbycracy and Corpocracy

In addition to the observed indifference of the people towards politics, it can also be observed that politics is increasingly influence by corporate interests (Wedel 2009). It is now well documented and known

by the general public that politics are deeply ingrained with corporate interests, and that political decision making is more involved with fulfilling the needs and wishes of corporates than what is important for the people. This is referred to by the use of lobbyocracy, which indicates the influence of corporates on political decision making through lobbying (Varoufakis 2015). Others go further and speak of a corpocracy, which reflects the state as being governed primarily by corporates rather than independent politicians (Wedel 2009). Hence, it is not surprising that people have become indifferent to the political process as it may seem corrupted, and people have consequently turned away from it. But this is not the end of the story, as it may go deeper than this observation. There is now evidence of how deep the connection is between corporate interests and politics. For instance, the connection between the large financial institutions and the government are clear and sign of a deep corrupting process (Mason 2015; Varoufakis 2015). Moreover, the links between US politicians such as Dick Cheney (vice-president under George W. Bush) and military and energy companies (e.g., Halliburton) that were hired and made huge profits on the Iraqi war (Klein 2007; Wedel 2009), show that there are virtually no boundaries for organizations to exploit and make profits. The war in Iraq and the resulting chaos which has led to hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths over the years since 2003, and the knowledge of the money that was made by US companies who resided directly in government positions is to be condemned in every possible way. There is no way in which the death of one person can be defended on the basis of organization profitability, let alone the death of so many people. This merely confirms the complete bankruptcy of the current political-economic model, and the sheer need for alternatives. It is only the seeming complexity of reality and the difficulty of posing potential alternatives that people have turned their attention away and deny reality for themselves. It does not have to be explained in detail that any future organizational paradigm can only exist on the basis that profits may never be prioritized above the lives of human beings, and this can only be achieved when there is a stricter distinction between corporate interests and the political process.

### 1.3.9 The Rise of the Surveillance State

A final societal trend to be discussed is the rise of the surveillance state. This is largely due to the rise of technology which is deeply embedded in contemporary lives and organizations (Mason 2015). While some have referred to a technological revolution (indicating a third large revolution after the agricultural and industrial revolution), it is apparent that there is some truth in the notion that the idea of personhood or identity is profoundly changed when people have both a physical and a simultaneous digital existence (Žižek 2001), with the latter as an equivalent at best and a caricature at worst. It cannot be denied that the internet and the possibility for people to have online presence 24/7 have changed people's lives dramatically. At the same time, the contemporary digital lives as separate entities as well as reflections of physical behavior have become the 'new gold'; big data provide companies and governments to collect information about people's behaviors at an enormous scale. All the efforts the East-German Stasi had to put in collecting data about their civilians can now be gathered without any hesitation or restraint by both governments and organizations using digital means, and the recent past has learned that they are not afraid to do so. On another level, these data can be used to predict and control people, and within organizations, digitalization has enhanced the importance of control mechanisms over trust. Too often, it has been neglected that digitalization manifests through its psychological dimension; it only obtains relevance when it reveals the secrets of human behavior. Notwithstanding decades of scientific research on human behavior in the social space and the workplace, big data tell another story, which is context free and not bounded by any theoretical dimension imposed by scientific research, which allows the user, be it a government or a company, to generalize and conclude on what can be seen as the core drivers of human behavior. The digital world reflects the deepest secrets and passions of the human being, in its escape from work into use of social media and its potential for unlimited access and connection to friends and yet unknown friends, until the darker escape into pornography, violent games, and movie clips of beheadings at Youtube. All of these

provide a glimpse into what lies beneath, and generalized by big data filter out any nuance and zoom in into the weaknesses of human existence and offers ways for exploitation. That was the great lesson of Bentheim's Panopticon, which taught that surveillance is not strictly needed, as the perception of potentially being watched is enough to alter behaviors. This is what currently is happening in society, limiting the freedom of human expression, pushing into predefined action repertoires as defined by those in control, be it the government or organizations. Whilst we are confronted with a steady stream of propaganda telling that contemporary society and workplace has to be creative and innovative as we are living in the knowledge and digital economy (Mason 2015), the reverse is actually the case; creativity is hampered when people are living in the contemporary surveillance state, and without knowing it, the behavioral potential is dictated by what is seen as appropriate, fitting within the frame of reference as any deviation may potentially be punished, and in any case never forgotten, stored in the digital archive or the internet to be used against anyone in case needed. This phenomenon has created a workplace stripped away of the freedoms that were defining the individual work experience in its ultimate existence.

It is not surprising to see attention being paid to call centers as the typical example of the workplace stripped of any individual privacy and exposed to total control and surveillance (Boussebaa et al. 2014). It is in this environment that the worker has lost its place as a human being, and has become fully robotized, in any case unnecessary as being exchangeable for a speaking computer, yet not fully replaced due to costs and limitations of computers vs. real human beings. These jobs find themselves at the bottom of the corporate ladder, and the worker doing the job is part of the precariat, typically on a zero-hour contract with no security to enhance the perception of exchangeability with a robot. However, it is insufficient to attribute the effects of digitalization to the precariat only. Earlier work has argued and shown that the middle-class is affected by it (Stiglitz 2012), and the creation of a Panopticon in the digitalized workplace means that all jobs are affected. It is not only the unskilled or low-skilled jobs which are dictated by strict control mechanisms, but to a large extent every job is affected. Consultants, teachers, bankers, and office workers find themselves



in the same predicament; they are all living under the same control mechanisms, in which their behavior is closely monitored, stored and archived, and where they carry an individualized responsibility over their jobs and what they do at work. There is no escape anymore as we currently cannot imagine ourselves outside a digitalized world, and hence we have moved to the same position of the precariat, with unsecure jobs, individualized responsibilities and ultimately lacking proper freedom of expression. In sum, it can be concluded that the digital world has affected personal lives and workplaces profoundly, and that it has raised the possibility to exert control over people, who unknowingly alter their behavior, through which freedom is eroded. The ultimate consequence is that trust has become meaningless as monitoring can undo any undefined subjectivity in human relationships at work. Hence, in a surveillance state where objective information about behavior is readily available, there is no apparent need for organizations to care about any of the 'soft' aspects of management (Greenwood 2002). On the one hand, 'objective' data tell decision makers how to act, while through means of propaganda, the workers and public can be made to believe. There are two particular aspects which need to be discussed in order to fully understand the need for an alternative theory: leadership and greenwashing.

### 1.3.10 Lack of Integrity in Leadership

There have been multiple calls for new types of leadership resulting from the economic crisis. One such a call which has been increasingly popular in the media as well is the need for self-management and self-leadership (see e.g., Kostera 2014). The core problem which these calls address is the lack of integrity in contemporary leadership (Stiglitz 2012). As organizations and politicians are mainly self-interested, there is no need to behave ethically, which thus allows for any behavior that enhances the outcomes of self-interest (Klein 2014). The question is whether leaders carry an inherent responsibility to take care for their followers, and thus whether integrity is something that can be expected from leaders. Stiglitz (2012) shows that this perspective is currently absent from

economic thinking, as a dominance of rent seeking behaviors allows companies to focus on profitable practices, regardless of their impact on society. It is thus not surprising that scholars have come up with a more bottom-up, follower-directed approach towards leadership (see e.g., Spisak et al. 2015). When leaders cannot be trusted (anymore), followers may take matters into their own hands, and perceive leadership to be more of a process of achieving things than residing within a person. Leadership residing in people may pose great difficulties in remaining ethical and to be able to a priori judge the ethical consequences of actions. Indeed, it is noticeable how absent felt responsibility has been during the economic crisis of 2008, and how little corporate leaders have spoken out and acted upon their role of leaders of large firms, and thus having a responsibility not only to take care for their own employees, but also beyond their firms. As this can be seen throughout the world, this refers to more systemic failure of how corporations operate and how people in those corporations are able to distance themselves from the effects their corporations have on those outside the firm (and the planet as such). This is not mere short-termism, such as is the case with oil companies who protect their interest in selling oil and not to invest in renewable energy, at the expense of destroying the world in the long-term. It is also a manifestation of how corporations are managed in a hierarchical system, where (top) managers fail to fulfill their roles of leaders, to enact a duty of care (Gabriel 2005) towards the people they ‘manage’, and how people lower at the career ladder are made dependent upon those above them in terms of performance appraisals, promotions, and extensions of their contracts. There is nothing new about this observation, while at the same time it constitutes a recipe for work practices that violate ethical norms, as power resides in the hands of the few, who have great things at stake, a strong financial motive for profits (or rent seeking; Stiglitz 2012), and empowered by the system feel little accountability to those below them, who are merely dependent upon them as well. It is therefore not strange to see how leadership, like trust, has eroded, and essentially has become meaningless as well. Leadership, even though theorized in terms of authenticity or charisma, has become transformative, as it has fundamentally influenced dynamics of work. While the management literature distinguishes between transactional

and transformational leadership (Van Knippenberg and Sitkin 2013), the reality is that leaders have been transformative in making workplaces transactional, and thus the two have come together, joined forces, and have defined ‘real’ existing leadership in the workplace in increasingly narrow terms, objectifying the relationship between worker and leader, and mutual respect outsourced towards digital monitoring systems in which the two parties only have to comply, such that there is no real discussion anymore about the relevance and meaning of leadership, as it is downgraded towards the achievement of the goals set by top management. However, even top management feels powerless in a hostile capitalist environment, which allows for the dissonance managers may feel in enforcing compliance of their subordinates while at the same time feeling obliged to do as others do to remain competitive and thus distancing themselves from taking responsibility. It is thus reasonable that calls have been made for the complete abolishment of hierarchical leadership (and with it, its rhetorical cousins transformative, authentic and charismatic leadership), as they only contribute to status-quo and worsening of the situations (Hamel 2011; Kostera 2014). This demands that more radical perspectives are brought forward, which offer ways in which leadership not revolves around a single person or a limited number of people, but which can be developed within situations where input from multiple stakeholders ensures a more ethical approach towards the effects and outcomes of leadership processes. Hence, this book will in detail describe the ways in which this paradox may be addressed: people at work may have needs for strong leadership to guide them into the direction that an organization should be going, but at the same time, strong leadership may force people into submissive positions in which they are stripped away from their power (Stohl and Cheney 2001). Workplace democracy, therefore, offers one way of resolving this paradox.

### 1.3.11 Corporate Greenwashing

One element that underpins the manifested lack of leadership in the workplace is corporate greenwashing. In an environment where leaders

do not experience a need to be accountable to society and lack a responsibility towards their employees and others outside the organization, it may result in what has been called greenwashing (Roulet and Touboul 2015). The essence of greenwashing is that companies pretend to be engaging in environment-friendly behaviors without being fully committed to it, whilst at the same time branding itself towards customers, government and the general public that it is intrinsically motivated to engage in these behaviors. The commitment of companies towards behaviors that do not directly benefit rent seeking, or profit making, is usually limited by the monetary availability. In other words, when companies are doing well, there may be stronger commitment to engage in environmentally right behaviors, while the real commitment is tested in less favorable situations. Moreover, Klein (2014) also convincingly showed how companies such as Virgin (led by Richard Branson) may applaud green behavior in public, but also lobbied intensely behind closed doors for maintenance of current practices (e.g., tax benefits for kerosene to fuel the Virgin airplanes). The important notion here is not so much that organizations engage in these actions, as it may be expected from a business case perspective to create an impression which can be sold to the public to relieve feelings of guilt for both sides (Žižek 1989), but that organizations are very much aware of what that responsibility *should* be. To engage in greenwashing, there is a notion that organizations (and managers) know what is important for society, and thus they pretend to be behaving accordingly. The knowledge about societal needs is a first step towards change, be it however obscured by organizations. Backfired by the anger among the attentive public elicited through greenwashing, it may actually constitute the foundations for the development of what societal needs entail, and how organizations may play a role in fulfilling those needs. As concluded before, it is not that it is unknown what should be done to counteract the malfunctioning practices dominating in organizations, but it is rather a question of how it could be managed and achieved. However, a deeper question also pertains to the core argument of this book, which is to argue that workplace dignity may provide such an alternative. When corporate greenwashing is dominating at the moment, introducing dignity to its 'toolkit' may only add another term to be used in a wide-scale

greenwashing movement. Hence, organizations may claim to be enacting dignity, but in reality refrain from it, which postulates the need for control mechanisms to avoid separation between speech and acting. Workplace democracy may provide such a mechanism, and will be discussed extensively later in the book.

## 1.4 An Alternative Theory?

All of the above discussed elements of the malfunctioning society lead to a single conclusion, which is that there is an urgent need for a radical alternative, which does not just move from capitalism to communism, from private property to shared property, from radical monetary incentive to radical intrinsic incentive based on collective needs. Instead, there is a need to move beyond this discussion, and as this book is not about a form of a political-economy, the central argument is to propose a theory that is developed bottom-up, and proposes how organizations can be founded within the current system, or changed from current practices into a redefined paradigm prescribing new ways of organizing. Even though this chapter has discussed various ways in which organizations malfunction and presented some first steps towards resolving these issues, it is apparent that there is lacking a fundament on which an alternative paradigm can be developed. This is important as proposed alternatives may just comply with the system, and may prove to be nothing more than ways in which dominant elites convince the general public that change is really happening, and that the status-quo can be defended. An example is the sharing-economy, which is coined to postulate an economy where people actively share, and thus consume less be of less damage to the planet. However, the new ‘sharing’ was readily commodified, and integrated with the neoliberal system, such as Airbnb, where people ‘share’ their free bedrooms, while at the same time the company earns billions with it. Moreover, many ethical start-up firms of the recent past are allowed by the larger firms as they legitimize a potential of change, while they operate in a margin and do not really endanger large corporations. An example is the Fairphone, which is a smartphone built through taking ethical concerns as much as possible

into account (e.g., that the phone is not produced through slavery or child labor). While this is crucially important to change the industry, the company does not endanger the big phone producers, such as Apple or Samsung, and thus, there is very little change observable in the industry despite the enormous (ethical) relevance of the Fairphone. But this is not the only problem, as companies that invest in doing good to society are not just resolving a situation where organizations fail to contribute to society. A famous example is the \$100 million gift by Facebook in 2010 to the US city of Newark to invest in the quality of education in public schools. The project failed to deliver tangible results, as the fundamental problem was that the investment did not involve local communities into how the money was spent. This corporate philanthropy should be understood within its context where large companies, and in particular the tech-giants such as Facebook, Apple, Google and Microsoft, invest millions of dollars in projects around the world, not only to protect their own interests and to create a positive image among the general public, but also as it undermines the democratic society; it is through these means that corporations are beyond the law, and are not subject to democratic control as governments are. Thus, while these corporations have no problems with avoiding taxes, they can spend their money through philanthropic means in ways dictated by their own interests and goals. The lack of democratic control over these actions allows these companies to exist beyond governments. Finally, it is not only that ethical companies tend to be tolerated in the margins and that large companies exist beyond democratic control, but also that seemingly radical business models built on the ‘sharing-economy’ (and terms used alike) are in fact only contributing to *more* neoliberalism in the workplace. Facebook is a prominent example here, which started as a very small initiative to connect fellow students with each other online, but which in a short time grew to become one of the largest firms in the world. However, beyond the activities that constitute the profit of this firm (selling of personal data for adverts), the firm can exist with a very small amount of workers creating huge amounts of profit. Going even further, companies such as Uber and Airbnb were able to commodify personal space (i.e., in one’s car or in one’s house), and make huge profits on this basis.

The problematic feature here is that these companies have arisen from the notion of sharing one's space with others, but transformed this into a billion-dollar industry, where the host company profits with the typical exploitation of workers (such as it the case with Uber), and at the same time endangering complete industries worldwide which were used to strict regulation (such as the taxi industry). These companies therefore not only scavenge on idealistic notions (of sharing), but also disrupt carefully crafted regulated industries where workers were relatively strongly protected and secure of their jobs. Through their activities, these companies place themselves beyond the law, and their defense is that the law has simply not caught up with their activities yet. In sum, proposed alternatives from the recent past may in fact just constitute neoliberal manifestations which only contribute rather than challenge existing practices. Therefore, one cannot escape the fact that a much more fundamental alternative paradigm is needed to address all of the problems described in this chapter. This entails a more philosophical exploration of how organizations could be built and developed. It is not sufficient to use existing terms such as justice or fairness, as these have been used for decades in the field of management studies, yet provide too little explicit guidance on how organizations can be built. It is therefore needed to postulate a more radical new paradigm, which informs the future of work, and the future of organizations. The next chapters, therefore, introduce workplace dignity, and build this theory from the philosophical underpinnings related to human dignity, until the practical implementation of workplace dignity in organizations. The next chapter will discuss the history of human dignity in philosophy, which provides the primary input into thinking about workplace dignity, and in particular Kantian dignity.

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# 2

## A Review of Human Dignity

### 2.1 Introduction

Before introducing the theory of workplace dignity in depth, this chapter reviews the broader landscape of human dignity to establish a foundation for the new theory. A theory of workplace dignity is in important ways different from human dignity, but in equally important ways builds upon the rich tradition of writers and writings about human dignity and how it has been defined in terms of what it is to be a human being, and how it differs from non-human beings such as animals. It is needed to explicitly describe what dignity means, how it has been developed philosophically in the past, and how it is still relevant for contemporary society (McCrudden 2013). Discussing dignity is impossible without taking into account the work of philosopher Immanuel Kant, and it is his work that forms the primary inspiration for the use of dignity in the newly postulated theory. However, as recent research has shown (Lucas 2015), dignity not only manifests at work in a Kantian sense; there is also evidence for the existence of dignity in line with Aristotelian virtue ethics, where people feel that they have earned their dignity, or perceive others to be behaving in a dignified way (which

are not strictly Kantian views on dignity). All of these are important to understand the relevance of dignity at work, and thus how a theory of workplace dignity can be postulated.

### 2.1.1 Uses of Dignity Across Languages

Before reviewing historical conceptualizations of dignity, it is useful to mention the cross-cultural difficulties of using a concept such as dignity. Dignity is an English term which may have a meaning which is hard to translate into other languages and cultures. It is therefore imperative to define its precise meaning in the context of this book. However, dignity as it will be currently conceptualized is also translated from German and Dutch (which have a similar original term for dignity). In German, dignity is described as '*Würdigkeit*', while in Dutch dignity is described as '*Waardigheid*'. Especially the Dutch translation or foundation of dignity has particular meaning, as it encompasses different words in the term: waar (true), waarde (value), aarde (earth), and aardigheid (kindness). Compared to translations to German and English, the Dutch term offers a unique insight into the meaning of dignity, as it includes various elements of what dignity entails. Chapter 3 will discuss in more depth the various dimensions and implications of the term and how it can be used to formulate a theory of workplace dignity. The tradition of human dignity theory stems primarily from European perspectives (i.e., Greek Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Renaissance perspectives; Düwell et al. 2014), and more recently dignity has been influenced substantially by US perspectives. Hence, the use of dignity cannot be ascertained without taking into account the cross-cultural aspects of the concept, but also the use of it through economic-political dominance of the US. It is not surprising, for instance, how Pinker (2008) in his now famous critique of dignity, in fact only partly addresses the problematic nature of dignity as a concept, but foremost criticizes the *use* of dignity by the US Council of Bioethics to legitimize and defend a particular political agenda backed by a religious (i.e., Christian Neo-Conservative) doctrine. While Pinker argued that it was problematic that it was not explained what dignity was (in the view of the Council) and how it

should guide policies, his main critique revolved around the use (and abuse) of dignity, for instance in the use of dignity by totalitarian regimes (e.g., Žižek 2001). It is, in Pinker's view, through the conceptual vagueness of dignity that it can be used globally, not only to promote the good, but also to legitimize oppression in name of dignity of a people (Hollenbach 2013). For instance, through proclaiming the dignity of a particular ethnic group or nationality, it can be used to exclude and dominate other ethnic minority groups. In this sense, dignity is hijacked to legitimize oppression, in particular of dominant Western views towards the rest of the world (Žižek 2001). While this book does not aim to resolve this complex issue, and partly escapes this debate through postulating a different theoretical framework (i.e., of the workplace rather than general human existence), it is nonetheless important to take into account the various uses of dignity across the world, and the potential misuse of dignity to promote a certain political agenda, which does not necessarily have to be aimed at promoting dignity of all the people. The remainder of the book, and in particular while developing the theory, will take intercultural perspectives into account, and aims to allow for different cultural interpretations and uses of the term. First, the history of dignity is discussed to understand how it has been used and operationalized over time.

## 2.2 Historical Uses of Dignity

Dignity has been used throughout history to indicate a variety of attributions of human beings. It was during the time of Ancient Greece that the concept of nobility (which would now be understood as dignity) was described as something virtuous, or of noble rank, which was attributed to the aristocracy (Ober 2014). This was followed up on by Roman thinkers, such as Cicero, who used the term in similar ways. The term dignity indeed results from the Latin *dignitas*, which can be translated as glory or prestige. This is referred to as the aristocratic use of the term dignity (Schroeder 2008), and indicates that some people are more dignified than others as they deserve their dignity through their actions or superior rank. This aristocratic view is largely based on distinguishing

people between those with and those without dignity. In other words, while some people have dignity as they are behaving according to their rank or status, others have no or little dignity. This exclusive approach to dignity may have been applicable in an era where it was justified to distinguish between people in society (such as slaves vs. noblemen), but it is not sufficient to apply to the contemporary workplace. However, it addresses an important notion about how dignity is sometimes perceived to be functioning in the world and the workplace, and how it may be attributed to leaders, as well as how dignity has been described in terms of those who live in circumstances where there is no dignity (e.g., in poverty). Dignity may be something which can be earned through having a particular status, and which may be related to the difference between a manager and a leader, the former resulting from a formal position while the latter results from having acquired a particular dignified status within a group. Hence, true leaders may reveal themselves through the dignity which comes with their position. It is noticeable how dignity has also been referred to as belonging to statesmen, both in ways of describing the position of statesmen as having some inherent dignity belonging to their position (Waldron and Dan-Cohen 2012), as well as a presupposition of their behaviors to be dignified, no matter what they in fact engage with. Yet, for the purposes of understanding how dignity can be used in the workplace, this is insufficient, as the notion of an aristocratic dignity may encompass a duty of leaders to be dignified but not necessarily implies one. In fact, an aristocratic notion of dignity may even legitimize the violation of it, as the implication of dignity as rank or status does not question the validity of the acquisition of the position, which may create a potential moral void in which leaders may freely act. For instance, the election of Barack Obama as the first black American president may have acted as an acquisition of his aristocratic dignity, which may have shaped the views of the global liberal public as being favorable towards him and his actions, thereby ignoring his willingness to engage in undignified actions, such as drone attacks involving killing of civilians across Yemen, Pakistan, Syria, Libya and other countries. Hence, this notion of dignity may undermine the idea of a leaders' duty to behave dignified, whichever this means in practical terms (e.g., the killing of innocent people to prevent potential

killing of a larger group of people, or the promotion of a certain political agenda of freedom in the name of liberal democracy).

However, the aristocratic dignity notion has not been the only one developed in history. Schroeder (2008) describes three other notions of dignity. *Comportment* dignity refers to a behaviorally achieved dignity which does not result from one's status or rank, such as it is the case with aristocratic dignity, but from one's behavior *despite* one's rank. In other words, people with a low status can still behave in a dignified way by responding to their predicament in ways not degrading themselves but lifting themselves beyond their status. Many stories about concentration camps show examples of comportment dignity, where some prisoners behave dignified in the most horrific circumstances (e.g., Levi 2014; Sjalamov 2005). Hence, it is in these horrific circumstances that the wonder of what it is to be a human being is exemplified. Primo Levi's work explains that very issue, as it shows situations which are completely stripped of any dignity, and where prison guards are destined to take away the prisoners' human face, and where prisoners are primed to act like animals in a quest to survive. It is in these places that human dignity surfaces, in its comportment form (Schroeder 2008). Sjalamov (2005) debunked the myth that it is only a thin layer of civilization that causes people to behave undignified, as he shows through his own experiences in the Russian Gulag camps that extreme violence, both physically and mentally, is needed to make people behave in such a way. At the same time, dignity can be even more manifest in these circumstances, in the ways people react and retain a sense of humanity in these circumstances, and how an individual's dignified behavior may also transfer and in a sense maintains the dignity of others (Žižek 2001). Hence, dignity is not purely individually relevant, as it plays a role in defining the social domain in which behavior is legitimized and exemplified for others.

Another dignity perspective is based on meritocracy (Ober 2014). In contrast to aristocratic dignity, where dignity results from having a particular position, meritocratic dignity is the product of one's behavior, and is primarily based on the work of Aristotle. An Aristotelian view of dignity includes a virtue-perspective, or the notion that through one's actions one become honorable, and thus deserves dignity.



Through respectable and praiseworthy actions, people obtain their dignity. Hence, in this view, dignity is not so much an inherent characteristic of a (particular) person, but only manifests itself through one's virtuous behavior. While this idea has some aspirational value, as it may direct one's actions and choices of how one should behave, it rather neglects the more problematic features of a direct link between behavior and dignity. As comportment dignity is about dignity despite of one's low status or misfortune, a meritocratic view carries an implicit assumption that people are able to exert agency, and have a free choice to engage in certain behaviors, while avoiding others. As our behavior is determined by our abilities to behave in a certain way, as well as determined socially by our environment, as human beings are part of social groups, the notion that dignity can only reside in a behavioral condition produces a too narrow perspective on the idea. A simple and often presented illustration is that of people suffering dementia, or people with mental disabilities, who are unable to exert agency over their own behaviors, and therefore dignity cannot be solely related to one's behaviors. Moreover, a meritocratic perspective begs the question whether children would have dignity, and whether criminals have lost their dignity, and hence, whether they should be treated as such. In response to these aforementioned views, a fourth perspective was offered by philosopher Immanuel Kant ([1785/2012](#)), who postulated dignity to reside within the human being, rather than being determined by one's behaviors. His conceptualization of dignity has been most influential in contemporary thinking about human dignity, and how it relates to various domains, such as human rights, bioethics, and theology. His thinking and explanation of dignity is particularly useful in forming a theory of workplace dignity, and therefore, will be explained in detail below.

### 2.2.1 Kantian Dignity

Kant's famous conceptualization of dignity in relation to the axiom that every human being should never be treated as a means, but always as an end in itself, has dominated research on human dignity over the years

(Düwell et al. 2014; McCrudden 2013; Rosen 2012). This is the core idea from the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785/2012), which summarizes his view of dignity, as contrasting previous theorizations. This axiom also puts the human being as central to existence at the earth, and thus counteracts the utilitarian perspective of the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The use of dignity (or *Würdigkeit/Würde*) by Kant was the driving force in his search for a supreme law of morality. By introducing a person-centered perspective on dignity, he basically introduced an egalitarian view of dignity (Rosen 2012), which means that every human being is in principle of equal worth, and all human beings have the same dignity, irrespective of one's behavior. All people have intrinsic worth which should not be violated, according to Kant. As explained above, the German (and Dutch) translation of dignity captures the term value in it (*Würde* or *Waarde*). Kant in fact distinguishes between two types of value: there is value which can be based on a market-price, and which can be exchanged between people. Goods have a certain value, and can be sold at the market to someone else for a particular price. However, there are also things which have a value which is incomparable and unconditional, and which cannot be estimated using market-pricing. Dignity is such an unconditional, incomparable value. Dignity resides in every person, and thus is a value that is attributed to every human being as inner and unconditional. Dignity is an existential value residing in every person, and in no way can be made subject to something else. Kateb (2011) complements this view by stating that essential to the idea of human dignity, is that people want to be treated as human beings, and that when people are no longer treated as individual, unique human beings, they perceive that their dignity is violated. Hence, the idea of dignity is contingent on the description of people as individual and unique, and that these characteristics should be honored as such. When people are merely treated as means, without unique individual characteristics, they are instrumentalized, and stripped of their dignity. This point is especially relevant for building a theory of workplace dignity.

Dignity, according to Kant, is deeply connected with autonomy, which is described by Kant as the ability to form self-given laws. As human beings are the only species on earth which are capable to

impose laws upon themselves and act accordingly, autonomy opens the way for morality, which defines the uniqueness of the human species (Kateb 2011). Moreover, Kant connects dignity to respect (Rosen 2012), and in particular respect as the result of the lawgiving nature of dignity, something that is inherent to a human being as the acknowledgement of status. However, this status is not to be earned or deserved, but inherent in every person. Hence, respect for one's dignity results from the notion that we are autonomous beings, capable to be ruled by self-given moral laws. However, this description of dignity is yet insufficient to explain human behavior, and that is why Kant added the categorical imperative to his conceptualization of dignity. As people are autonomous and thus are capable to impose laws or morality upon themselves, the question remains how people should behave. That is why Kant introduced the notion that one should behave in such a way that this behavior could also become a universal law. This categorical imperative opens the way to assess the meaning of dignity in Kantian terms, as it defines how dignity manifests: while it is an inalienable attribute of the human being, it obtains its relevance in relation to the other by directing one's behavior towards the categorical imperative, through which dignity not only is self-reflecting (i.e., guiding one's behavior and morality), but also relational, which is an aspect of particular importance for the establishment of a theory of workplace dignity. The relational aspect of dignity is also relevant according to Rosen (2012), who concludes his review of dignity conceptualizations throughout history, with the notion that dignity obtains relevance through its focus on duties. While duties have been somewhat absent from (contemporary) moral theory, Rosen (2012) argues that it is through the implication of duty resulting from inherent dignity that it directs human actions (see also Bayefsky 2013). Kant describes the most important duties as those towards oneself, and in particular the duty to act in ways that are both respectful and worthy of respect. As people have dignity, and are capable of morality, they carry the duty to act upon this, as duties result from personhood, and the freedom and independence to be lawgiving to oneself. This duty-perspective on dignity contrasts the more popular view on human dignity focusing on rights (e.g., McCrudden 2013), which has been dominant throughout

the twentieth century, for instance, through its focus in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the German constitution.

### 2.2.2 Human Dignity and Human Rights

A major influence of dignity in our contemporary language has been through its use in the legal domain, and in particular as part of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which reads:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The global relevance of human dignity is clear from this article—it is the first article in one of the few globally acknowledged legal frameworks, and thus should not be understated in its relevance for the notion of global civilization. Hence, it is almost self-evident that dignity deserves detailed investigation as to its precise meaning and possible use throughout the world, as it has found its own relevance in the legal sphere. While there is no explicit description on what dignity entails in this Declaration beyond some implications for specific fundamental rights such as the right for education, there has been a lot of research on the further meaning of this (e.g., McCrudden 2013; Waldron and Dan-Cohen 2012). The primary use of dignity in the sense of human rights, has been in relation to the fundamental right of every human being across the world to be treated with dignity, and perhaps even more important from a judicial perspective, not to take away someone's dignity, or to violate one's dignity. While clearly a Kantian perspective shines through this declaration, it is however, unclear how this should be understood and in more practical sense enforced. It is Rosen (2012) again who critiqued the legal use of dignity, as it problematizes the status and meaning of dignity. Without a clear description of what dignity entails, it cannot guide a legal framework, and can only rely on jurisprudence. While some clear descriptions can be found of what violations to dignity include, such as torture and rape (Kaufmann et al. 2011), and thus which could be legally enforced as a violation of one's dignity, still two questions remain here. The first pertains to the relevance of

introducing dignity on top of human rights, as the establishment of certain human rights should suffice to enact a legal sphere without necessarily introducing another legal term (i.e., dignity) to complement. The second one is whether dignity can be understood at all from a legal point of view, when we take into account the tension between autonomy (not necessarily from a Kantian view, but from a legal perspective), which postulates that people should be free to behave in ways that they want to, and the violations of dignity which are not directly legally enforceable but which are within the discretion of an individual human being. Rosen (2012), for instance, presents the (true) case of a mayor of a French village who prohibited a dwarf-tossing competition in a local discotheque. The dwarf, who earned a living for this work, claimed to be independent and voluntarily engaging in this job, and thus should be freely allowed to engage in this work, which the mayor of the village claimed to be a violation of one's dignity. Two issues arise here which are of relevance to understanding of dignity. First, is it possible to legalize or criminalize actions which are in itself dignity violations, but nonetheless the individual choice of a person? The case of the dwarf-tossing represented a large grey area in which we may or may not establish the occurrence of a dignity violation, which arises from the perception that a human being is instrumentalized, or, being treated not as a unique human being but merely as an instrument. It is insufficient to describe felt pain, be it physical or emotional, as the criterion for a dignity violation, as pain is unavoidable in life (and thus every time someone may get hurt, it could represent a dignity violation), and felt pain is not always present in a dignity violation. Moreover, humiliation and being insulted may be profoundly painful experiences, but are not necessarily violations of one's dignity; being insulted by another person may exemplify the humanity in interactions, as it is impossible to insult an animal. Yet, it may only be salient within the person who is insulting, given his or her inability to treat the other with the necessary dignity.

In the context of work, this is important, as workers may feel obliged to work in degrading circumstances, just to have a job in order to survive, and may even engage in activities in which they are merely treated as an instrument rather than a mean in itself. Work as such may be instrumental for many workers, as a job is only an instrument for a

company to make a profit, while instrumental for a person to earn some money to live. With that job may come the circumstances of work, such as the humiliation of dwarf-tossing at the expense of people on a night-out at the club. However, as Rosen (2012) also explains, putting dignity in a legal framework seems impossible, as it would indicate that dignity violations would have led to prosecution and sentences. The existence of a law implies that the law must be maintained, and that violators of the law are prosecuted. While the Declaration of Human Rights presents the opportunity to do so, it is not enough as dignity violations do not allow themselves to be constrained within legal frameworks. Moreover, as Žižek (2001) explains, dignity also results from the duty as an intervening force in redefining what counts as reality. Thus, dignity as purely described in terms of the law presents a rather static view, neglecting the mutual relationship of reality and dignity, where the former is essentially redefined by the other.

More fundamentally, the issue pertains to whether the free choice that resides in people should be made subordinate to the principle of human dignity. The dwarf claimed to have a free choice in his decision to be tossed for money, and the mayor's decision to prohibit these activities in his village presents a hierarchical decision over someone else's dignity, or more positively formulated, the decision to protect the dignity of others. The question that follows this issue is not so much whether it is possible to reach an agreement over what can be perceived as a violation of dignity, but whether a decision over what constitutes a violation of dignity can be imposed upon a person, thereby overruling his or her own free choice. As explained above, felt pain is insufficient to describe a dignity violation, as it may be present or absent depending on personal or cultural circumstances. This issue becomes even less relevant when we take into account the possible explanations a person may give to defend his or her own behavior. For instance, a prostitute may claim that she is fully aware that her dignity is violated, and that she is merely treated as an instrument without intrinsic worth, but that she is willingly and voluntarily doing this to earn money, and thus exerting her own free choice. She may even defend her own behavior by reasoning that if she would not have done this, she would be homeless and poor, and thus living in even more humiliating and dignity-violating circumstances. This example shows how difficult

it is to resolve the tension between free choice and dignity, and in some ways represent the choice for many workers to be treated as an instrument, thereby accepting humiliating circumstances, in order to make a living and to avoid further humiliation and poverty. However, the deeper issue here is to understand how such a situation can come into existence; as societal flaws prevail (such as explained in Chap. 1), people enter situations in which they perceive to be forced to make a choice between different levels of undignifying actions, which in reality may be no choice at all, as agency is already taken away from the person. Moreover, it also takes away the duty, or responsibility of the actor, being the visitors to the nightclub, the management of the club, the employer ensuring work circumstances, and the visitor of prostitutes.

In postulating a theory of workplace dignity, it is therefore important to resolve this paradox at least partially and to take a position on the role of dignity vs. free choice of the individual human being, and the responsibilities of people. In sum, while human dignity has been used extensively to defend and interpret universal human rights, it is insufficient to postulate dignity as residing in a legal framework only, as it conflicts with the individual choice for instrumentalization which cannot be criminalized legally, and the limitations of dignity in terms of separating between what should be enforced legally (e.g., prevention of rape and torture), and what is to the discretion of society (e.g., humiliation and degradation). Hence, this leaves with a purely philosophical conceptualization of dignity which will be used in the remainder of this book, rather than taking into account a perspective of dignity to be regulatory, and thus prescribing legal frameworks, and regulation towards corporations and workers. While human rights and rights for workers can be regulated by governments, and enforced, this is beyond the scope of the book. While touched upon in some instances throughout the book, the main focus will be on how workplaces can be organized in a dignified manner.

### 2.2.3 Other Conceptualizations of Human Dignity

A prominent way dignity has been used throughout time other than in aforementioned ways, has been by defining the special place human

beings occupy in the world. Pico Della Mirandola (2012) in his posthumously published 'Oration on the Dignity of Man' described the dignity of man, as given by God, which ensures the free choice of people to act in dignified ways. Man is free, and this freedom is given by God, which entails both a responsibility and a right, as people ought to act upon religious law as well as having the freedom to decide how to live. While most contemporary research on dignity tend to be more secular, it cannot be denied that human dignity has arisen over the centuries in relation to the special relationships between people and God. It was Kant as well, who acknowledged that the ultimate source of dignity was divine, and while contemporary thinkers such as Kateb (2011) conceptualize dignity in a secular way, building the fundament of human dignity on humans' unique characteristics as compared to animals, the question remains as to where dignity comes from. Religious accounts offer some justification for the ultimate source of human dignity but at the same time, religious accounts of dignity may also contradict current perspectives of dignity. More specifically, religious dignity conceptualizations may presuppose a dignity received by God, through which the human being becomes subordinate to God, serving him in every action (Rosen 2012). For instance, labor becomes a tool through which dignity is manifested, but labor is to serve the divinity of God, and the dignity of the human being is only revealed in human labor, which again legitimizes practices in which the individual human being is no longer a free agent, having an independent choice, but constraining him- or herself through following divine orders. In other words, labor is again instrumentalized, and conducted not necessarily out of free will, but to follow a dictated, religious order.

While in principle there should be no apparent contradiction in dignity and religion, and people should have the principle freedom to express and live according to their faith, religion in its cultural, political dimension should not be used to ascertain an exclusive approach towards dignity, and thus establishing a conditional dignity on the basis of contributions made. Another problem with religious accounts of dignity is that on the basis of a holy book, such as the Bible or Quran, the powerful within a religious stream may use their authority to distinguish between what can be seen as dignified behavior and what not.



As a consequence, theological dogmas may claim that homosexuality is undignified and therefore to be condemned, which may violate the dignity of homosexuals. While homophobia may partly result from dominant cultural norms, it raises the issue what exactly dignity entails, in relation to freedom (in the workplace), and how it should be defined. In Chap. 3, this will be discussed in-depth.

Beyond a rights vs. duty distinction in the legal sense, it is also relevant to mention the distinction made by Milbank (2013), who described internal and external dignity. While the former refers to the capacity to choose and to have autonomy which resides in every human being, external dignity refers to the acceptance of the external environment of which we have no control over. This touches upon the distinction between Kantian and aristocratic dignity, with the latter still having some added relevance in the sense that it is not only Kantian views of dignity that have survived over time, but also the idea that one can earn dignity, and that part of our dignity resides in our behavior, not just as something that purely exists within us. However, it is important here to refer to Kant's *Groundwork* (1785/2012), where he discusses the notion of dignity in relation to behavior. Kant explains that morality does not result from a purpose of an action, or the actual action itself, but from the will, or the motivation, that inspires the action. That will, or motivation, is only good, according to Kant, when it results from duty, not from a natural inclination. Hence, external dignity (Milbank 2013) thus results not from the position of accepting one's environment as it is, but from the good will that leads one to accept it. External dignity is important as it contrasts a purely agentic view on dignity as residing in the person and which is action-based. External dignity is thus also related to non-action, an aspect of dignity which is not Kantian, but which resonates with non-Western perspectives on dignity. Non-action as dignity is resonated for instance in traditional Chinese Daoism (Qing-Ju 2014). While Daoism is essentially non-Kantian, in that dignity is found through one's actions, it also offers another perspective on what dignity entails. Daoism proposes that dignity is achieved through non-action and abstinence. When one reduces his or her desires so there is less conflict with one's environment, the person becomes more dignified. Life should not be about striving for more possessions, but rather to refrain from desiring more.

Beyond this notion of abstinence, Daoism is also about a non-anthropocentrism, and thus essentially non-humanistic (Qing-Ju 2014); it is not solely humans who have dignity, but dignity is all around, and is also present within the ground on which all exists. All things on earth have dignity, according to Daoism, because all things are unique and possesses a unique value. This opens the way for a theory of workplace dignity, as dignity not only resides within human beings, but can be part of any object in the world. The dignity of the workplace can therefore be the object of one's actions or non-actions, similar as to a Daoist perspective on ecology, which postulates that due to the dignity of our natural environment, it is important to abstain from action, and thus to preserve natural resources in order to protect the dignity of the earth.

## 2.3 Critics of Human Dignity

It is without doubt that human dignity is a contested concept (Gallie 1956), of which there is no single definition that is agreed upon across the various disciplines in which it used and theorized upon. It is therefore particularly important to understand the bases on which critique on human dignity is formulated, in order to incorporate in a theory of workplace dignity. The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer was one of the first critics of human dignity, who called it an empty concept and a façade. While dignity served as a term to be used to promote humanism, it also reflected to be a dangerous concept, as it legitimized certain practices in its abuse of the term (Macklin 2003; Pinker 2008). In other words, and referenced above as well, dignity can be used to promote a totalitarian agenda aiming at protecting the dignity of a particular group of people without protecting, or even systematically violating, that of others. A more work-related critique stems from thinkers such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche (Lohmann 2014; Rosen 2012). Nietzsche questioned the possibility that there could be a positive existence of both work and dignity of work (Rosen 2012). Nietzsche argues that human existence only obtains value through culture. As art in itself is unproductive, this means that others have to work (e.g., produce food),

so that artists can live and produce art. Nietzsche distinguishes himself from the idea of dignity of labor, as he perceives labor as a necessity, which was made attractive (e.g., through the Church who proclaimed the dignity of labor) as a consolation for the fact that many people have no choice whether or not to engage in work, thereby enslaving themselves to their employers. Nietzsche concludes his argument by stating that slavery is fundamental to work, as it allows a small minority to engage in art, and thus to show what it really is to be a human being. He argues that it is only through exclaiming the dignity of man and labor that people accept that work in reality is nothing more than slavery. The relevance of this argument which takes place at the extreme end of the scale (where one perceives that work can only be conducted in slavery), is that it can be questioned whether work can have any dignity at all, as an engagement of two parties whereby a power-position is created which by definition may entail an aspect of dominance, or slavery. If that is the case, dignity is indeed a façade, thus something that can be used to legitimize the status quo of current workplace practices, under a new theoretical framework which in reality adds no real new dimension at all. Chapter 3 discusses this fundamental argument, and based on the idea of human interaction, postulates an answer to this tension.

A contemporary of Nietzsche, Karl Marx, was similarly reluctant about the potential of human dignity (or dignity of labor). He posited that dignity (and human rights) were primarily expressions of self-interests of the middle-class bourgeoisie (Lohmann 2014; Rosen 2012). However, at the same time, Marx should be understood as a great advocate against dignity violations, and in particular the exploitation of the workers, degradation, deprivation of rights, and use as mere instruments for company profits. As such, while critiquing the notion of dignity, Marx was the primary thinker who understood the inherent notion between capitalism and exploitation, and thus the direct link between the contemporary economic-political paradigms and the dignity violation that many workers experience (Hodson 2001). Marx takes a primary negative approach towards dignity, indicating that he was concerned with the violations of dignity, or instances where dignity was absent in the workplace. It has been argued elsewhere that dignity

is easier to observe through the violation of it (Kaufmann et al. 2011). Indeed, most of the research on dignity at work is found in the sociological and industrial relations literature, who have primarily investigated dignity through the absence of it (e.g., Berg and Frost 2005; Hodson 2001). Thus, an important question also arises, that concerns the difference between negative and positive approaches towards dignity, or whether perspectives on dignity vs. dignity violations differ fundamentally, and represent different theoretical mechanisms. This is also an aspect to be discussed in the theory of workplace dignity (Chap. 3).

A more contemporary critique of human dignity came from Macklin (2003), who claimed that dignity was nothing more than respect for autonomy. While Macklin positioned her critique within the field of medicine and bioethics, and thus should primarily be understood from that point of view (and also as a primer for Pinker's critique), the essential criticism pertains to the vagueness of the term, and the mere use of dignity as a slogan, rather than having a specific meaning with a practical use in medicine. This may be the result of the different philosophical perspectives on dignity, which allows for different interpretations of the term. Moreover, a virtue-based perspective implicates that dignity can be earned, or deserved, and as a result, dignity may be something that is freely used without too much constraint in terms of the definitory nature of the term (Rosen 2012), through which it ultimately becomes conceptually meaningless. This is a danger for every scientific concept, and allows any user to have an idiosyncratic interpretation of the term. Hence, the use of the term dignity has to include a specific description of what is meant with the term, or how it should be perceived upon within the context of its use. In any other circumstance, a conversation about dignity may trigger conceptually different connotations, which may lead to confusion and unclarity regarding the potential contribution of the term.

Nonetheless, there are inherent contradictions involved in the conceptualization of dignity. One such a contradictory element pertains the role of freedom. Freedom is an essential aspect related to upholding one's dignity, as will be postulated more extensively in Chap. 3. Without ensuring the freedom of the individual person to express

him- or herself, dignity cannot be guaranteed, as it would imply a coercive stance stemming from a hierarchical position towards an individual, as for instance would be the case in terms of perceiving dignity of labor having its particular place in the social order, as described in the Catholic *Rerum Novarum* during the reign of Pope Leo XIII (1891). It is through this hierarchical ordering of dignity as being made subject to a higher order (e.g., the will of God), that the abuse of dignity can take place, which essentially means that the free choice of the individual as underpinning of dignity is contradicted. However, having freedom is paramount to dignity, but not overruling dignity. Freedom implies that an individual has an independent choice to violate one's own dignity, for instance through degrading oneself, and being drunk etc. (Rosen 2012). However, even though such a violation to oneself may be minor, as is the case with drunkenness, there are certain limits to the freedom one has, as Kant explains why even freedom is subject to one's dignity. As a person is not free to sell one's own kidney on the market, even though a human being has two and needs only one to survive, this should be understood as the principle on which Kant distinguishes the duty of the individual towards protecting one's own dignity of the human being, indicating that a person does not own its body, but merely has duties towards him- or herself. Hence, dignity presupposes certain obligations which do not directly benefit the human. It is in this sense that Kant's dignity construction is not just humanistic, but goes beyond this by stating that duties to serve dignity are higher than striving for human flourishing, agency and freedom. Humanism does not equate human dignity, according to Kant, as in a humanistic philosophy agency and freedom prevail as foundations for the establishment of a social order. However, this does not take away the inherent limitations of one's freedom in a dignity paradigm. The relationship between freedom and duty implies that the former is constrained by the latter, and thus the latter should be described such that it guides the former. It is only through this exploration that an emerging theory can become explicit in describing dignity and it operated in the social space.

## 2.4 Dignity at Work

Dignity has received hardly any attention in management studies, and despite some studies throughout the last decades, there is still very little understood about the role of dignity at work. However, in the recent years, and due to the global unrest following the economic crisis, there is renewed attention for how dignity can play a role in forming an alternative paradigm for organizations (Donaldson and Walsh 2015; Pirson and Lawrence 2010).

While dignity has been largely absent from the management literature, it has been used in sociology and industrial relations, most notably in the work of Hodson (2001). His work is important for the establishment of the importance of dignity at the workplace, but at the same time is primarily concerned with the violations of dignity without strictly conceptually defining dignity as it would be applicable to workers in organizations (see also the book of Bolton 2007). Hodson's (2001) first page of his book "Dignity at Work" discusses multiple ways in which dignity can manifest at work, including both aristocratic, Kantian, and comportment views of dignity, beyond defining dignity primarily in Kantian ways. His empirical work (e.g., Hodson 1996; Hodson and Roscigno 2004) is lacking direct measurement of dignity of work, and only uses some proxies, such as pride in work and job satisfaction. This is not uncommon in other sociological and industrial relations research, where the lack of direct measurement impedes a clear understanding of dignity at work (see e.g., Agassi 1986; Berg and Frost 2005; Stacey 2005). Notable here is the Neo-Marxist view which assesses dignity through its absence, or through the violations of dignity in the workplace, such as exploitation and alienation from work. Moreover, these studies point to the pathways through which workplaces can become more dignified, such as through strong trade unions (e.g., Agassi 1986), which are important but nonetheless not informative in terms of the precise meaning and function of dignity at work. The problem is that indicators or conditions of dignity do not directly establish evidence that dignity is really present. For instance, through

means of cognitive dissonance, one can be fully satisfied with a job, yet being fully used as an instrument without intrinsic worth. Part of the explanation resides in the observation that dignity is not just observed publicly, but is also manifest in the deeper structures of organizations and society.

The work of sociologist Durkheim is also important (Lindemann 2014), as it explains individual dignity as a defining feature of modern society. Assaults on individuals, according to Durkheim, are therefore perceived to be assaults on what is the center of modern society. It is not surprising to observe that terror attacks in Western countries are perceived to be much stronger violations of the norms of dignity than terror attacks in the Middle-East, or Asian and African countries, revealing an implicit assumption of the Western countries as being more modern societies, in which such attacks are not just individual assaults, but threatening society as such, as it undermines the dignity of individuals. Hence, it is striking to observe how dignity through its violations manifests in society, but at the same time is used to distinguish cross-culturally, thereby implicitly implying a much more non-egalitarian view on dignity as Kant proposed, and confirming a performance-based approach towards dignity in line with Durkheim. It is not surprising to see how dignity is also used to describe the rise of the bourgeois society, alleviating people out of poverty but also (again) distinguishing between people with and without dignity (McCloskey 2010).

A similar focus on violation of dignity is found in the work of (Lucas 2011, 2015; Lucas et al. 2013), which focused on particular dignity violations at work, such as found in the Foxconn factories in China producing I-phones (Lucas et al. 2013). This research is particularly important, as it introduces a notion of reciprocity in dignity. As their research was conducted in Chinese factories, non-Western cultural factors play a role in determining what constitutes a dignity violation. As Asian cultures more strongly stress the manifestation of dignity in the evaluations of others, this implies a more meritocratic understanding of dignity, or something which has to be earned and respected by others. However, in this context, the researchers found many workers with little power to be systematically violated of their dignity. Hence, they were treated without the necessary dignity, which not only was accepted by employees as

they perceived to be without dignity and self-worth, but which also led to the confirmation of their status of having little intrinsic dignity, enabling the status quo. However, the work of Lucas is important in other ways as well, as it shows that dignity manifests in multiple ways at work. Her research among mining workers (Lucas 2011) revealed how dignity is important for the formation and preservation of work identities, and is revealed in the daily interactions between people at work, in how both managers and coworkers treat each other. Subsequent work (Lucas 2015) showed how workers experience inherent (Kantian) dignity, earned (meritocratic) dignity, and remediated dignity (which occurs after one has experienced a violation). Her work is one of the first that convincingly shows that dignity, in its various ways it has been used in the past, has a meaningful role to play at work, and hence there is a notion of validity of dignity in the workplace, as well as an additional contribution of dignity beyond existing frameworks of justice and fairness.

While Lucas' work shows the multiple ways in which dignity may manifest in the workplace, it may also be reflective of the status of dignity in the workplace, being somewhat obscured by a lack of uniformity in its meaning. This may give rise to ways in which dignity is used as a term that encompasses different 'good' management practices, such as representation for workers and meaningful work (Hodson 1996, 2001), but at the same time also lead to cultural views on dignity that describes a more individualistic notion of the term (see e.g., Aslani et al. 2016). Aslani et al. (2016) in their study on negotiation differences across cultures, attributed the US to be a dignity-culture, which represented an individualistic view of dignity as the tendency among people to be more concerned with self-respect than whether others have respect for the person. While self-respect is central here, it profoundly dissociates itself from Kantian descriptions of the importance of relational aspects of dignity. In this sense, dignity is downgraded towards mere individualism, and the consumerist notion of identity as revolving around the individual person without taking too much notion of the other (Gabriel 2015). It is through making these distinctions in the relevance of dignity across different cultures, and thereby describing American consumerism as focused on individual dignity that the term is obscured, giving way for misuse of the term.



Thus, it is important to feature the contours of how dignity can be conceptualized in the workplace. The theoretical work of Sayer (2007) is important here, as it describes the specific roles dignity has at work, and how it is different from non-work circumstances. For instance, as work comes with structural power differences, concepts such as earned dignity are subject to the relative positioning of an individual. As workers are dependent upon the recognition and rewards of their superiors in order to conduct and continue their job, earned dignity becomes a feature of this power-relationship. Without a recognized form of dignity towards the worker, the relationship is undermined, and recognition and rewards (financial or intrinsic) are essentially meaningless in the context of absence of dignity. Hence, Sayer (2007) argues that in order to have dignity manifesting in the workplace, it is needed that workers have control and autonomy, are in possession of conditions that others regard as normal (i.e., that one does not live in relative poverty), that one is serious and being taken seriously, and that one has self-control. Hence, from this description, dignity is again manifest through both inherent and earned ways, and in particular has a strong behavioral component. Sayer provides an explanation of this in the comparison between the household cleaner and the plumber, with the former doing work that could be done by the householder, while the plumber conducts specialized work that could not (easily) be done by a householder. Hence, the cleaner is in a subordinate position, and thus conducts work that is below the dignity of someone who is able but unwilling to do this her- or himself. Here, we observe another use of dignity in the treatment of others, employing them on the basis of a self-regard that permits oneself to be excluded from certain tasks, handing this over to another person who lacks such self-regard in the need to earn money. It is this subordinate relationship without a basis of needed expertise that Sayer (2007) shows to be a distinctive element of dignity abuse, or separation on the basis of differences in dignity between people (i.e., an aristocratic notion of dignity on the basis of honor).

In sum, while dignity has been present throughout the last decades in some management publications, it is hardly developed theoretically and empirically. However, in line with the reasoning in Chap. 1, the recent global economic crisis and the underlying reasons for the malfunctioning

political and economic order, have spurred a rethinking of dominant paradigms, which amongst others have led to the reemergence of dignity, such as the editorial by Hollensbe et al. (2014) published in the prestigious Academy of Management Journal. A more elaborate inclusion of dignity has been presented by Donaldson and Walsh (2015), in their ‘Theory of Business’, which represents a theoretical alternative to the dominant economic neoclassical perspective on the role of business, or the view that business can be organized around the principles of people as self-interested, economic agents, and shareholder value as the key outcome of the business. Instead, Donaldson and Walsh (2015) introduce a theory of business, including dignity and the dignity *threshold*, or the minimal standards in terms of respect and protection of dignity, and remedy of violations of dignity, that every organization should adhere to. While the authors argue that it is not the prime responsibility of organizations to solve poverty across the world, there should be minimal standards as to how organizations should operate, and in particular the recognition of individual dignity of workers, and treating workers not as mere objects or instruments, but to respect their intrinsic worth (Donaldson and Walsh 2015). The rise of these publications taking dignity explicitly into account when formulating possible alternatives to current dominant business models shows that there is a strong need for further development of how dignity can be integrated with management theories. Chap. 3, therefore, will introduce a theory of workplace dignity, which takes into account all the published studies on the role of dignity at work, and formulates a coherent view on how dignity manifests at work, and how it can play a role in the establishment of the organization.

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# 3

## Towards a Theory of Workplace Dignity

After reviewing the state of the literature concerning human dignity, this chapter will introduce a new theory of workplace dignity, in which it is explained what dignity is, how it can be conceptualized to be operational in the workplace, and how it may inform human work-related behavior. Having established the need for an alternative paradigm in Chap. 1 resulting from various societal malfunctioning practices, uses of human dignity in writings across various disciplines in history were reviewed, and in particular how it has been used in relation to work. Given the relative shortcomings of existing notions of dignity in the workplace, a new theory is needed in which the term dignity is developed, and conceptualized within the context of the workplace. Hence, this means not only building on the work of Kant, perceiving dignity as the inherent worth of each individual, but also building on the ideas around Daoist dignity, in which all things have their dignity, which allows to postulate a theory of workplace dignity not just revolving around human beings, but also to take into account the role of natural resources, the planet, and even more intangible matter, such as interactions and feelings. First, a definition of workplace dignity is presented, and explained how dignity is different from and related to

other concepts in the field of management studies, such as fairness, justice, and autonomy. A next step of building the theory is to position the role of the human being in workplace dignity, which assumes the importance of responsibilities and duties of the human being, through which the theory returns to, and takes account of, the work of Kant. Duties as central in the theory of workplace dignity manifest through a relational model of workplace dignity, which is also described in this chapter. Subsequently, a model of the stage of workplace dignity is presented, and a first translation into the field of management studies is presented through positing dignity as a verb, or in other words, how ‘to dignify’ can become a central management concept.

## 3.1 Towards a Theory of Workplace Dignity

Postulating a theory of workplace dignity involves two steps: first dignity has to be defined in relation to how it manifests in the workplace, and second, it needs to be postulated how dignity can be functioning in the workplace. The first question pertains to who has dignity, and the scope of dignity within and beyond the workplace. The second question assumes agency, or the deliberate choice of a certain individual to act or withhold one’s actions, thereby contributing to or violating workplace dignity.

### 3.1.1 Who or What Has Dignity?

It concerns a deliberate choice to postulate a theory of *workplace* dignity rather than a theory of human dignity. This results from the reasoning that it is insufficient to ascribe only humans as possessing dignity. As the goals of the book pertain to formulate an alternative paradigm for work and management, the book in itself is restrictive, in that it does not aim to formulate dignity at the level of general social functioning (i.e., a sociological theory of dignity). At the same time, the theory does not restrict itself to describe the dignity of human beings (e.g., Kateb 2011), but follows a more Daoist approach in describing dignity as

possessed by all things in the earth (Qing-Ju 2014). While Daoist dignity encompasses much more than that of the human being, it is essential to describe it in relation to humans, as only humans can act upon it, and thus have the opportunity to fulfill their duties and responsibilities towards workplace dignity. While some authors have described ‘a special position’ of human beings in the world (Kateb 2011), this is not to say that human beings are elevated in the order of things, but it merely indicates the development of duties and responsibilities of those persons towards the world and maintaining its dignity.

This means a separation of workplace dignity from *human* dignity, and there are multiple reasons to do so. First, while human dignity was not presented as such by Kant, it is primarily used within a humanistic perspective. The problem with this approach is that it assumes a focus of dignity towards human flourishing (at work). Not entirely hedonic, it still assumes the idea that flourishing at work can be achieved through reducing pain and suffering, and that the two can be mutually exclusive at work, i.e., where one flourishes, there is no suffering and the vice versa. While it is not immediately problematic for organizations to focus on human flourishing at work, as people will profit from higher well-being and happiness when organizations strive to fulfill the needs of their workers, it neglects a more fundamental problem of the workplace and life in general. As pain and human suffering are unavoidable in life, a humanistic approach falls short in addressing these issues. While some part of suffering can be taken away, prevented or remediated, the experience of human life is to experience pain and suffering as well. The question, then, is how can we approach these experiences in a dignified way? In the workplace, it is impossible for organizations and workers to completely avoid conflicts, pain, job loss, economic downturns, injuries and so forth, as they are just parts of life, and while it is possible to partly prevent those through good management practices and procedures, it is the task of people and collectives to address and cope with suffering. An approach towards human flourishing may even deny pain to a certain extent, as it postulates that when desires are fulfilled, people should experience happiness. This is where a humanistic approach clashes with a Daoist approach towards dignity, which assumes that one not only may benefit from non-action, but also should



be aiming towards reducing desires and possession. Hence, humanism would not propose that people should refrain from desire, but people should focus on improvement of well-being and alleviating suffering. However, this does not necessarily address situations and contexts where suffering is unavoidable, and how acceptance of suffering may contribute to dignity.

Second, a move from a person-centered vision of dignity towards a workplace-centered perspective on dignity acknowledges the subordinate position of the human being in the broader *framework* of the planet. Previous writings on human dignity have tried to position the human being as a species fundamentally different from animals. Della Mirandola (2012) described the human being as special as it is able to have a free choice over its actions, a notion which was more or less taken over by Kant and in more recent writings such as Kateb (2011). Kateb (2011) positioned the human being as fundamentally different from other species, in the enactment of their agency and in their uniqueness which allows them to have an individual sense of dignity. However, while human beings distinguish themselves from animals through their free choice and agency, uniqueness is not a characteristic that only exists within human beings; animals have unique personalities as well, and it is only because we have difficulties in observing the unique personalities of animals that we tend to attribute uniqueness to human beings. In contrast, it should be noted that uniqueness is a characteristic of the planet as such (there is only one planet such as ours), but also of the things at the planet, which have a unique value.

Furthermore, and more fundamental to postulating the theory, it should be noted that while human beings have a unique role in the world, they are also subordinate to what the earth gives them. Positioning human beings higher than anything else in the world neglects the vulnerability of the human being, for instance to earthquakes, storms and tsunamis. Having a free choice does not indicate that man is above nature, only that man is capable to influence nature to a certain extent and to escape natural disaster inasmuch man is able to do so. Dignity as residing in anything on earth (Qing-Ju 2014) opens up the way for human beings to enact their agency, and to give meaning to their special position on earth; only human beings have a free choice

to escape their fate, and thus experience duties and responsibilities beyond caring within their group (which animals tend to do). Having this special position, humans have the choice to respect the dignity of the workplace (which in itself is a human-made construction), and thus not only to respect the dignity of people in the workplace, but also to respect anything in the world that is affected by work. This is important, as the workplace can be the source of human flourishing (i.e., the fulfillment of human goals for happiness), but also as the workplace and organizations are responsible for most, if not all, assaults on our natural environment and the dignity of people across the world. When the interests and activities of organizations strip the world of its natural resources, and thus create a situation where organizational profits come at the expense of the state of our planet. This ultimately violates not only the dignity of human beings (e.g., through being harmed by natural disasters caused by climate change caused by pollution for economic growth), but also the planet itself, as human beings are only one of the living creatures on the planet next to animals, plants and trees, and so forth.

The role of a theory of workplace dignity, therefore, is not only to take into account the dignity of the human being, but also the dignity of everything around us, which human beings, being able to exercise a free choice and agency, have a duty towards to maintain and protect. However, while this revolves primarily around Kantian notions of human dignity, which is attributed to human beings due to their capacity to present laws upon themselves. There is justified critique on this notion (Žižek 2001), as not all human beings have the opportunity to exercise these self-given laws, as they are mentally unable to do so, or they live in circumstances where this is seemingly unable to exercise (such as in prisons). Thus, nuancing the view of human beings having duties to respect workplace dignity makes it a *relative* concept, lacking absolute norms, and leading to people potentially claiming incapacity to enact their duties due to whatever circumstances, such as would be the case as outlined by Luyendijk (2015), who described stories of bankers in the London City about the Great Crisis, some of them claiming being aware of the unethical practices of the banks, yet feeling unable to make a change as they felt a duty towards their families and keeping up

with (high) mortgages in London. While this example is qualitatively different from a person suffering from depression or burnout, and who therefore is unable to perceive duties towards society, the dividing line is yet to be established. A Kantian approach towards this would pose the question to the banker whether he/she is able to see the ‘truth as it really is’, or whether the person is really unable to act, or merely perceives to be unable to act, and consequently shies away from accepting duties resulting from a dignity paradigm.

### 3.1.2 Defining Workplace Dignity

The next step beyond identifying who has dignity, is to have a more specific definition of dignity. Following Daoist tradition, workplace dignity assumes that the workplace in itself has a dignity, or an intrinsic, inviolable, worth. Human beings therefore have a duty, when they enter the workplace, to uphold standards of dignity in the workplace. A couple of issues arise here. First is what dignity in the workplace means, and second is which behaviors should follow from the notion of ‘upholding standards’, or in other words, how people should behave when they enter the workplace.

Dignity of the workplace assumes that there is an intrinsic worth of what is called here the workplace. The workplace is a concept that brings together the minimal definition of organization as the coming together of at least two people with some goal-directed behavior, and the actual place or space where people interact and communicate in order to conduct work. People may have different reasons to engage in work, extending a purely economic motive. Most people strive to have a job or to conduct work in order to make a living and to survive and lead a life outside poverty. To do so, they engage in work, be it either through signing a contract with an organization or to engage in some form of self-employment. However, working purely as a means to make a living is insufficient to describe the workplace, as it is also a place which people join in order to contribute, to have social contacts, and to enact their craftsmanship (Sennett 2008). It is those desires that elevate the workplace beyond mere instrumentalism, or the notion that people

engage in work to make a living (i.e., that work is instrumental for them to survive), and that organizations hire people purely from instrumental purposes (i.e., to produce in order to make profits). Hence, the desires beyond making a living are essential in perceiving the importance of the workplace; it is here that people may find the meaning of their lives (Sennett 2008), and through which they are able to experience what it is to be a human being, able to exercise agency, to produce something, and to have a free choice over how they spend their time. This is not to say that meaning in life can only be found in work—it is obvious that people find meaning outside of work, and it may even be stated that people are currently more likely to find meaning in their leisure time rather than at work. However, the workplace has the potential to create meaning in life.

It is not necessary to justify the reasons for people to enter the workplace on the basis of a monetary incentive, as people may have very similar reasons to engage in voluntary work (i.e., working without being paid to benefit strangers), or informal work (work without being paid benefitting friends and family, such as parental care). A lot of work is conducted without payment, yet what we observe is the creation of a workplace. It is therefore, the place where something is created which we call work, or the physical or mental efforts of a person resulting from a perception of duty, that is the center of this book, and of which I claim that it has dignity. Following this definition, a rather broad perspective is generated on what is part of the workplace, as in theoretical terms, any buyer-seller relationship is postulated to form a workplace, as the seller engages in a relationship with another person to generate income through adding a certain value to a product or service (e.g., through buying vegetables from a farmer and selling it in the city, a value is generated for the end-consumer who does not have to make the trip to the farm). In other words, the theory might have large implications for the establishment of social relationships in general. Nonetheless, the focus of the following theory will be primarily focused on workers and the role of organizing and organizations. To do so, the question should be raised what dignity specifically is in the workplace.

Workplace dignity entails many of the Kantian notions of human dignity, but presents a twist towards Daoism in order to understand

how dignity can also be an attribute of a thing or an intangible. First, workplace dignity is defined as: *“the intrinsic, unalienable, worth of everything in the workplace, which should be respected, protected and promoted”*.

In further defining dignity, the four elements are incorporated which are literally included in the Dutch term for dignity (waardigheid): true (waar), value (waarde), nature or earth (aard or aarde), and kindness (aardigheid). Hence, dignity in the workplace is about the intrinsic value of the workplace itself, as a physical or mental space where people come together to conduct work, or to exert physical and mental efforts constructing something, which may be physical as well as intangible, such as ideas or creativity. It is the workplace as a space that has inherent dignity, and with it, postulates certain duties and responsibilities of people entering this space. The workplace is created not just as an instrument of transaction, albeit it may look like this, but as a place of intangibles, a place where people form communities to create, produce and give meaning to their lives. In the workplace, we can find dignity manifested in its connotations, as the workplace is about truth seeking in the activities performed in the workplace, about the value created in the interactions between human beings, in respect for the earth, which enables the creation of a workplace, and therefore is to be respected for it, and focused on kindness, or the positive, humanness assuring aspects of interpersonal relationships. Dignity does not equal value, as the latter implies a certain distinctiveness from a person to a thing, in the attachment of a value towards something, which can be generated, exchanged and lost, depending the discretion of a person towards the object. For instance, oil has a certain value to mankind, and this value is strictly controlled by ‘producers’ of oil in a global market, but this neglects the idea of the fossil fuel to have its dignity of being underground, resulting from years of natural development, regardless of the value attached to it by man.

Following Kant, dignity is about the inherent and intrinsic worth of the workplace, which is not to be violated and stripped of its dignity, as there is no higher value of the workplace than to maintain its dignity. Instrumentality, or the notion that actions can be performed to achieve a certain goal, may only be manifest when it assumes the role of dignity,

and should never be made dominant over respect for dignity. Recently, researchers have called for alternatives against the dominance of shareholder and neoliberal capitalism (e.g., Adler 2016; Donaldson and Walsh 2015), arguing that there is a need to formulate a viable alternative to the idea that organizations only exist in order to make profits, and with it all by-products of shareholder value, bonuses for top managers, and so forth. This begs the question whether and at which level alternatives should be developed. The response in this book is that it should happen at the fundamental basis of organizing, at the level where organizations are founded and developed. As any organization has been founded on individuals joining forces and to create something, it is at this basis that it is important to formulate an idea that can take into account the dynamics at this very level. When it is acknowledged that at this level dignity manifests and is inherently linked to what is happening (i.e., the organizing process), it opens the way for a theory of workplace dignity. However, the next question is how dignity can be perceived and taken into account as such. To do so, it is important to incorporate the responsibilities and duties of people when they enter the workplace, as it allows for an expanded view on how dignity operates in the workplace.

### 3.1.3 Human Beings in the Workplace

To conceptualize the role of a person in the workplace, one has to ascertain that engagement in work is not a neutral act; there is no moral disavowal concerning one's responsibilities when a person enters the workplace. By being part of the workplace, and in interaction with other people, a person acknowledges implicitly and explicitly that there are not just rights to be identified, but also responsibilities and duties of the person towards another human being and beyond that, to respect the dignity of the workplace. Hence, it is only through the actions of people that we can observe the state of workplace dignity; as the concept itself is manmade in the desire to create and produce, it is this artificiality (i.e., not made by nature without human interference) that determines the role of the human being in it. That is not to say

that the human being is central in the workplace—it is through her/his actions that workplace dignity is observed to be respected or violated, but at the center we find the dignity itself—which is not solely about human beings but about the world surrounding people, which has its dignity which should be respected. Through this conceptualization it is no longer possible to treat the earth as merely instrumental, as it has its inherent intrinsic worth, which is not to be violated when human beings desire to treat the earth as an instrument to its own fulfillments. An example of this relationship concerns the dignity of animals; it is easily observed that mass animal production farms, used for the mass breeding of cows, chickens and pigs, violate the dignity of these animals, as they are merely used as an instrument to the greed and desire for cheap meat of the people. This does not mean that any use of animals for human consumption is undignified, although some may claim so, and have enough justification to do so. The difference resides in two aspects; the first is the withholding of a dignified life that causes animal dignity violation. It could be postulated that cows should live on the land, with ample space for grazing, and a shelter for the winter or the hot summers. Denying a cow to live in these circumstances and put it in a little cage denies their dignity. The cow, in other words, is not treated as having an intrinsic worth. The second objection is the reason why animals are treated as such, as it only contributes to the need for cheap meat for consumers and high profits for farming corporates. It is as such the denial of responsibility of both consumer and companies to take dignity into account. The example is a clear case of denied dignity: in principle humans are not being denied of their intrinsic worth (Kateb 2011), but the workplace as a concept which facilitates these practices towards animals is the problem. This is part systemic and part individually negotiated, which will be discussed in depth in the next chapters. However, the violation of animal dignity only occurs as it has become part of the workplace, which allows people to use it instrumentally, without respecting their inherent worth. A (radical) solution is to become vegetarian or vegan such that animals are taken out of the workplace completely, through which it is argued that their dignity will not be violated. A less radical solution is to postulate how animals (as an example of the natural environment which becomes part

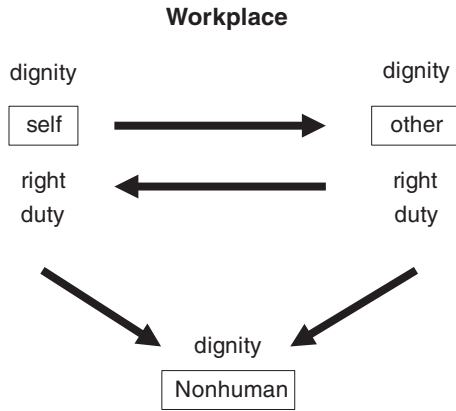
of the workplace) can be treated with the necessary dignity. As earlier it was argued that it is not separate entities (such as human beings) who have more or less dignity, it is about the ability of human beings to act and enact their agency which allows dignity to be part of the workplace. Hence, it is necessary to formulate the duties of human beings when they enter the workplace.

As explained in Chap. 2, duties have been somewhat absent from the literature on dignity, but recently reappraised by thinkers such as Rosen (2012) and Bayefsky (2013). Duties are a somewhat difficult concept to integrate in contemporary thinking about dignity. Rosen (2012) argued that duties are principles by dignity definition, which are not guided by assessments of their outcomes. Hence, people have some duties to respect the dignity of the workplace, even when it does not produce beneficial outcomes for people. People have the duty to respect the dignity of the workplace and with it, the dignity of the actors involved. What are those duties? For Kant, the most important duties concern those towards oneself, or an attitude of respect towards what is intrinsically good, or what constitutes dignity (Rosen 2012). Hence, one has the minimal duty to act in ways that shows respect for dignity, and worthy of respect at the same time (and in extension to protect and promote dignity, which will be discussed later). This brings us to a relational model of workplace dignity, in which it is postulated how dignity manifests in the workplace.

### 3.1.4 A Relational Model of Workplace Dignity

While the question of who has dignity has been answered, the question still remains where it is to be found. If dignity is based on everything that has intrinsic worth which is not to be violated, the question is how it can be assessed which things in the world have intrinsic worth. Daoism postulates that everything in the world has dignity, and thus intrinsic worth. But how is dignity manifested? As the workplace has been described earlier as the place where people come together to achieve a goal, dignity can be postulated to manifest at this very level, in the communications, interactions, and actions between people.





**Fig. 3.1** A relational model of workplace dignity

Figure 3.1 presents a relational model of workplace dignity. While dignity has primarily been described and theorized at the individual level, the main argument and deviation from earlier work is that dignity is salient in the interactions between people, and between people and their environment. It is in the relations between people that dignity is either violated or respected, and thus a theory on dignity should take into account that it is at this level that we can observe dignity. In the interactions between people, it is possible to distil the state of dignity, and even more importantly, dignity is assessed in the interactions between people. As others have argued, dignity is essentially an ‘empty’ concept, indicating the impossibility of defining objective criteria for what dignified behavior (or intentions) constitute. It is therefore in the negotiation and communication between people that we come to identify standards for dignity.

There are essentially three potential stakeholders within a workplace dignity framework. As explained above, workplace dignity manifests in the actions of people, and following Kant, the model starts with the self, which refers to an individual person entering the workplace. It is not the aim of the theory to neglect any group-related influences (e.g., Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly 1998), or systemic influences (e.g., McCloskey 2010; Varoufakis 2015) on the dynamics of the theory, but when duties and responsibilities are postulated as the core

underpinnings of how dignity is brought about in life, this can only be conceptualized at the individual level, that is, at the level where responsibilities can be perceived to exist. Notwithstanding the notion that states and organizations may have responsibilities and duties towards their citizens and workers, it is at the individual level that one can perceive an obligation to exist, to be felt, and thus an anthropomorphization of states or organizations merely implies that people working for these institutions perceive responsibilities to exist, and to be acted upon. For a theory of workplace dignity, it is thus necessary to postulate duties at the individual level, as it is at this level, they are perceived and can be influenced. Through means of collectivity, representation, and so forth, duties may extend beyond the individual level, and form a part of societal conventions, but at the individual level dignity formation can be observed.

The individual duties can be described in line with Kant to act in ways which shows respect for the other (another person, a group of people), as well as act in a way that is worthy of respect. Individuals are autonomous in Kantian terms, which means that dignity implies that people are subject to self-given laws; hence, the true meaning of autonomy resides not in the sense of being able to decide one's own decisions independent from the other, but that an individual is capable to set one's own standards in accordance with others. Duties of individuals primarily concern themselves, but are by definition set relationally, such that one strives for the respect of others. However, duties exist in relation to others, and are materialized through the mutual rights in the relationship between the self and the other. An earlier definition I have used presented dignity as the 'unalienable right of each individual human being to self-respect and get respect from others, to set one's own standards and principles of living, and to live accordingly (Bal and De Jong 2016; Bal and Lub 2015). This definition overly focused on the rights while somewhat obscuring the role of duties through its implicit association with it, but it nonetheless acknowledges the freedom (or autonomy) of people to set their standards and to be respected for it. Hence, while duties capture the way one should behave, rights denote the ways in which one ought to be treated. This addition is important, as treatment is not necessarily individually determined.

A classic example from psychology is the 'bystander effect', which describes the tendency toward inaction in an emergency situation when an individual is part of a (spontaneously formed) group. The victim in the bystander effect is by definition indifferent to who is willing to help, while the actors are dependent on each other in a psychological way. A dignity perspective on this issue reveals that the victim is helped through the right to receive help in an emergency situation, while present individuals have individual duties to help if possible given the circumstances. Hence, duties and rights mutually enforce each other, as the level of analysis (individuals vs. individuals or groups) may be different depending on the situation.

In addition, workplace dignity not only concerns the relationships between people; things have their dignity, and it is postulated that the workplace as such has its dignity, which extends to the duties of the self not only towards others, but to nonhumans as well. All nonhuman matter entering the workplace has dignity, and should be treated as such. Hence, duties of the self not only concern the other, but also the workplace and all that is part of it. To formulate it, individuals have the duty to act in ways that they show respect of all nonhuman matter, and in ways worthy of respect towards nonhuman matter. Nonhuman matter concerns all that becomes part of the workplace, and which is primarily tangible. Intangibles are shared between people and hence are captured in the relationships between people. However, all tangible nonhuman matter which is part of the workplace are worthy of respect, including abstract, yet tangible in the possibility to materialize it, matter such as finance. To operate in the workplace, people use resources from the earth which becomes part of a product. These resources, be it land, minerals, animals, plants, water, air or fossil fuels, have their dignity and should be treated as such. It is insufficient to attribute rights to these resources, as the fundamental relationship between people and these can be described in terms of duties of the people towards these, rather than attributing rights to all that is nonhuman. Individuals have duties towards these resources, such as to show respect towards resources.

This means they are not to be treated as mere instruments, as if they have no intrinsic value in itself. An example of this is household waste. For years, household waste has been treated as a residual, which was

without meaning and to be buried under ground, or made into artificial hills, closed by grass overgrowing it. It is relatively recent that household waste is revalued economically again, and understood not just as a byproduct of contemporary society, as a shadow of a consumer paradise, but as something that has economic benefit. Yet, this is still an instrumental view and does not yet show the real meaning of it; that in what is thrown away, it is needed to observe the value of recycling, as well as the need for reducing creation of waste, by ensuring that as little packaging is used as possible. In a more radical sense, it is about attributing dignity to waste, in order to understand the relation that humanity has to it. In the animal kingdom, waste without further purpose is nonexistent, and thus it is manmade or artificial and alien to nature, which implies an even stronger responsibility of humanity towards it. Waste is therefore inherently connected to human life, and it is needed to formulate some relationship to it, and one solution therefore concerns to describe waste as having its dignity, and thus to be treated accordingly. The duty to do so results from the duty of an individual towards behaving that shows self-respect as well, in that something that has been created purely manmade is also dependent upon how humans treat it.

### 3.1.5 Stages of Workplace Dignity

A subsequent question pertaining to workplace dignity is how it can be understood in a more developmental sense. Organizations arise and are in decline, and as such are in a continuous change process from growing, stabilizing, managing rapid changes in the environment, and dealing with economic decline. Fitting a dignity perspective into contemporary organizations is complex, as organizations are inclined to react to rapid change in the economy with an instrumental approach, focused on retaining profitability of the firm. Hence, organizations in the contemporary economy will experience difficulties making a radical shift towards workplace dignity, and while not impossible to do so, it seems that for new start-up organizations it may prove to be easier to implement workplace dignity due to its flexible organization, while more difficult for existing organizations driven by bureaucracy and

hierarchy (e.g., Adler 2016; Geppert and Hollinshead 2014; Vidal et al. 2015). To postulate a first step towards introducing dignity into the workplace, a stage-model of dignity may offer some insights into how organizations, in their current forms and practices, may integrate dignity. The stage-model describes the different stages in which workplace dignity may be integrated with organizational practices, and as such offers a way of both theoretically envisioning how workplace dignity coalesces with current practices as well as more practical ways in which organizations may introduce dignity in its culture and practices. At the lowest level, workplace dignity is not to be violated. Dignity violation pertains to what earlier researchers have been referring to in arguing for more dignity at work (e.g., Hodson 2001), which in essence is the active denial in organizations of the dignity of people and matter entering the workplace. Dignity violations are most visible in inhuman working conditions, such as labor circumstances where people are degraded, humiliated or physically and mentally abused (e.g., Kaufmann et al. 2011; Lucas et al. 2013).

Moreover, dignity violations include all denials of the dignity of matter, such as land or natural resources. By mining the land for minerals and other resources, many companies have used the land to extract the resources that were most valuable in economic terms until no resources were found anymore, thereby leaving behind deserted, moon-like landscapes. The largest open mine in the world in Minnesota, US, is more than 8 km long and 3 km wide. In the search for minerals, huge spaces of lands have been extracted and left behind as if no further purpose or meaning (see also Kostera 2014 on spaces without meaning). One solution to this is to postulate the duty to restore areas after they have been used for mining instead of leaving them behind. In the desire for economic value and the lack of felt duty to restore these spaces, we can observe clear violations of workplace dignity, where these spaces are used in mere instrumental ways, without any intrinsic worth. Hence, a theory of workplace dignity dictates that companies, and individuals have a duty to prevent dignity violations, and as such do not actively contribute to these violations. This may occur via both direct and indirect ways; people may, in their role as organizational employee, may actively and directly contribute to dignity violations, for instance

through treating people (e.g., other workers) like mere objects, or by using matter in a way that violates dignity.

However, people may also indirectly contribute to dignity violations, for instance, through playing an active role in a supply-chain where dignity violations are present, but do not directly fall under the responsibility of an actor. A well-known example of such a supply-chain mechanism, is the clothes-industry. Even a consumer with good intentions and who is willing to buy 'fair-trade' clothes which assume no dignity violations across the production process, can never be sure of it, and ends up buying with intention rather than being 100% sure of what is bought. This is due to the long production process that leads from cotton plantations until the shop where the clothes are sold, via many intermediaries, clothes factories and so on. For companies and clothes brands it is complex to keep track of the whole supply chain, and to ensure no dignity violation to take place. As such, companies may also contribute to dignity violations in an indirect way, for instance through acquiring cotton from plantations where children are working or where slavery is used, such as is the case in many of Uzbekistan's cotton, which is the 2nd exporter of cotton in the world (Murray 2013). Even if this happens unknowingly, and not just ignored by companies such as was the case with the Foxconn factories delivering I-phones to Apple (Lucas et al. 2013), a workplace dignity perspective still demands that individuals within organizations have the duty to ensure a dignity violation-free workplace. However, a workplace without dignity violations does add very little to the existing frameworks to guide organizational practices, as it would be largely possible to prevent such actions using a general human rights framework, and indeed, has been done so.

To move beyond this, three further stages of dignity development (Bal and De Jong 2016) are introduced: respect for, protection of, and promotion of workplace dignity (see also Dierksmeier 2015). Workplace dignity is not only salient in its absence or violation, but the importance of dignity is manifested in the respect shown for it. Thus, going one step beyond preventing dignity violation is to respect workplace dignity. This means that when an individual enters the workplace, she/he is not only concerned with not-violating dignity, but also to actively respect the dignity of the workplace. Respecting dignity

entails that within the workplace, people have the freedom to express themselves, to be who they want to be, and to act according to their beliefs and preferences. Hence, in contrast to pure instrumentalism, the individual in the workplace is not just a mean towards an end, not just an instrument to achieve performance, but treated as a person with an individual personality, a person with inherent dignity. Moreover, respecting dignity means that individuals and organizations treat matter 'as it should be', or in other words, to respect the dignity of the land, resources and all other matter. The key difference with the previous stage is that individuals are not only concerned with preventing the violation of it, but also to actively respect the dignity of the workplace, and to allow others to express their individuality, be it human or nonhuman, and their intrinsic worth.

The next stage beyond respecting dignity is to protect the dignity of the workplace. Protecting involves active efforts to ensure that people's dignity is respected and not violated. The key difference of this stage towards the previous two is that individuals, and in their capacities to form and manage organizations, engage in acts which are not only self- and other-directed, but which are spread across the social space defining the workplace. Hence, individuals and organizations engage in actions that provide an environment which protects the dignity of people and matter. Thus, protection is not just concerned at the level of interactions between individual people, but is aimed at creating structures and culture in which dignity is actively protected, and that collectives ensure that the likelihood of dignity violation is minimized through enforcing values and norms among stakeholders aimed at protection. For instance, through creating a culture within an organization that focuses on dignified practices in the organization and beyond it, it may set standards for people that may guide them how to act in situations where dignity plays a role. Furthermore, organizations, and in extension governments, may address dignity through implementing regulation that protects workplace dignity and which forms a framework to guide behavior in the workplace. Finally, individuals and organizations may engage in actions that directly focus on the protection of dignity standards in and beyond the organization, such that people are protected in their dignity (e.g., through creation of a workplace where people can express themselves

and show their individuality, and thus to actively find meaning in the workplace themselves), as well as that matter is protected in their dignity. For instance, when farmers make use of the land to grow a crop, they protect the dignity of the land through ensuring biodiversity, not to exhaust the land by giving land time to recover between growing crops, and not use any detrimental chemical products (e.g., glyphosates) to increase production but which at the same time creates risks for public health. In another context, dignity protection would entail that individuals working in financial institutions would not design financial products of which they know that they would be harmful for their customers, but to design practices which protect the dignity of the financial system as well as the customers. One of the fundamental problems with the contemporary financial world is that huge economic value is created for a very limited number of people (working for investment banks etc.), but without any real value for society or the world. A dignity protection perspective on finance would argue that finance is a crucial way of running the economy, by renting out money for investments, based on shared risk of the parties involved. Individuals working in financial firms thus have the duty to protect the inherent value or dignity of finance, and thus to use financial means to ensure the creation of real value, ascertained by society and the relevant stakeholders (which is discussed in Chap. 4). Individuals in the finance industry thus can act in ways that protects the dignity of finance, by for instance investing finance in organizations and activities that show respect for the dignity of the workplace.

The final stage of dignity development concerns the promotion of dignity, and represents the ultimate stage for individuals and organizations to achieve and strive for. Dignity promotion moves beyond respecting and protecting dignity through actively searching for ways in which the dignity of the workplace is enhanced. Thus, it is not mere protection of the dignity, but the involvement of people and organizations in creating a workplace that is dignified. This involves an explicit denial of the instrumental nature of the workplace, and an honoring of the central role of dignity in the workplace. This is indicated by a belief that work is not just performed to create profitability for firms and top managers, but to create meaning and the fabric of life on earth,



and as such should be treated with dignity. Consequently, actions are taken to proactively make the workplace more dignified, and thus represent actions (or in Kantian terms, the will to do good) that not only restore the dignity of the workplace, but also that which promotes a more dignified organizational life, and that which repairs damage made in the past. An example of this is the Commonland organization in the Netherlands, which aims to restore landscapes which have become deserts, and turn these lands into sustainable green lands. Their approach is partly based on the famous Loess plateau (or Huangtu Plateau) in China, which because of deforestation and overgrazing had become an enormous desert, causing the name of the Yellow River through the silt spilt in the river over the centuries. The rehabilitation project aimed at restoring the plateau and through more sustainable ways of farming the land also contributed to mitigation of desertification, thereby restoring the dignity of the land, and thus contributing to promotion of dignity not only in places that have dignity, but especially in places which have been stripped of their dignity. The key here is that through actions dignity cannot only be protected but even restored and promoted, especially when taken into account the ways in which this may happen. The Commonland organization also takes an explicit stakeholder approach, focusing on involvement of all parties in sustainable economic development. Through this way, dignity of the people is promoted, but also the dignity of the land and the resources. Areas that have lost their economic value, because of desertification have become devoid of meaning, and represent the empty spaces in the world which are not used by anyone, and thus have been stripped away of their intrinsic worth. Projects to restore and dignify these lands go beyond respecting and protecting, but proactively contribute to dignity enhancement, or the enlargement of dignity in the workplace.

Dignity promotion coincides with economic growth, as growth allows people to escape poverty and to live more dignified lives. However, while it has been argued that economic growth is the primary mean towards enhance of dignity, for instance of the middle-class (McCloskey 2010), it should be argued that there is no commensurate relationship of the two; in particular, dignity is also about the balance between human needs, use of the land and natural resources, and fair

distribution on a global scale. Hence, it is especially crucial now to formulate the paradigm, and to establish the foundation for how the workplace can be designed in a more dignified way, in which economic growth can still be an outcome of practices, but no longer serves as the ultimate goal, in which it is assumed that it will benefit the people indirectly (McCloskey 2010). Dignity enhancement therefore replaces alternative views and forms the basis of sustainable development.

In sum, the stage-model of dignity describes multiple stages of dignity development and creates some order of how dignity can be perceived to exist and operate in the workplace. It is not unimaginable that organizations start by focusing on prevention of dignity violations, in order to create a basis on which further dignity actions can be thought through, designed and implemented. As such, the stage-model also describes an action-oriented plan in which dignity can be integrated in the workplace. So far, the theory has primarily been discussed in terms of dignity, as a noun, something that is attainable in organizations. However, this refers to a somewhat static view of dignity, in which it is implicitly assumed that dignity is something that can be achieved through certain action, after which some stable position is achieved. Yet, a more appropriate perspective on dignity in the workplace is through using the verb 'to dignify'. Used in this sense, the purpose of the theory of workplace dignity is to implement the verb to dignify into organizational practices, and as such becomes the primary goal of the organization and individuals in the workplace, which is to dignify the workplace through acting in ways that prevents violation, respects, protects, and promotes dignity in the workplace. In this meaning, to dignify refers to a continuous process that is never ending, never finished, but which may form the basis of interpersonal communication and interactions. Moreover, as there is no single agreed understanding of what it is to act in ways that shows respect and is worthy of respect, to dignify also captures the ongoing ways in which people agree on the precise meaning of workplace dignity. Dignity is culturally and historically determined, and therefore is subject to continuous negotiation. For instance, while in the early twentieth century workers tended to work on average 12 h a day in the Netherlands, in 2015 this was less than 8 h. Moreover, while in Turkey people work on average 49 h a week, this is 29 in the

Netherlands (OECD 2014). An agreement on how many working hours would be dignified would significantly differ between these eras and between countries. It is thus in the practices which are adopted that dignity is established, and when these practices are aimed at dignifying the workplace, we return to Kant, in the establishment of how behavior can be denoted as dignified. As dignity is in the good will, or the intention that drives behavior, dignity cannot be merely objectively verified, but in striving to dignify the workplace, a Kantian perspective presents its value by showing that it is the motivation that counts here, and which thus presents a circumstantial view on dignity. The motivation, or intention to dignify the workplace prevails in determining the individuals' actions, and as such constitutes the foundation for the establishment of dignity, rather than the evaluation of the outcome.

This exploration of the nature of dignity and a person's relationship (defined as duties) towards it, leaves the question open as to 'true dignity', or the ways in which dignity cannot be captured as a fad, hijacked in a way it is legitimized through 'Dignity Charters' or 'Dignity Policies', through which it is legalized beyond individual duties towards the establishment of rights, neglecting the relational and negotiated nature, expressed in dialogue rather than policies (Cooper 2005). True dignity, as a theoretical concept, has a specific meaning in the current theory, as it is derived from the view that human beings in the world have a specific duty resulting from dignity frameworks, and that is to revive the nonliving nature of things (i.e., to bring to life that which has no life). As the workplace encapsulates people, animals, plants and trees, and nonliving matter, the ultimate meaning of the workplace is to create life in nonliving matter as the manifestation of the highest form of promotion of dignity. This is best understood in terms of buildings, which tend to be constructed either to provide homes (which thereby form one of the largest generators of economic activity and jobs), or offices, factories and so on (which in themselves are in every aspect workplaces). Buildings, and in extension cities, therefore form an important part of the concept of the workplace. It is intuitively possible for people to generate a perception about a building as either a living being, or a dying or already deceased entity. When a building is actively used, when it is being maintained, well-insulated against heat or

the cold, when it is part of active social communities, one can establish the view that a building is full of life, and that it lives itself. However, imperfections to buildings are evident, for instance in a lack of functioning within its environment, through which a building is extended with electricity-consuming air-conditioning, generating heat themselves and pushing heat from the building onto the streets. This is a sign where one can ascertain that a building lives, is used by people, but not in its optimal state, which presents a duty towards the people inhabiting it or otherwise having some relationship to it, through government, community or else. This is why workplace dignity is closely aligned with ecological sustainability, as a focus on the latter provides buildings, land, resources and so on with the possibility to give life to those objects. It is not surprising to see a huge interest in ‘urban exploring’, or the photography of deserted buildings, as it shows how once living objects have died themselves, stripped away of their dignity, showing a grandeur that has been long gone (this discussion is also complementing discussion of dignity and space, and in particular spaces void of meaning; see e.g., Kostera 2014). Thus, this only sparks interest in the understanding that objects can have a life, and true dignity therefore resides in the possibility to give life to those very objects, defined in terms of connection to their environment, sustainability and potential to enhance the lives of their inhabitants and communities around them.

### 3.2 How Dignity is Different from Other Management Concepts

Thus far, workplace dignity has been presented as a new theory that may underpin an alternative paradigm on which the workplace can be designed and developed. However, the term is introduced in a field (broadly speaking the field of management or organizing), which has produced a large number of terms throughout its hundred plus years of history, such as fairness, justice, freedom, autonomy, control, suffering, honesty and integrity. All of these have been described in relation to the workplace, and how they may offer some insights into how

organizations can be managed and better fit towards the people working in organizations. Hence, how is dignity different from these concepts?

Workplace dignity has two implied elements, of respect and autonomy. Both have been used in the field of management, and described in ways that may benefit humans at work (respect: Cleveland et al. 2015; autonomy: Van der Doef and Maes 1999). Respect for humans at work is closely aligned with dignity, yet lacks the foundation of what respect should be built upon. Without a clear understanding of what should be respected, it is unclear how respect should be shown at work. Theoretically, people could be treated as mere objects while paying respect to them, for instance through paying a large salary or granting many freedoms at work. This, however, does not deny the possibility that because a worker is treated as mere object, how highly paid it may be, one's dignity is violated in the treatment of a mere instrument. This is highly visible among professional sports players who are sold by clubs for huge amounts of money to other clubs where they can earn millions. While the individual player may be satisfied with the earned salary, it does not take away the fact that true sports fans lament the culture of money-takes-all, where loyalty to a certain club seems unimportant given the possibilities to earn millions, but at the same time, the complete sport is damaged through its lack to respect the dignity of the game, by transactionalizing the state of players in a club. Hence, only through dignity this conclusion can be reached, as a focus on mere respect for humanity would indicate that the possibility for an individual to make millions does not produce any problematic (ethical) issue.

Moreover, autonomy is insufficient as replacement for dignity. As outlined above, workplace dignity entails both rights and duties, and as such does not only prescribe the autonomy of people to act in ways according to their beliefs, but also in ways that is worthy of respect of others. As Kant explains, autonomy prescribes the ways in which man is capable of giving itself laws to act upon. However, in the classical use of autonomy at work, the use is quite different in that it postulates the choice a worker has to decide how to conduct the job, or whether this is prescribed by management. This term has always been problematic, as many jobs have strict protocols that guide how one should perform in a given situation, such as with medical practitioners, pilots, and the

police. These protocols serve to guide the appropriate and most effective ways to manage a (-n emergency) situation, limiting one's autonomy, but ultimately protecting people. Hence, limited autonomy of an individual may be sometimes important to guide the best behaviors at a certain moment. Hence, increasing autonomy is not a unilateral solution to an instrumental workplace, as autonomy is usually important to allow people to contribute and be part of the workplace, but sometimes is bounded by overriding rules or principles. It is dignity that describes these principles, and explains that autonomy is not just self-determination, but introducing boundaries to it through defining autonomy in a relational sense.

Dignity is also different from fairness and justice. Fairness, or also referred to as equity, has a relative long tradition in the field of management (Adams 1965), and defines the way people assess how they have been treated by the employer in terms of what they received compared to what they have done for their employer. While fairness captures an explicit comparison of the exchange between two parties, being an employer or manager and the worker, it does not include the richer meaning of dignity. However, dignity and fairness may be aligned, and co-occur, yet they are separate theoretical constructs. For instance, illness can elicit great feelings of unfairness—it is unfair that one becomes ill, even though one has lived a healthy life. This is because fairness assumes agency of the human being. However, dignity is not based on agency of the human being, and therefore allows for much wider interpretations of life, and through inclusion of external dignity (Milbank 2013), it is possible to accept the environment as it is, and as something people not necessarily have control over. This is important, as the unfairness in life cannot be easily resolved; for instance natural disasters and illness, leading to human suffering, may feel unfair, but nonetheless are no violations of one's dignity. It is in these situations that dignity becomes especially relevant, as in adverse situations, it is empathy and compassion which are more manifest in interhuman relationships. However, this does not mean that dignity does not entail anything related to fairness. As dignity is related to the existential value of human life and equality, it presupposes an obligation to repair fairness. In other words, while fairness can only exist under conditions of human agency,

dignity is independent of it. However, when we perceive a human as an agent, and capable of agency, we have a duty to correct the effects of unfairness in society.

A similar distinction pertains to justice, which has been used extensively in the management studies as well (Colquitt 2001; O'Reilly et al. 2016). Justice describes the way people assess the outcome or procedures used in decision making processes in organizations, and while generally equated to fairness, actually constitutes the answer to the question whether something is the right thing to do. Hence, justice seems very much occupied with the same concerns as dignity, but differs in a fundamental way to dignity. Justice can be based on the context of a particular situation, while dignity resides in the workplace itself. Hence, justice, or the decision about what is the right thing to do, is firstly occupied with the behavior of actors rather than the intentions and good will of people in the workplace. Second, justice is by definition contextually defined, as there is no basis or foundation on which a justice evaluation can be made. For instance, in a period of economic decline, such as the current one, organizations defend themselves for massively laying off workers by stating that if they do not so, the organization will go bankrupt. Hence, they try and often succeed to find an explanation of why they are laying off people, and as such treating people as mere objects. Hence, for outsiders these organizations may succeed in retaining procedural justice by communicating clearly and openly to those affected. However, a dignity perspective acknowledges the shortcoming of such an approach, and postulates the importance of treating people as human beings with their inherent dignity, and thus the felt violations of their dignity in being laid off.

Finally, workplace dignity is different from related terms such as suffering, control, freedom, honesty and integrity, in that these all result from dignity in the workplace, but which do not have a normative basis on which they obtain a sense of direction in terms of the workplace. For instance, workplaces can be designed in such a way that they minimize suffering while increasing control of the workers, freedom, honesty and integrity. However, suffering is a part of life which cannot be prevented, and while control and freedom are crucially important in relation to a dignified workplace, they are limited by nature, as excessive

levels of worker freedom and control may create situations where behavior is no longer bound upon rules of self-given laws through which they may negatively affect others. The banking crisis of 2008 was partly due to a culture of great freedom in banks for workers to act upon their own self-interests, and to increase their own profits and income. Unlimited freedom therefore may create situations where people have difficulties in controlling themselves in order to remain dignified. Lastly, while honesty and integrity are naturally resulting from respect for workplace dignity, they can only operate in conjunction with dignity, as without a foundation for integrity it is impossible to understand on which basis integrity is constituted. Hence, they primarily work resulting from dignity rather than providing an alternative paradigm to dignity.

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# 4

## Introducing Workplace Dignity to Management Studies

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 introduced the theory of workplace, and described its main core arguments and principles, summarized in the relational model of workplace dignity and the stage-model of how dignity may be introduced in theory and practice. These foundations form the core of the theory, but important questions remain which need to be answered, and will do so in this chapter. First, it needs to be established that dignity contributes to better understanding of what happens in the workplace, and in order to do so, the chapter will explain and discusses the links between workplace dignity and various established workplace concepts, such as stakeholder management, ideas of profit maximization, and counterproductive work behaviors. But before discussing this, it will outline the more specific response workplace dignity offers to the paradigms that guide the contemporary workplace, such that the theory is an adequate alternative to what is currently dominating workplaces globally. The next step in this chapter is to explain how workplace dignity becomes salient in organizations. While in Chap. 3 it has been discussed in theoretical terms, using somewhat abstract examples, this

chapter will in depth discuss how workplace dignity is manifested through individuals entering the workplace (see also the work of Lucas 2015). It will be discussed how dignity is experienced, and whether violation of dignity has the same connotations as the absence of dignity in the workplace (see also Conway et al. 2011 for a similar discussion regarding psychological contract breach). Finally, the chapter will discuss workplace dignity in relation to some of the prominent debates in the contemporary management literature, such as on leadership, proactivity, job crafting, and work engagement.

## 4.2 Workplace Dignity as an Alternative Paradigm in Organization Studies

Introducing a new theory of workplace dignity to the wide field of management imposes a problem of construct redundancy (Suddaby 2010), or the problem that is created through introducing a new concept to the field of management. Hence, there is a need to clearly explain how workplace dignity introduces a novel way of thinking in relation to what is dominant and problematic in the contemporary workplace. It should be noted that many of the theories used in the field of management and organization studies stem from the 1960s to 1970s. For instance, one of the most widely used theories in organizational behavior is social exchange theory (Blau 1964), which jointly with the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) was developed in the 1960s. Similarly, fairness or equity theory was developed in the 1960s (Adams 1965), and the first leadership theories were developed in the 1950s, while the influential view on leadership through its focus on situational leadership was coined in the late 1960s (Northouse 2004). Even more recent theories in OB, such as psychological contract theory (Rousseau 1995) and work engagement theory (Demerouti et al. 2001) are not particularly theories as such, but integrate these existing theories to postulate new hypotheses regarding employee behavior in the workplace. It is therefore striking that scholars are still building their research on these theories, while so many external factors have changed since the 1960s, which

raises the question whether the current set of theories are adequate in explaining dynamics in the workplace, as well as providing theoretical arguments for how the future workplace could be envisioned. While these theories are still relevant in explaining why people behave the way they do at work, it is nonetheless important to include new perspectives that take into account the realities of the contemporary workplace. As explained in the first chapter of the book, organizations nowadays operate in a globally competitive environment, where rapid technological changes demand organizations and workers to be hyperflexible and able to cope with these changes in a constructive way (Bal and Jansen 2016). Hence, the idea of social exchange underpinning employment relationships as described by Blau (1964) cannot be merely exported to a twenty-first century context, where employment relationships have been profoundly influenced by dominant political-economic paradigms, and where the meaning of ‘exchange’ has changed dramatically since the 1960s. As outlined before in great detail, the notion of employment relationships as stable for workers within organizations has been eroded since the 1990s, with increasing uncertainty of workers concerning their employment status in organizations, and a pressure for workers to become flexible and employable (Bal and Jansen 2016; Sims 1994). Hence, the meaning of exchange between employer and worker is no longer defined as a long-term relationship where mutual obligations are exchanged over time, with high job security and employee loyalty towards the firm. Instead, exchange has become commodified, as in a transactional agreement of workers with their organization in which the exchange is increasingly defined in specific terms, such as pay for hard work, and development opportunities for creativity and corporate entrepreneurship. However, while Bauman described this change as the transition of a solid state towards a liquid modernity, it should also be noted that the post-World War II society represented a relative unique era, in which Western societies built a welfare state with high job security for workers, and a relative generous safety net for those who were unable to work. Under influence of neoliberal capitalism, this safety net was replaced over decades with what would be called the flexible economy, or the notion that organizations would benefit when they would have the flexibility to hire and fire workers easily, while workers themselves

were tasked to become employable, and capable of developing themselves and finding new jobs (Bal and Jansen 2016).

It is particularly striking how management studies have been using these theories without necessarily updating theories based on the changing environmental circumstances. More specifically, what we have seen is research and theory being influenced under a neoliberal ideology, but this has happened largely implicitly, without explicit acknowledgement of it. It has been described elsewhere (Bal 2015, 2016) how the field of work and organizational psychology has paid implicit tribute to neoliberalism by assuming the importance of individualistic self-reliance and instrumentality in building research paradigms and models. A more theoretical overview of the dominant assumption in management research was offered by Pirson and Lawrence (2010), who contrasted dominant views of what they called 'economism' with humanism. Economism, following John Stuart Mill as being one of the earliest leading economic theorists, starts from the view that man is self-serving and primarily interested in maximizing its own utility. Economism is primarily based on utilitarianism, and as such has influenced not only the field of economics, but also management profoundly. The notion that people are rational actors, focused on maximizing their own outcomes, and therefore perceive human relationships to be instrumental to achieve self-interested goals, have become the cornerstone of modern economics (Sedlacek 2011). Moreover, and related to this trend, political-economic theory has been influenced by this notion, resulting in the rise of neoliberal capitalism (Adler 2016; Harvey 2005). While political economists, such as Stiglitz (2012), Varoufakis (2015) and Harvey (2005) have written about the workplace, it is striking how little work has been done in which these neoliberal foundations of the contemporary workplace have been linked to the management studies.

It is, however, neoliberal capitalism that has profoundly dictated theorizing, research and contemporary thinking in management studies, and many of the well-intended theories, models, and studies are implicitly influenced by it. Sometimes neoliberal capitalism is upfront visible and an explicit outcome of a theory, such as in the work of Jensen (2002) published in a primary business ethics journal, in which it is argued that value maximization is a valid outcome for organizations,

and a useful criterion for managers to act upon. Moreover, it is also visible in the work of researchers who argue that it is possible for organizations to jointly maximize their profits, and to have a social agenda benefitting the world beyond the organization (e.g., Porter and Kramer 2011). This is a typical example of a hidden neoliberal assumption in management research, as it proposes profit maximization as the ultimate outcome, while arguing that the creation of social value, or corporate social responsibility, does not have to conflict with this goal. This perspective largely neglects the tensions between these two, especially in situations where managers have to decide between profits and social value, where typically the former is prioritized. It was Harvey (2005) who argued that neoliberalism as a project that was aimed at preserving power with the elites, needed to be sold to the wider public in order to ensure that publicly unpopular measures would be taken. Hence, a discourse was created in which the public could be convinced to give up entitlements in exchange for something else. An example of this exchange was the rising flexibility for organizations to hire and fire workers at will, without dismissal protection for workers, which was sold to the public with the promise of flexible work arrangements, such as the possibilities for workers to have flexible working hours, working part-time, early retirement and so on (Bal and Jansen 2016). Corporate social responsibility is a somewhat similar invention, whereby the public is convinced to believe that organizations do good, while at the same time achieving high profits, thereby underestimating the potential tensions between the two. The lack of explicit attention to this contradiction is apparent across management studies, and can be seen for instance in the disciplines of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management. Van de Voorde et al. (2012) reviewed studies on the HRM-performance link, and concluded that employee well-being and organizational performance are often conflicting outcomes of HRM. Thus, the idea that organizations implement HR systems such that workers become more productive may conflict with employee well-being, as a result of increasing work pressure. This reflects the same principle such that organizations may focus on what is good for the organization (i.e., high employee productivity leads to higher organizational profitability), but this may come at the expense of the workers.

A political-economic analysis of this contradiction is that the context in which organizations operate has changed over the last decades and have become more influenced by neoliberal capitalism, and in particular via increasing individualism and instrumentalism. Neoliberalism has accentuated the idea of the individualistic, self-interested worker, and the workplace has adapted accordingly over the past decades. The power of trade unions has been fought and diminished by neoliberal governments (Harvey 2005; Seymour 2014), increasing the individual responsibility of workers to negotiate their contracts and working conditions with their organizations (Bal and Lub 2015). Individualism has thus become the cornerstone of contemporary relationships of workers with their organizations, and with declining trade unions and decreased protective regulation, workers are faced with the need to be self-reliant and to ensure employability and entrepreneurship. Individualism has deeply penetrated organization studies, and it is striking how little individualism as a key aspect of neoliberalism has been attributed to inform contemporary research and theory about employment relationships. Popular topics such as identity, psychological contracts, work engagement, job crafting, and proactivity all result from an increasing individualized workplace, where people are not just represented as a profession or a team of workers, but have been forced to become proactive and so on, in order to survive in the contemporary labor market. One problem with studies on these topics is that they tend to have a relative perspective on proactivity etc., which is understood as the positive effects of being proactive and therefore achieving career success are relative to workers who are less proactive. A positive correlation between proactivity and career success (Seibert et al. 1999, 2001) only indicates that proactive people have more career success than less proactive employees. Two fundamental problems arise here; first is the relativity of proactivity. The current approach indicates that people have to become more proactive than others, and that there is no objective standard to adhere to. This turns proactivity into a (neoliberal) competition which does not specify which behaviors are important at work, but only that one has to show more behaviors than others. This turns the workplace into a competitive domain, where people, regardless of their



backgrounds, education, skills, willingness, and physical and mental capabilities, are forced to compete with one another. The second problem concerns the outcome, which is defined on the basis of its input; career success is only prioritized as important outcome when proactivity is given its primary status in the workplace. Hence, the relationship of proactivity with career success is merely tautological, as both result from an underlying paradigm of the workplace as a competitive domain where people strive for maximizing their self-interests, and in order to do so, be proactive and achieve success. In these models, there is little considerations for the social atmosphere, the outcomes for coworkers who are less proactive and successful, and the larger meaning of the workplace as such (Bal 2015).

Furthermore, the field of management studies is not only influenced by its focus on the individualized workplace, but also by the paradigm of instrumentalism. This coincides with individualism in its source; economics has developed as a discipline based on utilitarianism, and the idea that the economy would be functioning optimally in a state of instrumentality and maximization of self-interest. The economy, therefore, operates best if people are individually self-interested, and instrumental towards how they perceive work and organizations. Notwithstanding the ample evidence that contrasts this view (George 2014; Pirson and Lawrence 2010), it is still dominating management research. In particular, models of management aim to explain company performance, often narrowly defined by profitability, growth, or shareholder value (Jensen 2002; Wright and Snell 1998). While the field of OB and HRM have traditionally been focused on employee well-being, it is these fields which also have widely adopted the instrumental perspective. The underlying paradigm here is that the employee is instrumental towards organizational goals, and thus occupies a subordinate position in the firm. This explains why corporate social responsibility is essentially a legitimizing of the status quo, as organizational goals will be prioritized over employee well-being when the two are in conflict (e.g., Van de Voorde et al. 2012).

The instrumental logic is apparent in the notion that scholars have argued that it is important for organizations to invest in employee

well-being as it contributes to organizational performance, and that poor employee well-being is costly for organizations (e.g., Porter and Kramer 2011). Employee well-being has no inherent value as such, but only when it contributes to organizational goals. Similarly, trending topics such as altruism can be introduced in a similar way, focused on arguing that organizations who are allowing their workers to show more altruism, are performing better (Clarkson 2014). Thus, any concept that may seem important for people in the workplace can be used in such a way that it is instrumentalized, or conceptualized in a way that it should benefit organizations. There is little notion of the inherent tensions between altruism and organizational performance, or the importance of discussing the duty of organizations to compromise on maximizing their outcomes in favor of societal preferences. In contrast, concepts which should have an intrinsic value for workers are instrumentalized to serve the organization, which is notable in the literature on employee commitment, which has increasingly been operationalized as a precursor of employee performance, which thus needs to be strengthened by organizations through HR practices and leadership (Bal 2015). Employee commitment as such has no value, but only when it leads employees to be more productive as a result of their attachment to the firm, be it emotionally, normative, or resulting from a lack of alternatives (Allen and Meyer 1990). In sum, the field of organization studies has suffered from an economic, neoliberal, and instrumental dominance in theory and the formation of assumptions, limiting itself, and the potential richness of available theoretical frameworks to capture the meaning of workplaces. It is therefore that workplace dignity has the potential to counteract the individualistic and instrumental perspectives on management in offering an alternative paradigm that addresses the underlying principles, rather than the relationships as such. In Chap. 5, the role of instrumentality will be addressed in relation to dignity and Chap. 7 in particular addresses the role of individuality in dignity. By offering an alternative paradigm, it is possible to postulate new theoretical notions, but also to introduce new concepts, and to reinterpret existing theories and concepts. For instance, proactivity is still something that can be studied from a workplace dignity perspective, but the relevance of proactivity does not reside within its explanatory power towards individual career success, but towards the protection and promotion of dignity in the workplace.

## 4.3 How Does Dignity Manifest in the Workplace?

### 4.3.1 Experienced Workplace Dignity

When workplace dignity is presented as an alternative paradigm for management studies, it needs to be established how dignity operates in the workplace, and how it can be perceived and experienced. In contrast to neoliberal capitalism, which presents a political-economic paradigm on management which is experienced not firsthand but through its derivatives of individualism and instrumentalism, workplace dignity is supposed to be experienced directly by people in the workplace. As dignity is not an objective phenomenon, but created in the human mind, it is by definition subjectively experienced by people. Hence, the primary ways through which workplace dignity obtains relevance is through the perceptions of individuals. When people are becoming part of the workplace (e.g., through signing a contract with an employer, or through exchanging services for payment), they have certain expectations of how they should treat others and how they should be treated. These expectations derive largely from personality, education, personal work-related history, and cultural values underpinning the person's standing in society (Montes and Zweig 2009; Rousseau 1995). While workplace dignity may not be a salient expectation for people when they become part of the workplace, it is still present on a more subconscious level. As ample research on psychological contracts has shown, mental models may dictate employees' experiences of what the employer should give them and what they owe back (Rousseau 2001), and workplace dignity is argued to be part of the mental model as well. Research of Lucas and others (Lucas 2011, 2015; Lucas et al. 2013) showed that dignity is experienced and relevant at work, and may have strong effects in terms of how employees behave and feel about their jobs. In particular, dignity may become salient when it is violated, as violations trigger emotional reactions, after which individuals try to make sense of what has happened, and thereby recreating the events that led to the dignity violation (cf. Morrison and Robinson 1997).

Violations of dignity represent the perceptions of individuals that there has been an active denial of the dignity of the workplace, and that behavior has been enacted in which respect for the dignity of the workplace is violated. This may be a personalized experience of an individual who is denied to be treated with the necessary dignity, but it may also be perceptions regarding undignified treatment within the workplace that concerns others or nonhuman matter. Dignity violations can be, for instance, perceived to occur when an oil company risks major environmental damage through drilling for oil in the Arctic region, knowing the huge dangers of oil drilling in oceans (such as evidenced by the Deepwater Horizon spillage in the Gulf of Mexico in 2009). The relevance of such a perception is that it directs the person's feelings of anger and frustration concerning an event (which are typically associated with feelings of violation; Morrison and Robinson 1997) towards a cause, and thereby provides a framework to understand the negative emotional feelings. Hence, dignity violations are strongly connected to emotions, as people are likely to become aware of dignity through the emotions it elicits. Emotions form a central aspect of dignity in the workplace, as it also counters the idea of the *homo economicus*, which postulates that people are rational self-interested actors, which are assumed to leave out emotions in their strategic functioning at work. As decades of research has shown, emotions play a central role at work (Fisher and Ashkanasy 2000), and human life is not imaginable without emotions playing a crucial role in decision making and behavior. The relevance of dignity is also directly emotional, as it is about the deeper connection between a human and work, and the idea that work, albeit an artificial construction of mankind, is an important aspect of creating meaning in life, and that human relationships are strongly formed through the workplace, as it creates the opportunity for people to share, contribute, and connect with other people. Emotions thus have multiple functions in relation to workplace dignity, as it serves a primary informative function for people to understand how dignity operates in the workplace. It directs attention of people towards a target, and can be subsequently motivational in the call for a response. Whereas classic economic theory postulates that actors in the workplace are rational and display strategic behaviors, it should be understood that despite its absurdity and deeply flawed claim,

it is still dominant and persuasive in determining dominant views of market functioning. A more psychologically informed model has never fully replaced the dominant view as it lacked the comprehensiveness of a fully developed theory on economic functioning. Notwithstanding the lack of aim of the current theory to resolve this, it sets the steps towards a development of an alternative paradigm, thereby explicitly acknowledging the role of emotion.

While workplace dignity is subjectively experienced, it should not be equated to being merely part of a psychological contract, or the individual beliefs of workers concerning the mutual obligations between them and their organization (Rousseau 1995). An important difference here is that even though it can be individually experienced, workplace dignity receives special meaning through being shared within and beyond the workplace. Hence, while a violation can be originally experienced individually, it becomes manifest when it is shared with others, and when collectives develop an understanding of what a violation constitutes. Hence, there is an added level of meaning in the shared perceptions of dignity, as collective experiences may create support for a shared understanding of what the specific meaning of respect for intrinsic worth entails, and when something constitutes a violation of it. Therefore, it is important to differentiate between individual experiences of dignity and collective, or shared, experiences of dignity. They may complement each other, when individualized experiences are shared among others, and lead to collective action, but they may also contradict each other, in the individualized experience which is not shared by others, and which remain individual perceptions. This is where the visible manifestation of workplace dignity becomes problematic, in that it is not by definition shared among individuals, and thus prone to be in conflict. The criterion for workplace dignity, and violation following from it, is that it arises from the good intention of an actor, which is not objectively falsifiable. This can be resolved in multiple ways, most importantly through interactions between people, as it provides a platform to bridge multiple perspectives. Through interaction, people can express their intentions, which may provide the opportunity for others to assess the validity in terms of contributing to or violating workplace dignity, in line with Nussbaum's approach towards dignity (Claassen 2014).

The general point here is that the specific meaning of dignity has to be established in the interactions between people, and a framework is needed to be developed through which these interactions may take place—we cannot not merely assume that these will, and that people arrive at some level of agreement concerning the explicit operationalization of workplace dignity. It is therefore an eternal work in progress, which can however, be guided into directions of clarity and understanding.

A clear example of the complexity of dignity (and in this case not particularly workplace dignity but nonetheless illustrating the issue) concerns the case of a German comedian who on television insulted the Turkish president Erdogan in 2016 (The Telegraph 2016). The Turkish government wanted to prosecute the comedian for insulting a befriended head of state of Germany. Notwithstanding the question whether the Turkish government could bring forward a legal case against the man, the event caused two perspectives beyond legal terms. The comedian claimed to have the democratic freedom to insult any person regardless of position, while Erdogan did not accept this right and asked the man to be prosecuted. Across Europe, many liberal thinkers argued for the comedian, and against the conservative Muslim background of Erdogan which was held responsible for his reaction. However, from a Kantian perspective, one can argue whether the dignity of Erdogan was violated, as he may have claimed being stripped of his intrinsic worth as a unique individual, and even though it can be argued that Erdogan was in the middle of the process of becoming a dictator in Turkey, the question is whether liberal societies by definition entitle the right to insult other people, claiming no responsibility of the comedian. In fact, comedians across Europe added to the comedian's insults by publishing their own insults, defending their approach by stating that in a versatile and firm society, people should accept that insults are taking place. While this is clearly an argument which has resulted from a move from liberalism to neoliberalism where society is individualized and thus people should be firm enough to be insulted individually, it also shows that dignity can explain why there are limits to particular behavior. As the comedian also carries a duty to behave accordingly to respect and respect-worthiness, it can be questioned whether his behavior carried any dignity to it, and beyond this, whether

there was a need to engage in his behavior. While the latter may constitute a utilitarian argument (whether a certain behavior delivers or damages human flourishing), it should be taken into account as it may reflect some of the original intentions of the actor (the comedian in this case), and whether by insulting the president his original aim might have been to metaphorically show the nudity of the emperor, which then could have led to a decreasing legitimacy of the president, thereby crumbling away his power. History showed that this was certainly not the case, and there is little evidence for the ‘good will’ of the comedian in addressing dignity. It is though, as Rosen (2012) argued, that comedy and humor almost by definition include dignity violations, and thus a world where this would not be permitted anymore would be a world without comedy and humor, much like the typical propaganda-style state television broadcasting in dictatorships such as China, Uzbekistan and Burma. Yet, without having to resolve the above discussed case, it shows that multiple groups in society may conflict with each other over what constitutes dignified behavior, but adding a dignity perspective to the debate would have enlightened the more liberal as well as the more conservative perspectives on the issue.

### 4.3.2 Objective and Subjective Dignity

As outlined above, workplace dignity may be subjectively experienced by individuals in the workplace, and which be extended across groups through interactions and debate (Claassen 2014). Such a perspective is useful, as it sheds light upon the more implicit dynamics of dignity in the workplace. Hence, a legalized perspective on dignity as operationalized through human rights is insufficient to describe dignity in the workplace, as it undermines the more subjectively experienced nature of what it is to be denied one’s dignity. This is shown by the powerful actions of Desmond Tutu’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in recognizing that dignity extends far beyond the legal domain, and therefore, the recognition of dignity as subjectively experienced is an important starting point of a theory. However, dignity cannot be framed as existing purely in the mind of individuals, and it is therefore necessary

to explore the common or shared experiences that lead to more objective perceptions of dignity. This leads to the question to what extent the presence or absence of dignity can be objectively assessed. The objective assessment of workplace dignity is important as it presents a framework through which organizations may act. Having stated this, it is by definition impossible to capture an exhaustive list of what workplace dignity should entail, as it will be subjectively experienced by people. However, objective assessments of dignity are important for a reason also pointed out by Rosen (2012), who discussed the case of dwarf tossing (also discussed in Chap. 2). The central issue of this case concerned the relationship between individual freedom and human dignity, and represented the tension between the establishment of a decision of what is dignified and what is not. On the one hand, a perspective on the individual freedom proposes that it is to the individual's discretion to determine how one wants to be treated. On the other hand, an objective dignity perspective would postulate that it is not merely in the hands of an individual to determine what dignity includes. The case for the latter can be made on the basis that a solely individualized view of workplace dignity places enormous responsibilities in the hands of the individual.

It is well established that the decisions people make for themselves are not always rational and serving their own interests, and a recent stream of research suggests that poverty impedes cognitive functioning (Mani et al. 2013). Hence, contextual factors may determine to a great extent whether people are able to make the decisions they ought to make, or even make decisions which align with workplace dignity theory. While eventually people have to make decisions individually, it falls short to implement a system where decision making is essentially individualized, which would be the case under neoliberalism (Harvey 2005). The solutions for such complexities include the earlier mentioned debate-approach, in line with Nussbaum (Claassen 2014), or the establishment of objective criteria for workplace dignity, through which the responsibility for dignity is not individualized but made into a shared responsibility within collectives. The complexities of the latter approach reveal themselves through taking into account the contextual and cultural aspects of workplace dignity, for instance in the basic idea whether dignity is perceived to be an inherent aspect of human life



or something that needs to be earned through one's actions (Düwell et al. 2014). Even in situations that seem similar, subtle differences may arise which present interpretational issues concerning the specific meaning of dignity. For instance, in Germany it is common practice that PhD-students conduct a lot of work for their professors, and write papers, while their professors are first authors on these papers. This practice would be perceived to be a strong violation of the relationship between PhD-student and professor in neighboring country the Netherlands, where rewards for work are more based on equality norms (Hofstede 2003). The specific question whether a German PhD-student would perceive a dignity violation to have occurred when a professor claims first-authorship while not having contributed to the work, goes beyond the subjective perceptions of the student. Reasons for such practices depend partly on local cultural norms (within a country or organization), but also on the power of a person within a situation. As the power of the student is limited, and while they are to a large extent dependent upon their professors in order to make an academic career, it is easily observable how workplace dignity is undermined in such a situation. Dignity is at stake here as the student is denied her intrinsic worth, or the notion that her individuality which she used in order to conduct a piece of academic research and publish this in a journal, is denied through the claim of a professor for first-authorship. Within academia, authorship should be decided upon contribution made, and any claim for first-authorship without having done the majority of the work constitutes a violation of academic practice (see also APA 2016). Moreover, it could be argued that a student is consciously willing to accept such treatment, as it forms a barrier which has to be taken in order to pursue an academic career, and therefore, it is within the freedom of an individual to do so, even though she lacks the power to choose an alternative path. Hence, she may even disagree with the treatment constituting a violation of workplace dignity, as it is perceived to be a culturally accepted practice, or even a rite de passage for junior researchers to become academics within the system. This is an argument basically made in the movie "The Devil Wears Prada" about a young woman working for a fashion magazine, who readily accepts to be abused by her boss, not enjoying it, but eventually, even though

she leaves the company at the end of the movie, accepts the maltreatment as it made her a stronger person. Neglected is the moral reflection on the behavior of the boss, and as such accepted as 'normal' part of high-performance workplaces. However, a closer look at the case of the German PhD-student also shows that the student is here the Other, and in this, a passive actor from which the focus of attention has to be shifted towards the active actor, in this case the professor. It is her duty to show respect of the intrinsic worth of the student, and to act in such a way that is worthy of respect. While it could be argued that the professor's behavior is contextually defined—the professor would behave different if employed at for instance a Dutch university—the powerful position of the professor carries an even greater responsibility to act in a dignified way. Hence, it is the failure of the professor to show the necessary respect towards the student that explains the basis of the dignity violation here. In other words, the context cannot be merely used by the professor to defend her behavior, just as a banker defends his actions on the basis of being only a small radar in the complete machinery of the bank, as the professor carries a duty towards the dignity of the workplace. In line with the stage-model, the minimal duties pertain to refraining from abusing PhD-students, while respect and protection of the dignity of vulnerable groups such as PhD-students would offer a richer perspective to the case.

In sum, this case points towards the need for objective assessments of dignity, as a focus on subjective, experiences dignity primarily follows from the Other without taking into account the Self, unless through self-reflection a person establishes one's own duties towards the Other. While it is well established that people tend to overestimate their own capabilities (Kim et al. 2016), it is likely that using a solely self-rated, subjectively experienced approach towards workplace dignity does not suffice, and hence, assessment need to be made of the interactions between the Self and the Other, or in other words, an evaluation of dignity stages in the enacted duties of the Self to an Other, whereby the central questions are raised as follows: do the actions of the Self show a good will focused on prevention of violation, respect, protection, and/or promotion of workplace dignity? And beyond this, could more be done

to respect, protect and promote workplace dignity? If so, which actions could be taken to enhance the intrinsic worth of the workplace?

These questions do not straightforwardly show objective evidence of presence or absence of workplace dignity, although there will be cases where violations of workplace dignity are clearly present, such as is the case with slave labor and unsustainable high work pressure (Kaufmann et al. 2011; Lucas et al. 2013). However, in other cases it will be more complex to ascertain the violation of dignity, and therefore can only be resolved through debate and negotiation, which will be discussed in more depth in Chap. 5.

### 4.3.3 Violation as Lack of Respect?

The final aspect to be discussed here is the relationships between violation, respect, protection and promotion of workplace dignity. An important issue concerns whether a violation constitutes the absence or workplace dignity, whereas presence of dignity manifests through its various ways of respecting, protecting, and promoting of it. A similar debate has been held with regards to the psychological contract, with a discussion of the similarities and differences between breach of a contract and fulfillment of the contract (Conway et al. 2011). The absence of workplace dignity (indicated by a lack of respect, protection and promotion) has to be conceptually differentiated from violation. Absence of dignity, just as with a lack of psychological contract fulfillment, indicates a state where the minimal conditions are met, where people are part of the workplace (for instance through being an employee), and experience the relationship with the employer in transactional terms, as an exchange of work for pay without any other involvement. This situation may be reflective of the contemporary economy where work has been largely downgraded to be instrumental, and it is this instrumentality that lacks workplace dignity, but which nonetheless defines contemporary employment relationships (Bal and Jansen 2016). Yet, this situation should be differentiated from a dignity violation, which as explained constitutes an active denial of one's dignity. In contrast to a situation where an individual is treated without dignity, a violation

is characterized by a certain act of a Self towards the Other in which something is taken away, destroyed, nullified, or withheld, that is needed in order to have any dignity in the workplace. This indicates an act of agency on behalf of a person, where the individual would have the theoretical or practical opportunity to refrain from acting. It thus indicates some willingness or perceived necessity of an actor to violate workplace dignity, through treating people in a certain way, or to use matter in such a way that is stripped of its inherent worth. This may be the result of one's self-interest, for instance through selling a consumer a bad financial product and thereby earning huge bonuses, but this would simplify the case, as dignity violations may also result from unawareness, ignorance, ambiguity, and miscommunication. A cynical version of dignity violations can be seen in the often used reasoning that when a certain company or person would not do it, another company would step in and do it, which refers to a cynical reasoning where individual duties are reasoned away to the anonymous collective. These active betrayals of workplace dignity are expected to constitute emotionally and cognitively different actions as a lack of respect for dignity, as the active removal will elicit strong emotional reactions, leading to more outrage and anger (e.g., Morrison and Robinson 1997). In addition, it is also expected that the promotion of dignity has a qualitative different meaning than respect and protection of dignity, in that it is not just related to more quantitative outcomes (for instance more satisfaction of workers with their jobs), but to a different perspective on how the workplace is conceptualized and how it looks like.

## 4.4 Values of Workplace Dignity

Conceptually, the value of dignity represents a tautology, as dignity in its inherent meaning already captures value, making it an intrinsic aspect of how dignity is defined and conceptualized. However, one could argue that dignity is redundant when a clearer, and perhaps more uniformly understood term such as value would be used, and which can be differentiated in its own right, by distinguishing between economic value and social value, the latter presenting the opportunity to include

perspectives focused on what would be important for societies rather than organizations alone. Yet, a value-based perspective on organizations would fall short in explaining how mankind needs to treat the earth, as it lacks direction and content of the precise meaning of it in the workplace. More specifically, value can be possessed, exchanged, wasted and is essentially socially determined. However, it does not explain those places that seemingly have no value to mankind, yet have an inherent dignity. Dignity does not equal value, as the value one addresses to a human or a thing is conceptually different from the dignity it has. Value does not presuppose a duty of a person towards it beyond a self-interest to protect the value and to maintain it as one fears to lose in some way when value is destroyed. As dignity is not inherent to how a person approaches matter but to the matter itself, it results in a duty of the person towards it. Hence, dignity presupposes a relationship between man and matter, while value makes it only conditional.

Having dignity does imply certain values, however, which can be established on the basis of the definition presented earlier focusing on the duties to act in ways respecting and worthy of respect. In particular, it can be stated that four key values result from a workplace dignity perspective, being equality, positive contribution, openness, and responsibility. A dignified workplace ultimately aims at promoting workplace dignity, but it can only achieve this through focusing on four identified key values, which gives a more complete picture of how dignity could be implemented in organizations. Equality is the primary driver for the establishment of the dignified workplace, and departs from notions of workplace democracy as the tool through which workplace dignity can be achieved (Bal and De Jong 2016). At the core of many failed ideologies and escalating hierarchies we can observe power struggles to take place, whereby those with power seek ways through which preserving it (Harvey 2005), rather than sharing it and distributing it. The essential struggle for organizations focused on workplace dignity is the redistribution of power, as moving power away from the top leads to rather strong uncertainties or risk, which is typically distrusted by higher management. This is also notable in the work of critical scholars (e.g., Phan et al. 2016), who base their critique of workplace democracies and cooperatives essentially on the argument that people cannot be

trusted to make the right decisions. At the fundament of this debate is the notion that corporations are founded on the principle of inequality, or the idea that people obtain different rewards resulting from the possession of different skills, capabilities and responsibilities. While the existence of different skills and abilities among people are not to be contested, and while there should be no need to return to some radical notion of communism, focused on complete equal distribution of resources, the more fundamental argument is that people have equal status in organizations, resulting from their individual uniqueness as being part of the workplace. Despite hierarchical differences resulting from different levels of responsibilities in organizations, a dignity approach argues that every human being entering the workplace has equal status and should be treated as such (Kateb 2011). Equality, thus, is a starting point from which the workplace is designed, and for instance may obtain further meaning through the right for each individual employee to be part of decision making processes on the basis of one-person-one-vote. Equality is largely absent from many organizations where hierarchies dictate workers how to behave at the workplace. It is a consequence of deregulated capitalism that workers accept to give away their freedoms in the workplace to have a job that pays their salary. The acceptance of hierarchy that may dictate behavior allows for companies to develop escalating norms of abuse, and it is ultimately only resolved through norms of equality, where despite varying levels of responsibility, workers have equal status. Only through equal status, workers are empowered to critique current practices, and develop a sense of how things should be done.

In addition to equality, the notion is introduced that organizations are designed on the basis of positive contribution. As the theory implies that people have duties when they become part of the workplace, a founding principle which results from this notion is that people intend to make a positive contribution to the workplace. While this value may seem superfluous and trite in the context of the dignified workplace, it has far reaching consequences. As the principle of positive contribution forms the core of organizing, it provides ways through which people may make sense of their role in the workplace and may engage in self-reflection in order to achieve this. Furthermore, as dignity is given

meaning through debate and negotiation, a focus on positive contribution may inform these debates, and may present a very practical question for people in the workplace, whether they are (still) making a positive contribution. A major problem of the contemporary workplace is that work is strongly related to having a job, and that at the macro level, policy makers are occupied with decreasing unemployment, which means that jobs need to be provided for people so they have jobs, and as such mask unemployment numbers. The question here is not about the quality of jobs, and whether people having a job make a positive contribution, or in other words, create 'real' value or dignity. The consequence, for instance, of the increasing bureaucracy in the UK following neoliberal transactionalization of employment relationships, is that an increasing number of people work in jobs in which monitoring is the primary task. As work is currently strongly connected to having a job, people working in these jobs become increasingly attached to this work, as making the monitoring redundant would risk the very existence of their jobs. Hence, the question here is not so much whether any value is created, but the reverse; people stick to their jobs, while there is effectively no real work attached to it. Conversely, a trend is observable where work is needed but as it is not attached to a job, risks to be destroyed and disappear altogether, such as caring for needy, homeless shelter, helping drug and alcohol addicts, cleaning of shared spaces, and creating solutions for the increasing number of empty offices. Hence, the intention of making a positive contribution within the workplace is more relevant than ever.

Furthermore, when positive contribution is elevated to become a principle of the future workplace, there is less or no need for strict controlling mechanisms and extensive monitoring policies. These parts of increasing bureaucracies in neoliberal societies are aimed at the execution of flawless work tasks, with full transparency as to the procedures used and the people responsible for enactment of production processes. The need to strictly control people is aimed at reducing errors and improving efficiency, but it only and primarily results in behavior that is aimed at meeting performance targets, which become the holy grail of control mechanisms, as well as stifling real creativity as this is never part of control systems. Again, a positive contribution perspective departs

from the view of trust as driving workplaces, and as such prioritizes radical views, including cooperation between leaders and followers founded on trust, learning cycles and self-reflection within organizations.

Openness is the third value underpinning the dignified workplace. One of the major problems underlying the contemporary workplace is the opaque nature of decision making processes. For both workers and external stakeholders, it is generally difficult to ascertain how decisions are made and to understand how decision making processes can be steered. A clear example of the opaqueness of organizations is the massively occurring offshoring of taxes, a custom of organizational life that has become so common that it is not only the large multinationals or superrich who engage in these activities, but also the more mundane small businesses and millionaires who in their efforts to protect their status offshore profits and wealth to tax havens in order to avoid paying taxes. The crucial problem here is not only that money disappears at the expense of society, but also that organizations do well by increasing secrecy of their operations, through which this becomes the *modus operandi* which pervades across the organization. This may result in layoffs only announced when decisions are already taken and so forth. A dignified workplace establishes the norm that secrecy of organizational practices do not contribute to dignity. When workers and other stakeholders have no insights into the why and how of organizational practices, they cannot be involved and will likely experience unfairness and arbitrariness. Openness therefore becomes a central value of workplace dignity, as it allows all people to be aware of which decisions are to be taken, but more importantly, to have involvement in these decision making processes. Transparency is important with regards to decision making, but also in relation to financial affairs, and future planning, such that people can be informed and involved in defining decisions to be made.

There are two possible critiques on a call for openness in organizations. First, organizations contain a lot of sensitive information which may due to legal constraints or other reasons be restricted to a select group of people. When sensitive information is widely available, competitors may use that information to their advantage. Information is one of the key resources through which organizations accumulate



competitive advantage, and as such underlie complete business models. A call for openness contradicts such a business model, but more importantly is the notion that democracy and dignity only operate well in a society where people have true access to information. This implies that current business models should be changed as well, and the famous Dutch Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR) provides a practical way of dealing with this issue. The uniqueness of this system within contemporary capitalism resides in the right for breeders of plants and seeds to patent their own seeds, which allows them unique rights to sell a particular seed or plant. However, the PBR allows anyone to use those seeds for crossbreeding, which if resulting in a new seed may be patented as well. This system allows for both protection of developed seeds through patents, and the continuous development of seeds through cross-breeding, in order to create seeds which are resistant to contemporary diseases and which produce better plants. This system serves as an important metaphor for the contemporary workplace, where on the one hand organizations should have the right to protect their own developed products in order to balance investment costs with returns, but on the other hand allows other organizations and individuals to use their information in order to improve existing products. In this system, the focus is not on outcompeting others through protecting products through patents, but on the continuous development in order to improve the quality of products and ultimately society. This rebalances the priorities of organizations, and as such allows information to flow more freely within and across organizational systems, as the key question is how individuals and collectives are able to improve the quality rather than outcompeting each other.

The second critique towards openness is that full transparency may have adverse side-effects (Colella et al. 2007). For instance, the decision to make salaries of public and private employees transparent may have resulted from the idea that when salaries are openly available, people would be more likely to adhere to lower salaries due to social norms developing about the maximum one should be earning, as well as feelings of shame or guilt among top earners. However, the reverse happened; it provided the opportunity for CEOs and high public officials to compare their own salaries to others, legitimizing upward

comparisons and a sense of entitlement as others were earning similar or higher salaries. Similarly, rankings of highest-earning public officials (e.g., *The Guardian* 2016), are merely used as indicators of status instead of eliciting feelings of guilt and shame. In other words, the consequence of open information may also have negative side-effects as it is misused by people to create a sense of entitlement, as the information lacks the necessary context or debate about what is appropriate or dignified. Another example is the decision within universities to make student evaluations of courses available to students or even the wider public. This is usually underlined by a claim of transparency to serve quality of education, but also represents an increasingly individualized approach towards performance management, as usually individual teachers are responsible to individual courses. While student evaluations are criticized widely for lacking validity (MacNeill et al. 2015; Boring et al. 2016), they are still used for performance appraisals and marketing of universities. However, the true meaning of this is that the public availability of invalid information about individual performance, individualizes the worker and with it, attributes performance to the person rather than whatever circumstance, and in the long run, changes the system as people start performing to meet the criteria of the evaluations rather than the more important objective criteria such as learning of students. The broader point here is that openness is important, but is endangered when information lacks the necessary context in which it is generated. When presented without context, information can have negative side-effects, allowing for the abuse of it to create inequalities between people.

The final value resulting from a dignity paradigm is responsibility. As explained before, organizations are unable to perceive responsibilities to exist (even though organizations may have them), and as a result, responsibilities arise from individuals acknowledging the existence of it, and to act accordingly (Dierksmeier 2011). Responsibility as a term has not been absent from the management literature, and most notably present in concepts such as corporate social responsibility (Devinney 2009). However, responsibility as it is used in these terms refers much more to compliance with law and regulations than the actually perceived responsibility of individuals within organizations.

Hence, any alternative paradigm has to accentuate the importance of responsibility, as it forms the primary motive for individuals to act in the workplace. Insofar an individual is capable within a certain situation to act and enact agency, workplace dignity postulates that the person has responsibilities, and more specifically the responsibility to strive towards respecting, protecting, and promoting workplace dignity. Motivations are the defining characteristics of felt responsibility (Kant 1785/2012), and thus are not formed by external criteria of the precise nature of responsibilities, but rather as an individually determined feeling that may be shared and extended to others, through which change is established. While responsibility is individually-driven, there is an abundance of research showing how individualized perceptions may be shared in workplaces to create ‘climates’ or ‘cultures’ (e.g., Gonzalez and Denisi 2009), and thus responsibility may be extended to collective levels to creation of climates where people within a community or workplace share a common understanding of what ‘ought to be’, a perception that is of increasing importance given the dynamic nature of the contemporary workplace and the confusion arising from a lack of understanding about how to behave in the current world, complex through its global proportions manifested in the local domain which faces the individual looking for high-quality jobs which are absent due to those global forces. Hence, cultures which share common understandings of dignity may facilitate the sharing and following of responsibilities and norms, and are therefore important to study and create in workplaces.

## 4.5 Implementing Workplace Dignity in Organization Studies

This chapter finishes with an exploration of the first steps towards a ‘proper’ introduction of workplace dignity in organization studies (a term that is used across the book to indicate the scientific discipline which studies organizing in its broadest sense, but primarily in relation to workplaces, organizations, and workers). It has been established that dignity is a term which has received some attention in the field

(e.g., Bolton 2007; Hodson 2001; Pirson 2015; Sayer 2007), yet there are two main differences between the work that has been published and the current theory of workplace dignity. First, the scope of what workplace dignity entails is different in the current theorizing as compared to previous works on dignity, which has primarily been theorized around the notion of human dignity, and in particular the dignity of workers (e.g., Hodson 2001). Previous work is important as it elucidates some of the characteristics of dignity in the workplace, and points to the relevant factors that may contribute or hinder the integration of dignity with work. For instance, it shows how autonomy and employee involvement relate to a dignity paradigm (Hodson 2001). Nonetheless, it leaves dignity researchers with the fundamental problem of attribution of dignity to human beings, and not others such as animals which in many forms become part of workplaces. Hence, a focus solely on human dignity in the workplace would require organizations to adapt their policies and practices to honor the dignity of workers, without any (moral) obligation to change other practices. In conceptualizing workplace dignity as an all-encompassing framework for understanding organizations and workplaces, it enables the analyses of organizational practices which include the treatment of animals, land, resources and so on.

A second difference with previous dignity research is the level of conceptual precision in defining dignity. Many existing studies on dignity have either used dignity in a rather loose way, not specifically defining it, or used dignity through various proxies or indicators. A lack of precise definition of dignity enables the concept to be used across various disciplines and create truly interdisciplinary concepts which can be used by researchers and practitioners from multiple disciplines and backgrounds to find a common interest and talking points. However, it also enables conceptual confusion through which it is no longer possible to have a clear understanding of the true meaning of a concept, necessitating a clear definition to create these very common interests. For instance, dignity can be understood as suffering to a scholar interested in international conflicts, but nonetheless reduces the concept to something detached from its original meaning. Moreover, the use of proxies of dignity, such as job satisfaction or pride in one's work (Berg and Frost 2005; Hodson 1996), is informative as it provides context to the

concept of dignity, and potential indicators of it, but without measuring directly people's experiences with workplace dignity fails to capture the true meaning of the concept in the workplace. For instance, one can be satisfied with one's job as a result of cognitive dissonance (as there are no other jobs available), yet at the same time being stripped off one's dignity as there is no choice to accept such treatment in the absence of other jobs. Hence, conceptually they should be distinguished, as job satisfaction can only be a mere indicator of dignity rather than a proxy of it. A similar argument can be made with regards to other existing frameworks for understanding organizing in a different way. When the issue arises of how dignity can be best integrated in existing and new organizations and organizational forms (e.g., self-employed workers), an Human Resources Management (HRM) approach fits with the idea of the establishment of dignity through duties of people, as HRM is fundamentally about the role of people in organizations (Bal and De Jong 2016). When the HRM-literature is taken into account, one may observe that in the past, various attempts have been made to postulate theories which enable HRM to distance itself from utilitarian instrumental and individualized approaches towards a more ethical HRM (Greenwood 2002), moral HRM (Schumann 2001), standards for decent work (Bonnet et al. 2003), respect for humanity at work (Cleveland et al. 2015), and moral values (Paauwe 2004). Notwithstanding the potential contradiction between the term HRM as domain of instrumentality and the idea of the dignity of a worker, there should be more attention being devoted to integration of dignity frameworks with knowledge of how people are motivated at work and how they could be treated. All of these are important to understand the relationships between organizations and workers, and most of these aim at describing norms for the treatment of workers in organization, yet they need to be complemented with two fundamental aspects of workplace dignity, which are (1) the need for a fundamental assumption that drives obligations, norms, and so on, and (2) the relationship between people and all other aspects of organizational life. Hence, a theory of workplace dignity shows that existing frameworks for understanding organizing and in particular HRM-related issues can be added with a more precise understanding of the roles and duties of human beings,

and the quest for ‘true dignity’. In Chap. 5, a more specific analysis is presented in which workplace dignity informs current debates in organization studies, and this can be implemented in organizations.

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# 5

## Implementing Workplace Dignity in Organizations

The previous chapters have discussed the foundations of a new theory of workplace dignity, which offers the opportunity to encompass a credible notion towards everything that is entered into the workplace, thereby presenting an integrative theory of practices and behavior in the workplace. However, introducing the theory in the domain of organization studies requires integration with current dominant models, theories and concepts in organization studies, in order to establish the precise role of dignity in the academic discipline. This chapter therefore discusses more in-depth relationships of dignity with existing models and concepts in organizations and organization studies. Moreover, the chapter discusses how dignity relates to utopian ideas about work, and defines the roles of meaning and participation in relation to dignity. It also discusses dignity and short-term and long-term relationships, after which the concept of dignity is implemented in organization studies, and how it revives and enriches existing terminology in organization studies.

## 5.1 Theoretical Linkages of Dignity

As argued previously and elsewhere (Lazonick 2014; Porter and Kramer 2011), business has become overly focused on maximizing profits and shareholder value, such that it has legitimized any kind of unethical action in order to increase business profit (Amann and Stachowicz-Stanusch 2013), including the instrumentalization of workers (Lucas et al. 2013). Workplace dignity is a direct attempt at reconstructing the existing order using new terminology, yet the question remains how to be able to make dignity ‘real’, indicated by a genuine adoption of the term into organizational practices. One of the main attempts in organization studies to come up with an alternative to the dominance of shareholder value has been the stakeholder approach (Freeman 1984), or the acknowledgement that it is not only shareholders or managers in organizations who are in the drivers’ seat, but the wide body of stakeholders relevant to organizations should have input into how organizations are functioning. These stakeholders may include workers, trade unions, customers, suppliers, governments, and NGOs. One of the main critiques on the stakeholder theory has focused on the lack of understanding as to how much influence each of these parties should have on organizational decision making (Jensen 2002). This critique has led to some authors proposing the value of clear indicators and single objectives, such as profit or shareholder value, but this does not solve the concern about how much influence stakeholders ought to have.

Recent theoretical work has argued that stakeholders may have different interests in organizational practices, and as such may be more focused on fairness or self-interest as a result of stakeholder management (Bridoux and Stoelhorst 2014). But how are those interests defined or developed? Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2014) use two airline companies to exemplify how stakeholder management approaches may differ between companies. They introduce the airline Ryanair as an example of an organization that primarily perceives stakeholders from a bargaining power perspective, or in other words, as self-interested stakeholders, not interested in fairness (or in more sociological terms, social justice), as outcome of its activities. Yet, the relevant issue here is not how

Ryanair (as a low-cost airline carrier focused on minimization of costs at the expense of social norms and safety) deals with its stakeholders to achieve profitability, but the absence of felt responsibility due to its lack of commitment to any relevant stakeholder (beyond their shareholders) as long it is unnecessary. The crux of the story, which is largely neglected in the paper, and as such in the literature, is not in the comparison of the stakeholder strategies of different organizations, but in the reality of using airlines as comparable material for the normalized understanding of stakeholder models, thereby neglecting the role of airlines in environmental pollution (e.g., not just in flying itself, but also through corporate lobby for low taxes on kerosene, through which flying can be a cheaper option than trains or buses). A normalized understanding of airlines as economic drivers ignores the overly strong contribution to environmental pollution and destruction of the earth (i.e., the violation of dignity of the earth through business), which represent the price paid for global mobility and trade. To be able to sustain the myth of the global city, cheap transportation across the planet needs to be heavily subsidized through absence of taxes on kerosene, as well as a treatment of this phenomenon as desirable and attractive. This also shows the inherent paradoxes of modern life through which dignity of resources, land and environment can be violated due to the desire to consume and travel. It is not surprising that in the so-called 'hipster' movement, which started out as an alternative, do-your-own-thing, culture, global mobility was from the start regarded as a priority of achieving status and wisdom, of having been around the world, including a food-fetish glorifying 'undiscovered' foods from far away, such as quinoa from Peru. Seemingly countercultures are embedded within global trade structures, and instead of postulating alternative ways outside of the system, are encapsulated within the system, through which the status-quo of the system itself is maintained in the allowance of countercultures which in reality represent nothing more than another twist on consumer-society and acceptance of existing structures of reality (Gabriel 2015).

Returning to the airline example, a workplace dignity perspective would start from the point where it has become legitimized to perceive companies as operating within a uncritical space, as if their operations

are neutral acts towards the establishment of workplace dignity, while at the same time, they form huge contributors to the destruction of the planet. As the workplace also includes stakeholders, they also carry a duty in their role as stakeholder to ensure that the intrinsic worth of the workplace is respected, while striving for promotion of dignity in the workplace. Many organizational stakeholders may have a prevalent financial objective when engaging with a firm, including shareholders, employees and suppliers. Moreover, past teaching at business schools and dominant thinking in management has been developed around the idea of the self-interested, rational actor (Dierksmeier 2011; Stiglitz 2012), which may be referred to as pragmatic, as it appeals to intuitive ideas around the nature of the human being as self-centered and egoistic. The problem arises not only as it neglects the idea around people having duties towards one another and the workplace in general, perceiving those and acting upon it, but the greatest flaw is that it is unscientific, and in contrast with a lot of recent research around human motivation, including evolutionary perspective on human behavior.

Research among monkeys and other animals has shown that empathy for others and altruism are not culturally embedded within humanity (i.e., an artificial element to human life), but central to the existence and survival of species (De Waal 2008). Contemporary evolutionary psychology has also supported the notion that for species to survive, competition between groups is necessary as well as collaboration within groups (Spisak et al. 2011). Hence, a fundamental aspect of life as such concerns the role of interpersonal relationships, and the development of organizations on the basis of self-interest alone is insufficient. Thus, alignment of the true nature of the human being with the process of organizing has to take into account the variety under which people function, interact and live by. Through a focus on dignity, stakeholders who are aware of their duty towards workplace dignity enter the workplace not just self-interested, neither have a neutral role, but strive towards respecting and protecting workplace dignity. This adds understanding to normative stakeholder models, such that it helps to formulate duties of stakeholders towards organizations and vice versa. Furthermore, through the exchange of dialogue and mutual views, it becomes a process of how different parties engage in 'dignity work'. Hence, *ibid* to the literature

on identity work in organizations (Ibarra and Barbalescu 2010), dignity work can be envisioned to constitute the mental, physical and verbal activities of different people in a workplace to make those activities aiming for enhancement (i.e., protection, promotion etc.) of dignity in the workplace. Hence, through these activities, the workplace itself becomes less self-centered, less revolving around the ego of a person engaging in various behaviors to make that workplace one's own little conquered space, but more focused on the interconnections between people and how they form relationships to promote doing good and maintaining and strengthening dignity. This is not a far-fetched, utopian idea of people entering the workplace with reasons beyond monetary ones, as ample research has shown that people have reasons other than monetary to be part of that workplace (Mor-Barak 1995), and the current theory is an attempt to explicitly draw the attention to those motives. However, the utopian connotations of dignity may be widespread and therefore in need of further exploration.

### 5.1.1 Dignity and Utopia

The philosopher Žižek (1989, 2001, 2009) has extensively written about the role of totalitarianism resulting from communism, socialism, and fascism, and how this process has unfolded through existing paradoxes of meaning, or the notion that the establishment of a certain ideological state produces conflicting situations around how ideas are transformed into reality. It is notable from the transformation of former Eastern bloc countries into capitalist states, how the result of these processes has been either mass migration, such as is the case in countries such as Poland and Lithuania, or a general disappointment regarding the reality of 'actually existing capitalism', which then turns into nostalgia and populism (Žižek 2001). The problem arising here is that from a state of repression, a desire is formulated to seek freedom, but without its conceptual boundaries clearly defined and experienced, these countries were, just as so many other countries across the world (Klein 2007), being made part of the project of neoliberalization, where individual freedoms became commodified, and eventually reduced to a level

where people long for some more radical solutions to everything that has been brought by neoliberalism. The crucial notion here is that these various political-economic paradigms are contested in its true meaning. The same applies to dignity, and it needs to be explained how dignity can be differentiated from the utopian idea of the workplace as a domain of harmony and peace.

Taking into account the state of uncertainty regarding the contemporary workplace (i.e., there is no security of work and income for people anymore), a typical response is generated by those who have much to lose (e.g., the capitalist; Žižek 2001), which is to protect their interests *no matter what*. This is based on an individualistic notion of self-interest, which is separated by the notion of the Other. Hence, the only true aim of workplace dignity is to introduce the idea of the Other, and in particular, the relationality to another individual (Cooper 2005). Put differently, through refraining from utopianism of postulating big ideas to achieve in the workplace, the current theory derives from a framework based on the everyday communication between people, which concerns the question whether one's activities contribute to workplace dignity, or whether there is any chance of violation or disrespect of dignity. The establishment of such a judgment results from the debate in everyday working life. As the theory aims to be grounded in the reality of the contemporary workplace, an explicit notion of gradualism cannot be disregarded, in the sense that radicalism is unlikely to result from a dignity perspective, while gradual change is more likely to take place as a result. Implementation of dignity is unlikely to lead to radical revolution, as the means through which change occurs is subject to dignity assessment. When one raises the question whether a certain act is dignified, a process unfolds of internal discussion and external verification of the legitimacy of behaviour in terms of its dignity enhancement. As a consequence, revolution itself is judged on the basis of whether it is dignified, and therefore, will be associated more heavily with gradual changes implemented on the basis of dignity enhancement. Moreover, gradualism postulates the value of error and learning, as it informs the person and organization of the possibility of improvement, not in a



competitive way of outperformance, but focused on standards of dignity. However, the true and actually existing meaning of dignity resides in the debate among people, and as such is granted only through error-without-punishment and continuous learning. This requires two conditions in the workplace. On the one hand, it requires a power-balance, as a hierarchical power establishment is by definition not aimed at allowing errors and learning, but at control and enforcement (Stohl and Cheney 2001). Hence, an alternative approach is needed, where power is essentially distributed among the people, through means of democracy (Graeber 2013). On the other hand, there is the need for learning organizations, where learning is not only integrated in the everyday activities of workers, but also where learning is not purely instrumentalized. For instance, the contemporary university is increasingly dominated by and obsessed with employability enhancement and competition (Marginson 2006), and therefore has adapted its complete structures to facilitate a smooth transfer from student to labor market, without presenting the opportunity to gain skills that move beyond fitting in existing workplaces, with its present structures restricting potential recruits in their action repertoires in order to align them with organizational preferences, a process being facilitated through assimilating students at young age through internships and placements. As learning is important to be able to be aware of what dignity is, and how dignity can be improved, a goal of the dignified organization is to establish the value of outsider perspectives on existing practices and cultures, through which learning may really take place. Hence, the theory refrains from utopianism through not focusing on an end state which needs to be achieved, but by emphasizing the continuous efforts of dignity-work, which revolves around the idea of the action as such being dignified rather than the end result of some unknown dignity state. Hence, dignity resides in the continuous debates and communications between various groups of people about the best course of action in a particular context, given a focus on respect, protection and promotion of dignity. Yet, it needs to be explained how dignity can be integrated with existing terminology in management and organization studies.

### 5.1.2 Dignity, Meaning and Participation

Workplace dignity is not introduced in a void, but enters a scientific discipline which has been occupied with terms such as stress, performance, and job characteristics during the last century since Taylorism started to define work in scientific terminology as to optimize the process of production. Taylorism, which aimed at efficiency and predictability, opened up the way for a mass production of labor (not just of products), instrumentalizing the notion of labor through detaching it from the person conducting it. The Human Relations movement reacted against this movement through postulating the importance of people in work, but nonetheless could not prevent the pervasiveness of instrumentality of labor and workers, occurring at various levels to the point where labor becomes essentially invisible (Žižek 2001). The world's physical production areas are largely hidden from the perspective of the consumer and residing in China, Vietnam or Brazil, through which the relationship between production and consumption is erased completely, thereby creating the mental distancing of work, labor, human being, and production. Hence, it is no longer necessary or possible to postulate the origin of products of consumption, and products' artificiality allows the consumer to refrain from asking the difficult questions—the sheer complexity of an Iphone prohibits the consumer from asking where all the parts are from and how they are produced. The difficult issue is therefore to establish a credible notion of meaningfulness back into work as well as meaningful participation. Meaning of work too often has been the privilege of the office worker or craftsman, and established through a norm of autonomy (Michaelsen et al. 2014), has never taken into account the truly global proportions of the labor market and the extent to which manual meaningless work has been transferred to low wage countries across the global South. This process left behind unskilled workers in the Western countries unemployed, impoverished and susceptible for radicalism, while at the same time neglecting the notion of work in these situations as deeply meaningless. Instead, Western countries replaced outsourced jobs with the bureaucracy of control mechanisms (the rise of administrative jobs aimed at

monitoring) and its associated employment opportunities, which constitute in themselves largely meaningless jobs, as they hardly produce anything in relation to workplace dignity. Hence, the meaning of meaning has to be debated, as meaningful work in itself is a debatable term without clear conceptualization (Rosso et al. 2010). Consequently, meaning of work is used in an exclusive way, focusing on the efforts people, who have autonomy in their work, do to create meaning for themselves, or are presented in situations which are rich of meaning (such as being a nurse or firemen; Grant and Wade-Benzoni 2009). Yet, meaning of work is in its current use merely presented as privileged domains of the few, without taking into account the deeper meaning of the term itself. An important reason for this lack of meaning in meaning is the absence of any basic assumption regarding the inclusion of the term in the domain of management.

In a system where high-quality jobs are glorified as the *sine qua non* of contemporary working, meaningful work is largely determined through the current dominant structures, and therefore it is not surprising that meaning of work in itself is instrumental, as a potential add-on to be delivered to jobs by organizations, or something that is merely attributed to a job by the person doing it, either through processes of sensemaking or through cognitive dissonance (Ibarra and Barbalescu 2010). In other words, meaningful work can only be substantial if there is an assumption of what that meaning is, or what it contributes to. Hence, one can talk about purpose or value-systems underlying meaning of work (Rosso et al. 2010), but it only obtains specific content when it is conceptually related to workplace dignity, as the respect for the intrinsic worth of the workplace enriches meaning of work in presenting the direction of how one achieves meaning. For instance, a monitoring job as armed guard at an airport may superficially represent meaningful work (as it aims to prevent terrorists to enter the airport and thereby protecting the dignity of innocent lives), but at the same time, it hardly contributes to promotion of dignity in the workplace, as it is only directed at the surface level phenomenon, and as recent history has shown, it does not prevent attacks to take place; in Brussels, Belgium, suicide bombers merely moved themselves to the entrance of the airport (in attacks early 2016), thereby literally moving the cause

of problem elsewhere. It does, however, not address the more fundamental question about the reasons why these attacks take place and can be prevented through focusing on more dignified working conditions for wider groups of people in society. Moreover, the presence of armed guards militarizes the public space, thereby diminishing the dignity of the public space itself. In this sense, meaning of work has no deeper layer, which can only be solved through the inclusion of a framework of understanding, such as workplace dignity.

Workplace dignity therefore informs these debates by showing how meaning in work is constructed. True meaningful work resides not purely in the subjectivity of the person conducting the work (Rosso et al. 2010), or the ability to exert traditional craftsmanship (Sennett 2008), but in the establishment of a positive contribution towards workplace dignity. As dignity may be a complex term to understand, Chap. 4 discussed four key values underpinning dignity in the workplace (i.e., equality, contribution, openness, and responsibility), which help to further understand how dignity can be conceptualized at work. Moreover, dignity also conceptually relates to truth, value, earth and kindness. Acts in the workplace through which one is able to tell the truth, add real value, show respect to the earth, and show kindness to others are all indicative of dignity established (with each of these being necessary yet not individually sufficient). One note needs to be made, however, pertaining the role of value, as it traditionally is the driving force of economic activity. Economic value is created through scarcity of resources, which not necessarily corresponds to any 'true' value. Hence value creation in the dignified organization constitutes a different meaning than in the traditional organization, as the creation of value does not directly relate to the increase of economic value per se. A notable example of economic value creation without any real value, is the rise of financial innovation, which has been one of the primary causes of the crisis (Stiglitz 2012). Financial innovation is a term which is used to denote the financial products created during the last decennia, such as Collateralized Debt Obligations and Credit Default Swaps, which provided financial institutions to create enormous economic value for themselves without adding any value to the real economy. Similarly, high-frequency trading on the stock market is based on the buying and

selling within (nano-) seconds or minutes, a process which is completely digitalized and run by algorithms, and as such does not relate in any way to the original meaning of the stock market as the place where investors would make their money available for organizations to use in order to create business. The absence of true value is notable here, and represents the ultimate separation between the financial economy and real life (Thompson 2013). The problematic feature here constitutes the awareness of the investor about the sheer lack of proper value, which is nonetheless transferred to his personal bank account in order to acquire a proper status. Workplace dignity is absent, and it is only a minor step towards integrating dignity into finance, through postulating the necessary question of how dignity in the workplace is enhanced through financial investments. When investing does not promote dignity in the workplace (e.g., through ethical investing which becomes increasingly popular in ethical banks, such as Triodos Bank), there is a lack of dignity in the activity as such, which raises the question of how dignity in this situation can be regained. This implies a process of negotiation and dialogue which is necessary in this community and beyond in the public domain. Hence, this requires dignity-work in finance, in order to specify the meaning in finance. In addition to meaning found through dignity-work, another question now emerges around the more precise role of people in dignity work.

While in Chap. 6, it will be discussed how dignity can be implemented in organizations using workplace democracy, the role of participation needs to be discussed in relation to the existing terminology of management. There is a long tradition within management studies that has discussed the importance of involving employees in decision making processes that directly affect their work and experiences (Locke and Schweiger 1979). It is regarded as one of the key motivators at work, and research has traditionally focused on employee involvement as one of the strongest predictors of success of organizational change (Cummings and Worley 2002). Yet, the translation of this fundamental basic knowledge into practice has been far from successful, and the likelihood of decisions being made at the top, and communicated top-down to the employees is a common practice in organizations. Even sincere attempts at involving employees early in processes of decision

making, such as for organizational changes, often fail due to a tendency to rely on pseudo-involvement: the ordinary workers are asked for their input, yet not being taken seriously when it concerns decision making. An underlying reason is the fundamental distrust of management towards workers, which may result from a deeply engrained Taylorism in management thinking. Workers are distrusted and perceived to be incapable to make long-term decisions (see this argument in e.g., Phan et al. 2016), while technocratic managers, who may have or may not have any insights into which decisions are best in the long run, are perceived to be better decision makers.

This is also manifest at political level, where during the last decades since the economic crisis in various countries, such as Italy, Greece and the United Kingdom, unelected technocrats were elevated to become prime minister, and despite the undemocratic means through which they gained power, were praised across different media outlets. This process is connected to the distrust of political leaders towards their own citizens (they might elect a populist as president), as well as managers towards their own workers (they are perceived to be incapable to know what is best for them). Neglected is the role of contextual factors in creating the mutual distrust and sometimes open resistance of people towards their political leaders and management. In other words, the very act of ignoring workers has created a situation in which workers partly have too little knowledge and understanding of the processes while still being affected by them, and partly have mentally disengaged as a result of the lack of attention received over the years. Hence, a dignified approach towards workers in organizations starts with the notion that participation is vital, not just in the sense of decision making, but as well as involvement in work as such. Participation in itself is an important goal of dignity, as it allows people to become part of workplaces in which they are able to find meaning through contributing to promotion of dignity of the land, other people etc. Participation is also important as it responds to the need for social contact among people, which still is one of the more neglected goals of the establishment of workplace in that it creates the opportunity for people to meet, discuss,

form relationships and create tolerance towards people who would not that easily meet outside the workplace.

Moreover, the structuring (or organizing) of the workplace is by definition an inclusive act, as it describes the ways in which people work together, how they interact, and how they form their contributions. A top-down approach, where employees are excluded from being part of decision making, does not dignify the workplace, as it undermines the need for participation and personal control, and bears the risk of violating dignity, as decisions are being made about people without their explicit approval of engaging in the consequences of these decisions. While consultation constitutes an important act of contemporary organizations to engage people in decision making, it is primarily reactive (decisions have been made more or less, or proposals have been pre-cooked), and it does not involve people in the process of problem definition, analysis, solution statement and implementation (Cummings and Worley 2002). In other words, the involvement of people in every step of decision making processes is crucial, as it allows people a sense of direction and agency, as well as creating a substantial larger pool of creativity, meaning, and input in processes. The fundamental distrust of managers towards workers can be explained through the fear that due to involvement of people situations become unstable, and potentially even undermines the position of the manager, as decisions can be made more efficiently and effectively by the workers themselves (Cheney et al. 2014). A dignity perspective would postulate that the redundancy of management is preferable when in that position no *real* value is added to the (production) process, and when workers themselves are empowered to make their own decisions in a joint, democratic process. Yet, the role of democracy (to be discussed later in more detail) is not self-evident, as the corruption and degeneration of democracy is well documented (Varman and Chakrabarti 2004). While democracy may have short-lived positive effects in mobilizing workers to collectivize, it has been proven difficult to sustain democracy, and as such also poses a question about the sustainability of dignity.

### 5.1.3 Short-Termism Vs. Long-Term Viability

A critique often posed against the dominant forces in contemporary organizations pertains the myopic focus on short-term profits over long-term viability (Porter and Kramer 2011), which not only endangers jobs of workers in firms, but the entire sustainability of firms and the economic system, as the global financial crisis has shown. Hence, an important issue concerns the role of temporality in relation to workplace dignity. At a surface level, it may seem that dignity is primarily concerned with long-term relationships, because on the one hand, dignity is something that may seem to be absent in many workplace, and therefore it may take time to be developed fully. On the other hand, dignity as such may inherently attach value to long-term relationships over the transient nature of short-termism. The former carries an inherent worth, as long-term relationships may provide people with opportunities for exploration, deepening of existing relationships, reflection, development, and generally counteracts the fugacious nature of contemporary society. This also reflects in the activities of organizations, such as in the construction industry and urban planning. A well-known societal problem concerns gentrification, or the process of constant renewal in cities through which new, potentially wealthy, people enter the cities, and push out existing inhabitants to the periphery, who may have lived in their communities for decades or even centuries. This process often aligns with racial divisions, whereby neighborhoods are popularized by wealthy, white elites, while existing black or colored immigrants are forced further into the periphery of outskirts. As having to move as a result of economic expansion, and rent-seeking project developments, which take no account of the people involved, violations of the principles of workplace dignity are visible. In particular, project development turning old neighborhoods into spaces occupied with modern flats, is likely to neglect the role of people and dignity, the more it focuses on profits and the less it takes into account the importance of communities which have been existing for decades or centuries. Hence, it is not just a matter of architecture and urban planning, but of the extent to which all the organizations and institutions involved take dignity into



account in developing their business, and in particular the dignity of existing communities inhabiting spaces. This would imply that workplace dignity is primarily concerned with the development of long-term relationships (e.g., through building organizations which are truly viable and provide meaning for stakeholders for long periods of time).

One of the conclusions to be drawn on the recent research showing that poverty impedes cognitive functioning (Mani et al. 2013), is that temporary states of poverty, and not permanent poverty per se, may already cause people to make poorer decisions, as they feel impaired and unable to make optimal decisions. Hence, long-term relationships offer an important remedy against those states of poverty, and it is not surprising to see a rising interest in basic income (Gans 2014), as these kinds of (governmental) measures aim at reducing those very states of poverty, which can be metaphorically perceived as any situation where people feel to be reduced to make decisions for the moment only, and are fundamentally unable to perceive beyond the boundaries of the mundane worries occupying the person day-in-day-out. The notion of permanent contracts offered to workers, providing stability of employment during one's entire career, while expecting loyalty and moderation in return (Sims 1994), was aimed at this very state of poverty, which due to individualization and neoliberalism has been broken down almost completely (Bal and Jansen 2016). Dignity therefore resides in those long-term relationships, where people are able to free themselves from these states of poverty, and focus on aspects of their lives which have not been touched upon, and which prevented them for instance to have any focus on sustainability of the earth and so on. Hence, an escape from the neoliberal, individualized, discourse on poorer people living unhealthy, making poor financial decisions etc., is through integrating a way of implementing dignity in communities and workplaces, as it focuses on how to alleviate people from states of poverty, and to regain a sense of dignity in and through work.

However, this analysis falls short in its unilateral focus on long-term relationships, whilst ignoring the value of the single moment, which may have a strong emotional connotation for people to understand the meaning of the workplace. In a metaphorical moment of clarity,

one is able to see ‘the truth as it really is’, unconfounded by the images and propaganda of the ruling elites, corporates, and politics, and it is in these moments, where one is able to perceive the value of it all, or the ability to see through the opaque nature of contemporary times, as Bauman (2000) would refer to liquid modernity, where nothing is left than the image of the world itself, and observing this reality is unbiased in one’s own mind. In these moments, the traditional relationship between short-term and long-term has vanished, as it is delineated in linearity of time, but its own reality is constructed through stretching what is now, and bringing closer what has been and what will be. Hence, the value of the single moment is not to be underestimated when it concerns the value of dignity—it is often that one speaks of dignity resulting from a particular moment in time, where a person or situation shows dignity beyond the passing of time. For instance, in the earlier discussed examples of the One in the concentration camps or Gulag camps who did not break but maintained dignity, these references are not particularly time-based, as there may be a point in time where even that person breaks, and either engages in the same behavior as the others, or simply becomes ill and dies (such as is the case with the old Bolshevik Mostovskoj in the German concentration camp during WWII in Grossman’s *Life and Fate* 2013). Thus, dignity is not necessarily conceptualized in terms of its stability across time, and the establishment of it is not purely leading to some status-quo, showing a level of predictability concerning behavioral patterns, but one has to acknowledge the temporal phenomenon of dignity becoming manifest, or perceived to surface for everyone’s eyes in even the most horrific circumstances as within concentration camps, and therefore materialized in observable behaviors. This is not to say that dignity is transient, and that it solely resides within a moment, but for people dignity manifests in these moments, while being invisible at other times. Extending this argument leads to an understanding of dignity not only within the long-term relationships between people, but also within the moments that define what it is to be a human, and which can be either experienced alone, or jointly with others. Thus, there is an inherent value of the passing by of the moment in which one sees truth, and shares this with others.

Translating this to the workplace leads to a specific acknowledgement of the role of short-term relationships in the workplace. Temporary contracts, self-employed workers, zero-hour contracts, agency work and the like have too often been enforced upon employees, leaving them with no option than to accept these work circumstances or no work at all (Bal and Jansen 2016), which does not contribute to the dignity of these workers, as they are positioned in employment with no or little power, unless they have some specialization (e.g., being a craftsman or consultant), through which they can contribute to the workplace. However, a natural aspect of the workplace is also the rise and fall of economies, organizations, and products (Mason 2015; Varoufakis 2015), which demand a continuous adaptation of organizations, people and governments towards the changing nature of work and workplaces, as well as mechanisms in place to repair and resolve inequalities in the system. Therefore, stability is always fragile, and the key concern is to be able to adapt, which is understood in the need for workers to change jobs, organizations, and location. Dignity is not established when workers are forced to move when work is either outdated or outsourced to cheaper countries, but a more dignified approach would include the continuous learning of workers, which enables them to move and take up other jobs, as well as specific preparation and planning for future changes. In this paradigm, workers may be able to connect to others for a specific period of time (such as to work on a specific project), which may contribute to workplace dignity, but then move to another job or organization elsewhere. The importance here is not only of dignity during the work being performed on a specific project, but also in-between, when there is either no work, or when one engages in education to prepare for other work or jobs. Practical solutions for these types of waves in one's (working) life include the earlier mentioned basic income (Gans 2014), or flexicurity (Hastings and Heyes 2016), which constitute governmental efforts to enable workers to find dignity within work, but also in periods of lack of (paid) work, in which one engages in rest, parental care, education, volunteering work and so on. In sum, a workplace dignity perspective values long-term relationships as well as short-term moments or periods of time as essential in defining the fluctuations naturally occurring in economies and societies, and

poses the fundamental question, regardless of the specific timeframe of a relationship, how one can contribute to the protection and promotion of workplace dignity.

#### 5.1.4 Dignity and Its Relationship to Organization Studies

Implementing workplace dignity in the domain of management and organization studies assumes some relationship of the concept with existing terminology. Even though dignity is not entirely absent from organization studies (e.g., Donaldson and Walsh 2015; Pirson and Lawrence 2010; Sayer 2007), it has played a role only in the very margins of the field, while concepts such as fairness, justice, and integrity have been more dominant (Amann and Stachowicz-Stanusch 2013; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). Hence, why the need for a rather new concept in the (crowded) field of management discourse, with its over-emphasis on renewal of concepts, without always taking into account the conceptual boundaries of existing terms in relation to new ones? So is dignity nothing more than justice, or the perceived fairness of decisions and behavior in organizations (Colquitt 2001)? An important distinction is that dignity implies some level of fairness, while the reverse is not necessarily the case. Fundamentally, fairness perceptions arise from its context, and depending on a certain situation, something can be perceived to be fair or not. In this line of reasoning, fairness can be maintained in processes of downsizing, mass layoffs, and extending working hours, while dignity resides not just in the situation, but is founded on the basic assumption that the workplace has its dignity, or its intrinsic worth, and through laying off people, making them redundant and unemployed, it can be established that the workplace as such is treated without its intrinsic worth, as in this case people are instrumentalized, and merely used as means towards profitability. Hence, fairness and justice are about the question what is the right thing to do in a particular situation, while dignity provides a foundation for answering such questions through postulating the dignity of the workplace, including the intrinsic worth of people, which is not necessarily taken into account

under the label of fairness. In a certain way, one can argue a justification for torturing an individual in order to obtain information to prevent a terroristic attack, which aligns with a utilitarian view of instrumentalization of a human being. Hence, fairness can be used in multiple moral ways, including utilitarianism. Offering a solution to this argument, one can reason that dignity provides the necessary basic foundation for the use of concepts within management and organization studies, as it gives a sense of direction towards existing concepts in organization studies.

A prominent area of research in organizational psychology and human resource management is that of employee engagement, or the notion of the vigorous and dedicated worker, who is able to contribute to the organization beyond simply fulfilling a task description (Demerouti et al. 2001; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). Since the early 2000s, an enormous number of studies have been conducted on employee engagement, and a significant number of critical studies on the concept have been published as well (e.g., Crawford et al. 2010). Despite the conceptual critique on engagement, the often neglected point is the lack of direction in the term itself, through which it legitimizes any behavior to be 'engaged'. More specifically, one can be vigorous and dedicated to a specific cause, such as cheating customers in order to make profits, which tended to be the case in many financial institutions over the last decades (Luyendijk 2015). Moreover, a tax consultant working for an accountancy company may be fully engaged in helping a client with offshoring profits and avoid paying taxes, which produces high profits for both consultant, accountancy firm, and client, which ticks all the boxes of traditional management research: performance, engagement and satisfaction of all parties will be high. Hence, studying engagement without taking into account the context in which it emerges, is conceptually meaningless, as it only assesses one's arousal in the context of the work a person is conducting, thereby neglecting any situational factors determining the appropriateness of behaviors. In contrast, workplace dignity provides the capacity for engagement to appear within its proper context; in the combination of the two emerging, one can assess an activation of a person towards the protection or promotion of workplace dignity, through which engagement derives its true meaning in relation to work. Without a foundational reference, engagement is conceptually meaningless in

relation to work (beyond assessing individual arousal which may be related to individual well-being; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004), and it *only* obtains real substance as it elevates the individual hedonic experience (“I am feeling well, even though I do not know why”) into its deeper meaning embedded within the structures of meaning attached to the dignified workplace. It is this observation that is central to the implementation of dignity into management and organization studies; the lack of foundation in basic assumptions, or more precisely, the lack of explicit attribution to a basic assumption, legitimizes the use of various concepts, including engagement, proactivity and psychological contract, to be used freely across domains and by various researchers. However, as noted elsewhere (Bal 2015, 2016), more often these foundations tend to be aligned across dominant political-economic paradigms, and it is not strange to come across these hidden, unacknowledged assumptions underlying contemporary management research in the ideas described in journal articles and so on. Hence, a dignity perspective offers an important and useful alternative, explicit framework for understanding contemporary management issues, and allows concepts to be used within more specifically, explicitly acknowledged foundations, which are properly described in the studies presented in journals, book chapters, etc. However, the issue can be also observed on a deeper level, as the concepts used themselves result from ideology, and the focus on individualized work experiences represent in themselves a focus on what has been societally dominant.

More problematic is that researchers in their quest for what the workplace is ‘actually’ made of, have adhered to dominant societal paradigms rather than proposing paradigmatic alternatives. As such, the term engagement represents a fundamental shift from existing concepts including job satisfaction and organizational commitment, these latter two representing somewhat passive states, while engagement encapsulates individual activity and arousal, which is needed to survive in the contemporary labor market (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Hallberg and Schaufeli 2006). Hence, in the contemporary economy, employee commitment and satisfaction are no longer sufficient, but in global capitalism, employees need to be engaged and perform citizenship behaviors, or all those behaviors that go beyond task descriptions

and help organizational performance (Bolino et al. 2015). This necessarily leads to a view where employees are never finished with their work, where output is never enough, and where output growth is always the ultimate priority. A dignity perspective on this issue provides the alternative perspective in offering a possible view of how to behave, and postulates specifically a conceptual framework for understanding of *why* many of the concepts used in management studies are problematic in their very nature. An interesting recent example is the work of Bolino et al. (2015), who introduced the concept of citizenship fatigue, or the notion that employees are fed up with engaging in tasks beyond their task descriptions that enhance organization functioning. The authors do not engage in explaining why employees have those experiences, yet it is striking that in mainstream (US dominated) applied psychology and organizational behavior, a rising perception emerges of fatigue with the existing terminology and the fundamental inherent shortcomings of the terms used, presenting the need for new terms but which do not yet address the deeper issues. A fatigue with having to engage in citizenship is exemplary of the state of contemporary organizations, and dignity therefore introduces not only the notion of an alternative (as in presenting a direction for how to engage, or how to be a citizen), but at the same time offers a way of re-establishing the relationships between ethics, resistance, management, and individual experience (Greenwood 2002). In other words, a dignity perspective postulates a direction for establishment of the differences between behaviors which are good for the organization, yet unethical (e.g., Umphress and Bingham 2011), and acts which are good in itself but potentially counterproductive to the organization. Hence, there is an important role for people in terms of resistance against the organization and wider society (Gabriel 2005) in redefinition of what is 'the right thing to do', beyond narrowly defined organizational norms, potentially violating societal norms and personal well-being.

There are two issues related to the establishment of a dichotomy between organizational interest and societal interest as played out for the individual employee, who may be forced to choose between his/her own interests (fulfilled through having paid employment at a firm), and a desire to contribute to wider aim of society as such. First, as

ideology dictates the issue, employees are forced to make such decisions. Ultimately, dominant discourse in society redirects the interest of the worker towards a position that is not benefitting him- or herself directly, but which can only be sustained through propaganda. In other words, the worker is made to believe that dignity should not be on the table, as the sole organizational interest is in profit, which will ultimately always mean this trickles down to the employee. Populist movements in politics are a clear example of this process, as they sell their story through the classical issues of xenophobia and anti-elitism, but in reality are very much part of the elitist groups favoring large companies and so on (Jones 2014). A similar process occurs in the workplace, where even the poorest paid workers are told to believe in meritocracy and for instance the American Dream, in order to accept their inferior positions in the workplace, to sustain the system as it is, and to keep their hopes alive of reaching a better position in a distant future. It is not surprising to see how terminology in management has acted in line with this very notion, and has either been used as propaganda (i.e., the myth of the engaged worker), or as legitimizer of an ideology-free space (Ellemers and De Gilder 2016; Žižek 1989), in which terms are supposed to have no deeper meaning than the presented definition. A closer look at this reveals a conclusion which has been presented before (Bal 2015, 2016): terminology should be studied in more detail, and especially the ideological connotations implied in a term, as is the case with for instance engagement. Engagement should therefore be conceptualized to integrate the seemingly dichotomous nature of employer and societal interest (if not the employee).

Yet, the second issue related to the dichotomy pertains to the relative vagueness of what societal interest might constitute. A dignity-perspective on organizations may entail the idea that they should make a positive contribution to society, and as such pay their taxes to government. At the same time, national interests dictate that countries should be attractive to foreign investors and multinationals, which often leads to lowering of corporate taxes (such as in the Netherlands), which refrains organizations from making their necessary contributions to society. The point however, is that national interests cannot be equated to broader societal interests, as the recent debates on global tax



havens have shown. The right thing to do, resulting from a dignity-paradigm, may involve a substantial level of resistance, not just in the sense of resisting corporate interests per se (which was at the foundation of the Occupy Movement), but at the same time taking into account the more perverse nature of societal and potentially individual interests as well. Again, dignity is not just aimed at reducing the need for corporate interests favored by individual-societal needs, but is founded at the crossroad of these interests, and postulates a relatively straightforward question in addressing the nature of motivation (or will) guiding one's actions towards the promotion of dignity rather than addressing performance or well-being, as these are conceptually meaningless without the context in which they arise.

Similar arguments as presented above can be made for various terms within the area of management and organization studies; the recent rise of concepts such as proactivity, job crafting, leadership (transformative, authentic, servant, and so on), psychological contract, teamwork, trust, and idiosyncratic deals should all be understood as operating within the domain of the so-called ideology-free zone, heavily inspired by the cognitive science approach, aiming at explaining a scientific way of defining Reality which exists beyond or outside the ordinary human experience, which we cannot have complete control over, as they are determined by processes dictated by genes, brains, and hardwired in the experience of human life. The given task, therefore, of the contemporary management scholar is to identify those processes of for instance proactivity, which can be conceptualized at the level of personality (Greguras and Diefendorff 2010), through which it obtains deterministic properties, uninfluenced by external factors or context, and therefore dictating one's career success (Seibert et al. 1999). The more difficult questions around proactivity are usually avoided, in a myopic focus on the pros of proactivity, thereby ignoring the context in which proactivity arises, the inability or unwillingness of people to be proactive, and the deeper meaning of proactivity as such (Bal and Lub 2015).

Beyond the obvious neoliberal connotations and perceived societal need for people to become proactive (Bal and Jansen 2016), it is less well understood that proactivity has a deep ideological and political meaning, and that it is difficult in ordinary language to postulate an alternative

given its deeply engrained nature in contemporary discourse. This is evidenced in the inability to conceptualize the counterpart of proactivity; while inactivity can be perceived to be the counterpart of activity, proactivity does not have such a counterpart (perhaps inertia as the negative connotation which resembles rigidity as the counterpart of flexibility with an intended negative connotation), indicating the conceptual problematic nature of the term in the absence of conceptualization of its boundaries through non-defining what a lack of proactivity entails or how it can be described. It is in this absence that the ideological nature fully manifests, as there is no alternative. Reactivity is not a term used in management, and importantly distinguishes itself from proactivity in that it is not automated-driven behavior per se, and can be self-initiated and goal-driven (cf. definitions of proactivity: Parker et al. 2010). Hence, the inability of a conceptualization of the counterpart or absence of proactivity is directly resulting from the inherent aims of introduction of the term, and hence, it cannot be perceived without the underlying goals of using such a term in the scope of modern working life; it serves corporate interests when workers are proactive, as it constitutes self-initiated unpaid extra work which could be sold to the public through emphasizing not only its positive connotations (proactive people are happier and more successful), but also through the contemporary need to display these behaviors. The ultimate benefits as proactivity has been used so far, are for corporations, and academic research has played its role here; management scholars have published widely about the benefits of proactivity for (organizational) performance, while the recent emphasis on academia-practice collaboration (i.e., impact, public engagement, valorization) has only substantiated the belief that proactivity is needed for both organizations and workers. There is little question about the value of introducing proactivity and to which extent it is good for any party involved. Proactivity is qualitatively different from terms such as reactivity, inactivity, passivity and inertia as it concerns an extra investment; it is not the opposite of withholding effort put in conducting work, but it should be understood as extra; that is work conducted on top of normal work performance, and in its nature never suffices, as extra work is not quantified in its regulated structure. Hence, there is little questioning about the hidden costs of proactivity, in the sense of

the investment of time and energy that people invest in being proactive, and whether non-work domains, such as family and friends are suffering as a result of the need for proactivity. This potentially creates a conflict between proactivity and dignity, as unlimited need for proactivity may come at the expense in other domains, such as competition, health or family life (Bolino et al. 2015).

Moreover, at the work level, the question is who is paying for proactivity, as it consists largely of unpaid additional efforts which may benefit the individual (indirectly) but should benefit organizations ultimately, posing however no organizational obligation to reward these efforts. Finally, as stated before, there is no assumption underlying the goal-directedness of proactivity. Hence, in the absence of an ethic of proactivity (beyond the norm to be proactive), there is no goal other than the filling of a void that is undefined and uncriticized and therefore allows for any behavior to become acceptable under the label of proactivity, thereby legitimizing any behavior, detrimental or not, as fulfilling the societal need for the proactive worker.

Mainstream academia has failed quite blatantly in elucidating the true nature of proactivity (i.e., extra unpaid work), and therefore it is time to establish the role of dignity in proactivity, or to investigate how proactive behavior can contribute to greater dignity in the workplace. In case of failure, it is perhaps, time for introduction of *conactivity* as a scientific term to indicate the activity arising among workers which are aimed not at contributing to organizational goals or pure self-enhancement (Parker et al. 2010) but towards the establishment of organizations that contribute to protection and promotion of dignity rather than using terminology for work intensification (Kelliher and Anderson 2010). This is the essential meaning of dignity in the workplace, as it serves as a way of reconceptualizing terminology around proactivity, engagement, leadership etc. into the domain of true meaning. It is through dignity that two major streams of research in management can be aligned: on the one hand, the focus on 'good' behaviors and experiences has studied engagement, satisfaction, commitment, and so on, while on the other hand, a stream of research has focused on 'bad' behaviors such as corruption, cheating, unethical behavior, counterproductive behavior and abusive leadership. It is noteworthy

how researchers have struggled (and with it, created work for themselves) in aligning how these two co-occur, and some researchers have pointed towards the inconsistencies between the two (Bolino et al. 2015; Umphress and Bingham 2011). For instance, the two streams of research are not just negatively correlated with each other, but may occur at the same time: in situations of high commitment, unethical behavior may be observed (Tang and Chiu 2003), and job satisfaction may exist where leaders are abusive through means of cognitive dissonance. These streams of research fail to understand the inherent relationship between the two through neglecting the underlying ideological principles as well as the cognitive efforts people undertake to distance themselves from experiencing dissonance, leading to a context in which both good and bad arise, as there is no foundation of what is right and wrong. Only through acknowledging the status of each act (resulting from a will to respect dignity), the two streams can be aligned.

## 5.2 Dignity Implementation in Organizations

The implementation of dignity in organizations revolves not around utopian ideas of the perfect society or organization, resulting in the idea of the workplace where dignity is never violated or damaged. Established in a tradition of pragmatism (Evans 2000), dignity does not serve as the so-called moral high ground occupied by the One (Žižek 2001), or the almost metaphorical individual in the Nazi or Gulag concentration camps who was able to retain her/his dignity, who did not break down in the quest for survival, and thereby saved the dignity of the Others. This individual, described in many autobiographies of life in concentration camps serves as the single person who saves humanity as such, through maintaining comportment dignity in the face of the horror which leads so many others to comply and regress to some level of inhumanity, stealing from others, lying and necessary killing in order to survive (e.g., Levi 2014; Sjalamov 2005). While this example stems from a situation where human life is tested to the extreme, where both physical and psychological violence against people is happening at the most horrendous levels, it still is important to understand its relation

to the workplace, as workplace dignity is not theorized to either occupy moral high grounds, with hardly achievable levels of human interaction, or to legitimize the state of dignity through others, whereby dignity is maintained through those special individuals who *do not break* (Žižek 2001). Implementation of dignity into the workplace, therefore, is concerned with both the mundane activities of working life, and assesses the quality of those activities in relation to its broader context, as well as the more fundamental level of interaction and collaboration between people and within organizations.

An often posed critique against moral appeals (such as considering dignity in one's work activities), is that it is individualized, to the level that every individual has to make a decision regarding his or her actions in the workplace. The earlier mentioned defense of the banker in Luyendijk (2015), is essentially denoting the survival instinct of the contemporary worker, where downward comparisons are deemed to be useless, and as such the banker primarily worries about being able to pay his mortgage, send his children to expensive private schools, to drive his expensive Land Rover, and so on. In other words, it is the bourgeois or the capitalist who has a lot to lose, and therefore is unlikely to engage in dignity work when it does not immediately reward the person extrinsically (Žižek 2001). A lasting moment of realization of the sheer luxury and lack of necessity of these very symbols is not happening, and therefore, a question of workplace dignity directly interferes with the need for disavowal (Žižek 1989), or the acknowledgement of the banker that he knows what he is doing, yet is still doing it. This is the problematic nature of a lack of dignity in the workplace, as it leads to disavowal, in the realization of the undignified nature of the workplace and yet a feeling of hopelessness to individually change anything about it. The individual perception of inability to make a positive change demands for structural changes, amongst others via legislation, regulation and so on. However, as outlined elsewhere (Düwell et al. 2014), there are various problems with focusing on a legal way *only*, as organizations may be inclined to either disregard existing regulation or find their way around it (Devinney 2009). Hence, a more viable way through which workplace dignity may be implemented in organizations is using a bottom-up approach, thereby uniting the strength

of individuals forming collectives, along principles of organizational democracy (Cheney et al. 2014). Chapter 6 will discuss in greater detail the ways in which dignity can be truly implemented in organizations through workplace democracy, while focusing on the activities traditionally performed under the label of human resource management (Bal and De Jong 2016).

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# 6

## Dignity, Workplace Democracy, and HRM

In Chap. 5, it was discussed how dignity can be implemented in the domain of management studies. It was argued that dignity offers a unique perspective on the existing set of instruments and tools available to the management scholar, in offering a dignity approach towards existing terminology such as engagement and proactivity. Furthermore, the chapter argued that dignity is not built around utopian visions of how the workplace could be, but that dignity is established in the reality of daily working life through sensemaking and debate. Two conditions were postulated as crucial in building dignified organizations: power-balance and learning organizations. To do so, it is postulated that dignity can be established on the notion of democracy, as it fundamentally revolves around the redistribution of power in organizations, and creates the opportunity for learning organizations and systems. The current chapter discusses the role of democracy in establishing dignity in the workplace, and subsequently argues how this may affect activities relating to traditional human resource management: staffing, performance appraisal, development and so forth.

## 6.1 Workplace Democracy and Dignity

Workplace dignity implies a number of values, including freedom, equality and openness. However, given existing dominant structures of organizational life (and in extension economies and societies), there is little space for development of these value, as hierarchies, control mechanisms, power structures, and bureaucracies dominate in laying out the foundations of contemporary organizations (Hamel 2011). This is surprising given the rising levels of literacy and education across societies, and therefore, the proposed growth of involvement of people in decision making processes. Despite these trends, organizations seem to have become more hollow institutions where people work but where is no sense of collectivity, where real participation has declined into either an active denial of those rights, or pseudo-involvement. Especially popular has been pseudo-involvement, which has been introduced as means of consultation, where workers are offered a way of influence within their organizations (or work groups) but where actual influence is limited with real decisions being taken elsewhere. As workplace dignity is essentially aimed at pragmatic solutions to real existing problems (Margolis 1998), it seeks not just to establish an aspirational framework for willing organizations and workers (e.g., how through the notion of the enlightened despot allowing freedom, workers experience to have dignified jobs), in presenting guidelines of how workplaces may become more dignified through benevolent (or altruistic) actions, but to present the primary ways through which a workplace can become dignified in itself, thereby sustaining systems regardless of the individual initiative for dignified actions leading to decent work environments. Sustainability of dignity is established when it is elevated beyond the efforts of individuals into the culture and systematic properties, and workplace democracy is one of the ways in which this can be achieved. Notwithstanding the downsides of democracy and potential degeneration over time, which will be discussed later in the chapter, the alignment of the principles of dignity with democracy provides an opening for theorizing on the more practical implications of a dignity paradigm. In earlier publications, I have briefly discussed the links between dignity

and democracy, and its implications for human resource management (e.g., Bal 2015, 2016; Bal and De Jong 2016), but this chapter more extensively discusses the links between these and the challenges presented in sustaining dignity through democracy.

### 6.1.1 What Is Democracy?

While democracy has been functioning as a way of operating societies since the Greek Antiquity, it is surprising that democracy as organizational structure has largely been absent (even though cooperatives exist more widely although these are not necessarily democratic), while organizations still primarily rely on more paternalistic structures at best, with caring managers who are willing to take the needs of their employees into account, thereby thus essentially sacrificing some profitability for the well-being of workers. While this system relies heavily on the benevolence of individuals (Cheney et al. 2014), it has long been established that alternative forms of governance are possible and may thrive (Butcher and Clarke 2002). The well-known example of the Mondragon community in Northern Spain has been working with democracy over decades, and despite many challenges, the system has survived over the years, providing fairness, equality and social cohesion in the communities (Flecha and Ngai 2014). Theoretically, the question pertaining to the current chapter is how democracy aligns with dignity, and before doing so, I will explain the core idea of democracy while relating this to the notions of workplace dignity, thereby focusing not only on the dignity of human beings, but more generally of the workplace itself, and how it can be sustained within principles and practices of democracy.

The central aim of workplace democracy is the involvement of all organizational members into the organizational practices and decision making processes and empowering them to be engaged with all the important facets of the organization (Bal and De Jong 2016; Foley and Polanyi 2006). Democracy is a form an organizational structure which in its essence is based around the idea of the power redistribution within organizations with the intention to create more ethical business.

Timming's (2015) argument that leaving decision making processes in the hands of a few people is dangerous and destabilizes organizations is valid in the context of recent global economic events, but it was an argument that was made in the Greek Antiquity and formed the reason to establish structures of distributed decision making, aimed not just at involving more people into it, but with the specific goal in mind to make decisions which were better, more sustainable and generally more widely accepted. Hence, there is an inherent relationship between distributed decision making and quality of decisions being made. Yet, this realization is not widely spread—a recent symposium published in *Academy of Management Perspectives* on alternative economic futures (Adler 2016) was introduced with an editorial commentary which questioned the validity of this very observation, by stating that individuals cannot be trusted as they have little means to diversify and to have control over the direction of a firm (Phan et al. 2016, see p. 119). There are two fundamental problems with this; first, it represents (a classical) elitist notion that ordinary workers cannot be trusted, as they lack the information, capabilities or motivation to foresee the effects of their decisions. It can be questioned whether managers have those skills (as the many bankruptcies over the last decades show), and it blames workers of not having the information and so on, which they should receive from the very same managers who claim the right to make those decisions. Thus, by withholding the very resources on which democracy can be built, it is used as an argument against democracy. Moreover, the second problem is that it reduces the worker to its completely individualized properties, through assuming that individuals do not have much influence on organizations. Again, the arguments against democracy are presented on the basis of the goals of democracy itself; the collective representation of workers in organization, which does have the impact needed to direct firms. Thus, while not fully established, a core argument of democracy is that it not only represents a fundamental value for people (as involvement results from a position of equality), but it is also important to retain the sustainability of the organizational system itself, as the inclusion of multiple voices and opinions will in the long run optimize decision making. Hence, from multiple perspectives, it can be theorized that workplace democracy forms the best way of organizing,

and in the remainder of this chapter, the arguments will be explained in greater detail.

Workplace democracy is essentially about a reversal of top-down management towards bottom-up approaches to organizing, change, and decision making (Hamel 2011). Instead of the traditional manager who distributes tasks and orders the subordinate workers when and how to conduct their work, democracy reverses this relationship in line with the theoretical idea of democracy in terms of representation; managers are no longer primarily employed by top managers or directors, but act as representatives of workers and thus functions in their interests, and in extension, in the interests of workplace dignity. Bottom-up approaches are occupied with the shifting of the power-balance in organizations, with the equal distribution of power as outcome of a process where power was centered at the top, in the hands of the board of directors or shareholders. Power shift is central to democracy, as it involves the capacity to make and influence decisions, and therefore should be taken into account when investigating the implementation of dignity into workplaces. The precise ways of establishing this shift may differ across contexts and organizations; some organizations may engage in employee ownership (e.g., through shares; Keef 1998), but not all employee-owned companies are actually democratic (e.g., Paraque and Willmott 2014).

However, ownership may constitute a 'natural' result of a process where workers (re-)gain control over their organizations, and being part of organizations which are physically owned by external stakeholders, such as shareholders or private equity firms, may actually endanger democratic principles. Yet, it may be the case that pragmatic solutions are achieved, for instance through ownerships via shares with a commitment to dignity (or sustainability). Shareholders may in this role act as responsible stakeholders, in providing the necessary financial means to contribute to the organizational goals, and should therefore not be neglected in the foundation of dignified organizations. Thus, physical ownership of organizations is not a necessary condition of democracy as such, but in more general terms represent the ways of describing the relationships between workers and their activities, as ownership of one's activities imply a responsibility towards the activity itself as well as the outcomes of it, which aligns with the notion of dignity in terms

of duties to respect the intrinsic worth of the workplace (Rousseau and Shperling 2003).

At the basis of the organizational democracy are relationships among people. As such, organizations are built around people and their communications which lays the foundation for equality, dignity and democracy (Cooper 2005), rather than around capital, real estate or products. The explicit notion of relationships underpinning organizations and therefore the structures of organizations, indicate that it is only possible to postulate a theory of the workplace in terms of the people involved in it. At the basis of modern society is the idea of equality (Kateb 2011), or the notion that people do not have more worth than others, and that people cannot be merely sacrificed for the benefit of other people. A way of conceptualizing this starting point is on the principles of democracy, which has increasingly postulated the point of one-person-one-vote (as a result of suffragette movements), and implementation of this system in organizations will contribute to a more dignified workplace for several reasons (Bal and De Jong 2016).

Democracy does not entail just any act of involvement or empowerment of workers in organizations (Argyris 1998). As democracy has primarily positive connotations in Western society (albeit decreasing with the current rise of populist movements), organizations have used it in the past either as a fad, or a way of installing pseudo-democracy, whereby workers have some discretion over how they conduct their work and when they work, while at the same time, there is no or little proper involvement in key decision making processes (see e.g., Kelliher and Anderson 2010 for an interesting example of how workplace flexibility has functioned as form or empowerment leading to work intensification). As democracy is about power distribution, control mechanisms are key to understand in terms of how employee involvement programs really function, as an accepted way of involving employees is allowing some freedoms, implementation of decentralization, engagement of works councils or trade unions, while at the same time, control and monitoring mechanisms are still very much in place, with higher management remaining in power. It is therefore not surprising to see how elites in management and corporations resist the idea of democracy, as it takes away their power positions, and ultimately



endangers the *raison d'être* of management itself. The provocative call of Hamel (2011) in *Harvard Business Review* for self-managed teams without the need for managers, as managers are costly and ineffective, is on the one hand based on classical arguments of costs and profits, but on the other hand offers an interesting plea for alternatives, yet being stuck in paradigms in which the very change being called for is unlikely to be achieved, as the discourse itself is not addressed; while being stuck in the jargon of management it does not resolve the deeper issue of purposefulness of the organization and team itself, thereby ignoring the non-financial issues around the role and redundancy of management and managers. Hence, true democracy is needed not only to preserve the status of equality of organizational members and external stakeholders, but also to address the reason of existence of the organization itself.

In a previous book chapter (Bal and De Jong 2016), eight reasons were presented why democracy fits the notion of dignity (see also Sauser 2009). First, democracy aligns with the notion of participation. Dignity implies the equal status of people (Kateb 2011), and work not only fulfils the need for survival (to feed one's family), but serves other needs as well, including the need to belong (Ryan and Deci 2000). Democracy offers not only the potential for participation of employees in terms of having work, but also to be involved in key decision making processes at work. Dignity at work implies that decisions that are directly affecting people at work should never be taken without their involvement and consent, as it would imply that people are treated towards an end (the decision that leads to an outcome), rather than taking into account the person involved as an end in itself. Hence, participation is central to both democracy (in decision making and power redistribution), and dignity (the involvement in being part of the workplace and in decisions that directly affect the worker). Second, democracy is directly focused at the protection of the employee. In a system of global capitalism (in the order of liberal democracy), workplace flexibility has become all too common (Bal and Jansen 2016), and thus used as an excuse for work intensification, mass layoffs, suboptimal working conditions and use of zero-hour contracts (Mason 2015). Exacerbated by the decline of trade unions, the protection of workers has lost its importance for contemporary organizational life, and while dignity implies that protection

is an explicit value of the activities performed at the workplace, there is yet no framework in which protection is institutionalized, as the rising need for self-reliance enhances further individualization of work.

Democracy not only values the protection of workers through empowering the voice of individuals and groups to be heard and taken into account, but it also directly associates with the bottom-up formation of the workplace itself. In consequence, for instance layoffs are not just the result of economic downturns or cost-efficiency measures, but are questioned in its entire validity, as they represent likely cases of dignity violations (Gilbert 2000). This does not mean that the alternative is represented by a static position where people do not leave organizations, but the more fundamental question pertains to the process of how people enter and leave organizations. Presenting a proper, dignified, alternative focuses on addressing the underlying causes of economic malfunctioning, and seeks to establish more dignified ways to address these, for instance through higher savings in better economic times to cope with economic downturns, temporary pay cuts, work hour reduction, and decent ways to share resources. For example, women or men who are sole breadwinners and earning their salary to feed their families carry a responsibility for their family, and in times of economic hardship, these personal circumstances could be taken into account in terms of how available resources in organizations (e.g., profits, salaries) are distributed among people. This also implies a reversal of the entitlement principle, based on equity (Adams 1965): it is not just the outcome of how much people contribute to organizational performance depending on their inputs, but resource distribution may also take into account the needs of people depending on their personal circumstances. An often heard criticism towards family-friendly policies in organizations comes from those *without* families, as these policies discriminate against those without families. While this aligns with principles of fairness or equal treatment, it is already happening (hence, creating different treatment in organizations on the basis of particular needs), and more importantly it should be aligned with principles of dignity and the extent to which people can contribute in a sustainable way to dignifying organizations.

Third, a core principle of democracy is the voluntary engagement of its members (Cheney et al. 2014). This is important, as workplace democracy is different from political-state democracy, as it operates within a space of multiple systems and actors (Adler 2016). The implication is that within the hegemonic structure of neoliberalism, alternatives arise including workplace democracy, which allows for the voluntary commitment of workers towards it. In other words, many workers may initially have little desire to be actively involved in the functioning and management of their own organizations, as it implies efforts and energy that need to be spent towards investing in mastering the skills to be engaged within democracy. As a result, workers have the freedom to choose to be working in traditional organizations with traditional management structures. Hence, enforced cooperation in democracies excludes proper commitment to a goal, and therefore workplace democracy relies upon the voluntary choice of individuals to be part of organizations, and to experience the responsibility of engagement. One observation from alternative ways of cohabiting and cooperation (such as communes) is that while initially based on principles of equality, strong hierarchies can be formed over time, with dominant leaders and strong behavioral norms, with a pressure on compliance of its members (Cheney et al. 2014; Sauser 2009). This is a typical phenomenon of an unhealthily operating, degenerated, democracy, which denies the principle of voluntariness, as people may perceive to be stuck within a community, while experiencing strong (oppressive) behavioral norms, and feel a too strong hesitation to move. This is a signal of a mismanaged democracy, where dominance and pressure of compliance have silenced the very voices that should be heard within communities. Thus, it merely signals that a negative threshold has been passed, and that renewal (or regeneration; Heras-Saizarbitoria 2014), is needed within organizations and communities. Hence, the value of true voluntariness should not be underestimated in taking into account workplace democracy and sustaining dignity through it. It is through the very means of people entering organizations and leaving them, that new voices are heard, criticism could be introduced as central mechanism of improvement, and therefore, democracies should be focused on smooth processes through which people can ‘flow’ through the system.

Fourth, democracies enable values beyond the ‘business case’ to be integrated in organizational functioning. In systems of traditional hierarchical control, decisions tend to be made from the perspectives and interests of the shareholders or top managers, resulting in a separation between top management and workers. When profitability and shareholder value is prioritized, it affects the workers (Lazonick 2014), as they not only reap fewer benefits from the economic performance of the organization but also because they are merely means in the system. Reversing the system, and rebalancing power towards the workers opens the way for other outcomes to be taken into account, and in particular the interests resulting from a dignity paradigm. Two processes explain this relationship. On the one hand, decisions tend to be made by not just a small minority of elite, top managers, who may be unable or unwilling to perceive the social consequences of their actions, but by a large group of people in the organization (and potentially outside as well), through which multiple voices can be heard and taken into account. As a result, voices that are concerned with the dignity outcomes of organizational actions are more likely to be heard as well. On the other hand, when decisions are taken by top managers and subsequently enacted by the workers, a separation is created between the one making a decision and the one performing it, which creates a moral vacuum of who is responsible for the outcomes of a certain act, which subsequently creates the opportunity for disavowal (i.e., we know it is wrong to do, but nonetheless we are still doing it). A closer connection between a person or group of people making a decision and consequently performing it, leads to a situation where people are directly responsible for the outcomes of their own decisions, and as such may be more likely to take into account the ethical and social consequences of their actions (VanSandt et al. 2006).

Fifth, an important aspect of democracy is empowerment and autonomy. Over the last decades, researchers have been occupied with the quest for meaningful work (e.g., Michaelson et al. 2014), and how jobs and careers are made more meaningful and how workers can construct more meaning in their work. However, much of this research has largely neglected the processes of how jobs and people in jobs are produced and formed, and have failed to take into account the notion

that few organizations have an interest in meaningful jobs, while at the same time outcome-based performance targets are inherently disinterested in the process. Democracy, however, does not just enable people to individually construct their own jobs in a hedonic way (see e.g., job crafting; Tims and Bakker 2010), but opens the way for people to create meaning in their work in a joint process of teams constructing their work, deciding how and when to conduct their work, and using their autonomy to develop dignified workplaces.

Sixth, democracies are focused on learning and development (De Jong and Van Witteloostuijn 2004). Organizations are no error-free zones, yet, this observation is increasingly reduced to a mere punishment system, such as in universities, where faculty who does not publish in academic journals lose their time to do research, and where student evaluations serve as strong indicator of one's quality of teaching, with low evaluations being regarded as errors in delivering value for the students, and consequently hampering one's career (the same counts for research). Hence, even in the very institutions of learning, learning does not really take place anymore in the pressure for commodified performance, and a similar trend is occurring in organizations. Notable are the quickly disappearing training, research and development departments in large organizations, where training and learning becomes commodified completely through external training agencies and consultants, thereby devaluing the development of workers as an autonomous goal, as external consultant-driven training is in need of more justification of its direct benefits for performance. Workplace democracy reintroduces the value of learning and development as an autonomous goal of the work process, and through means of reflection (individually or in dyads or groups), learning is a central aspect of the work process, as the only ways in which improvement of quality and more dignity can occur is through a process of reflection on the past in order to learn for the future. As workplace dignity is unlikely to be captured within specific guidelines of how to act when one enters the workplace, a crucial element in dignity work is the reflection of workers on what has been conducted in the past, and how they negotiate their behaviors for the future that may contribute to more respect and promotion of dignity.

Seventh, democracy brings together two elements on which societies and economies function: competition and collaboration (De Waal 2008; Spisak et al. 2011). While neoliberalism postulates a radical version of competition and social Darwinism (survival of the fittest, ego-oriented behavior), it is discussed earlier how this fails to fully acknowledge the elements that constitute human behavior and inclinations. Democracy and dignity postulate a specific vision on this apparent dichotomy, which differs somewhat from the classical description of the separation between competition and collaboration. Evolutionary perspectives (Spisak et al. 2011) would propose dynamics of competition between groups and collaboration within groups, which in the workplace could be translated into strong competitive forces between organizations, while within organizations collaboration would constitute the primary *modus operandi* to smoothen organizational functioning. However, this would constitute a limited version of evolutionary thinking, and would open pathways of exclusion across groups. Instead, a democracy and dignity perspective argues that competition is an element which cannot be neglected; however, competition occurs primarily in terms of quality. The only way through (social) improvements take place is through processes that lead individuals and companies to improve their own functioning. A core argument of neoliberalization has always been that governments lack the incentives for improvement, and that in a free market, competition drives to better quality products. While this reasoning has been shown to be flawed both theoretically (e.g., Stiglitz 2012; Varoufakis 2015) and practically (e.g., one can observe the privatization of trains in the UK), an important conclusion to be drawn is that there should be appropriate incentives for people and organizations to improve their own functioning and products and services. While this is partly due to the importance of learning in democratic organizations, it also relies on the explicit acknowledgement of the role of collaboration in the workplace. Cooperation not only within organizations, but also across organizations, forms the fundament of the dignified workplace. Collaboration has always occurred in and between organizations, and while this may have led to corruption (e.g. through cartels), the more important element is that competition occurs on quality and improvement of the workplace, while collaboration is necessary to create

cohesion, information exchange and so forth. This may for instance lead to the earlier discussed patent system in Holland, where protection of established plants (or products) can be achieved via patents, while others may freely use plants (or developed products) to improve and develop. This creates a system within and beyond organizations that focuses on *both* competition and collaboration, but with a specific direction of what competition and collaboration mean, and how they relate to each other.

Eighth, democracies have a concern for communities. While stakeholder management models have been existing since the 1980s, they do not specify the relationships of stakeholders with the organization. Democracy and dignity further integrate the stakeholder relevance with the direction in which communication with stakeholders is aimed at. The principle starting point of democracies is inclusiveness (i.e., equality of each member), which means that organizations do not operate beyond the system, but essentially are being part of societies, and as such should be integrated within their communities. Hence, organizations which are based in a particular city or neighborhood carry a responsibility towards that neighborhood, in their role as employer or using natural resources as part of their organizational functioning. When organizational members, who may also be part of the community surrounding the organization, are empowered to be the key decision makers within the organization, they will be more likely to take into account the interests of the communities, and thus find a balance between creating employment for local communities and sustainable treatment of resources that are either used or produced by the organization.

In sum, the inherent relationships of democracy with dignity offer the possibility to create organizations which contribute to promotion of dignity in communities, as well as creating sustainability, fairness and social cohesion. The eight reasons why democracy and dignity align also describe the values underpinning democratic workplaces, and can be used as foundational values of democratic organizations (Heras-Saizarbitoria 2014; Sauser 2009). When the power balance shifts, it opens pathways for different organizations, including truly inclusive organizations, as the aim of democracy is to realign the

interests of different groups within society and within organizations. This is not a free act, which is something that is not always understood, as democracy allows for the advancement of the interests of specific groups. However, in line with the dignity notion, entering the workplace, and becoming part of democratic organizations, does not solely entail the right to express one's voice, but also the duty to uphold respect for the dignity of the workplace. In effect, this means that representation in democracy is not just focused on advancing the interests of one's own group, but also to take into account the interests of minority groups, as tyranny of the majority is an often raised critique against democracy. However, this critique cannot be used to defend the status-quo as this represents a more perverse situation in which a minority (of top managers) decides over the majority, where democracy is completely absent. Hence, the adoption of workplace democracy entails both the opportunities for workers to express their voice and be involved, while at the same time workers have a duty to take the interests of all workers into account, and thus form truly inclusive organizations.

### 6.1.2 Politics and Democracy

An important role in organizational democracies pertains to organizational politics (Butcher and Clarke 2002). Notwithstanding the negative connotations of politics (especially in the context of organizational life), democracies involve some political processes, and in particular voting systems and representation. An often posed critique on democracies has revolved around the time consuming elements of involvement (Heras-Saizarbitoria 2014), as traditional hierarchies are generally quicker to respond to challenges posed to organizations. Yet, voting systems are essential to the functioning of organizational democracies, as they on the one hand give employees the opportunity to directly influence decision making, while on the other hand they may decrease some of the burden of everyday decision making. In more practical terms, decision making processes should be decentralized where possible to the discretion of employees and/or teams. When teams have control over how they manage their resources, it may create stronger identification



with their work and tasks, and avoids the risk of top-down hierarchical decision making.

Moreover, for more general and organization-wide decisions that affect workers more widely as well as external stakeholders, voting may be necessary through extensive consultation and information exchange. Another option is via representative democracy, or the choice of elected managers who are representatives of teams and departments and in their roles, ensure that the workers in the department have the opportunity to perform well, while initiating the collaboration with others outside the department. Allowing a manager to act as representative ensures the accountability of the manager towards the workers in the team, while at the same time having received a mandate by the team to act in their interests, through which workers not necessarily have to be involved in voting and strategic decision making on a daily basis. However, as Graeber (2013) points out, voting is not at the heart of democracy, as a more fundamental perspective pertains to democracy as a process rather than a means towards an end. Hence, democratization is about involvement and consensus, and voting can thus be used as a means to assess whether there is consensus rather than to push through a majority vote on a certain decision to be taken, thereby willfully neglecting the minority views. In contrast, democracy is about aligning the needs of the different individuals and groups, and thereby overcoming the potential dangers of tyranny of majorities through postulating the duties of individuals and groups in the workplace.

The optimal functioning of democracies is described by its very elements, as a focus on learning and development concerns not only the performance of the work, but also performance of the management process itself. Hence, this vision towards management reverses the idea of what the role of a manager is; while partly agreeing with Hamel (2011) that self-managing teams not necessarily need a manager, as leadership may be perceived as a process and informal leadership may spontaneously occur in the absence of formal leaders, this may be complemented with a view of the leader as representative. Moreover, leadership positions or managerial roles are not just resulting from a desire for career progression, as this would imply a rather static view on how one moves across organizations, using management positions to climb so the

so-called career ladder. Instrumental in its very essence, the career ladder can hardly be perceived as a dignified way of working, and instead, a more fundamental question pertains to how long a person desires a management role or is capable and motivated to engage in a management position. Extending this concern leads to a position where the focus changes from management as a career step to management as a necessary function within the organization, which people can commit to for a certain period of time, after which they return to the team and continue working as a team member, or go elsewhere in or outside the organization. Through revolving management positions across team members, it is more likely that management is perceived to be a 'normal' position within the organization, which does not entail specific privileges carrying over after one has conducted the role, as a risk may occur that former managers who return to their teams still have implicit perceptions of being a manager, or are perceived by team members to play such a role, which may undermine the credibility of a new manager. However, to be able to implement a system where people change positions, functions and responsibilities across time, organizational democracies require an investment from the employee. As argued earlier in the book, entering the workplace is not a neutral act, and when dignity is taken seriously in organizational life, it follows that democracy offers the best potential way of implementing dignity in the workplace, but this also implies that employees perceive their own responsibilities and duties. There are several ways in which the individual employee is involved in democracy.

### 6.1.3 The Employee and Democracy

The individual employee is central in the organizational democracy, which is one of the key differentiations between dignity and democracy, as the former implies the workplace as such being central to the organizing principle (in following how to act to respect the dignity of the workplace), while the latter is a primarily human-based organizing process or principle, and focuses on how workers in organizations (and in extension stakeholders) can make decisions and use politics and

power in a way that it contributes to workplace dignity. In line with the advocated bottom-up approach, democracy starts with the individual employee, and her or his investment in an organization. This investment may be physical, in terms of shares that need to be purchased before one can become part of an organization (Rousseau and Shperling 2003). A financial investment is a way of aligning the individual interests of a worker with those of the other workers and the organization, as taking the notion that workers may be primarily self-interested and searching for ways to enhance their income, may be enforced through tying the employee financially to the outcomes of the organization, and when the organizations profitability grows, this has direct effects on the employee's income and share worth. While this represents a somewhat extreme enforcement of employee commitment through financial ties, other systems may include profit sharing among all workers (and not just managers), and more affective forms of commitment of an employee to the organization, for instance through subscribing to its values and ideas. Commitment has too often been enforced upon employees, representing the ultimate choice of the employee between committing to an organization or living in the land of insecurity, with no certainty of having a job, or having to find one in an increasingly competitive labor market (Cappelli and Keller 2013).

Democracy entails the voluntary choice to commit oneself to an organization, and thereby returning to a meaning of commitment as belonging and being part of a group (Solinger et al. 2013). Beyond this commitment, it can be observed how democracy through its focus on equality of members, regains a sense of meaning with regards to conceptual terminology in organization studies, such as the concept of the psychological contract. As noted by Rousseau (2012), psychological contracts can only emerge through the free will of the employee. When employees cannot freely engage in a relationship with an employer, psychological contracts may develop in a context of abusive relationships towards employees, through which the concept itself is meaningless.

When employees become part of workplace democracies in the context of the dignified workplace, this establishes the formation of duties towards the responsibilities carried out in the workplace. While workplace dignity defines these duties at the individual level, this does not

imply the individualized nature of duties, as the relational framework in which they arise (in the communications between people), particularly emphasizes the way in which duties are constructed in social processes. As representation, consensus, elections, and voting mechanisms are the fabric of healthy democracies, employees need to be involved in the processes underlying the functioning of organizations, as to participate means to understand and have a sense of ownership regarding organizational operations. This is not merely achieved through making information accessible, but needs to be implemented in a more radical way into organizational democracies. Following the eight reasons for alignment of democracy with dignity, a number of specific recommendations follow in relation to the role and tasks of employees in democracies. At the most fundamental level can be stated that development is central to the organization, and as such workplace democracies are *learning organizations* (De Jong and Van Witteloostuijn 2004). Both employees and managers focus on continuous learning and development, for instance through reflection mechanisms built in the system (e.g., regular individual and team meetings where discussions take place for reflection on past performance and future improvements), but also through proper implementation of HRM (to be reframed in a dignity perspective), which will be discussed below in greater detail.

Learning and development are important, as they enable workers to grow within their current roles, to participate in the wider processes of the operations and management of the organization, and to prepare for other roles in or outside the organization. An often neglected concern around democracies and the roles of employees in organizations is the enormous impact of increasing life expectancy, and hence the need to extend working lives (Bal et al. 2012), and the complexities of achieving this. Taking into account that people within decades may be expected to become 120 years old, they may have to prepare for working lives of more than 50–60 years. Given these changes, it is impossible to retain current career perspectives, and to rely on existing career models to predict how people move across time in a dignified way. Hence, a dignity perspective postulates that learning and development enable people to actively prepare for the future and to be able to contribute to workplace dignity in a sustainable manner over

time. To do so, it is no longer acceptable to rely on the single-career perspective which has been dominant over the last decades (if not centuries), and people will more actively move across occupations, organizations, employment situations, and so on, during their 50–60 year ‘careers’ (if that term has any proper meaning). Thus, this means the end of the traditional career, and in extension, the end of the fixed job description, salaries, and career progression systems. Job descriptions have been designed to ensure clarity and fairness across organizations and occupations, and to prevent workers doing the same kind of job within an organization being paid differently, and thus to retain equity (Adams 1965). While this is an important notion, it has led to a reversed situation where work tasks and responsibilities are narrowly defined within the boundaries of job descriptions (a clear example is US restaurants where waiters are only allowed to serve food, but not to see people to their tables and clear finished tables as that work is reserved to others—an interesting phenomenon here is when a waiter drops a plate on the floor, and has to wait for a cleaner as the waiter is not allowed to clear things from the floor). In the absurdity of the situation defined by job descriptions, it is not only counterproductive to the organizational process, but more importantly stifles creativity and learning, and prohibits workers to experiment, make errors and learn from it, etc. Moreover, as research has shown, employees who conduct the same job over longer periods of time (years and years), may be unable to change jobs and find new employment, as their skills have become outdated, while the organization has taken no responsibility to ensure learning and development over the years (Bal et al. 2013; Kooij et al. 2008). In dignified democracies, work is no longer organized around job descriptions, but around tasks that need to be performed (projects, life cycles etc.), and how workers can contribute to those tasks. This means that there is an ongoing negotiation process around how the currently available skills of employees can contribute to organizational goals, whether employees have specific needs and wishes in terms of development and acquiring new skills, and the rotation of employees around tasks, roles, teams and so forth. An often perceived concern with the rotation of roles and tasks, is not solely that the more experience a worker has, the more automatic and efficient the

performance of the task can be, but the refusal or hesitation of workers to leave their comfort zone, and to become more flexible in terms of the tasks they perform and roles they have. Hence, this requires a process of slow adaptation to new realities, where again the role of learning and development is crucial. Yet, there has been ample research on how learning and development at work can be implemented successfully through taking into account the anxieties and role of self-efficacy and support for workers (Maurer et al. [2002](#), [2003](#)).

Beyond the role of learning and willingness to engage in various roles in the organization, is the change in traditional career patterns in the dignified democracy. While it has been well established that the mere existence of hierarchies within organizations has led to career-behavior, conceptualized as the instrumental use of the career system in organizations by workers to advance their income, status, and perceived career success, a major implication of this system is that roles, including management positions, are purely instrumentalized to workers, as it is a stepping stone to higher positions rather than having a specific meaning in itself, with its associated duties, responsibilities and opportunities for care and personal attention. Hence, the abolishment of traditional career patterns is necessary to reform the instrumentalized nature of careers into meaningful ways in which people contribute to workplace dignity. The major ramification is that there is no established pattern, but this has to be negotiated and agreed upon among organizational members, and this may result for instance in (management) positions for the duration of a number years, after which workers have to change their roles, tasks and so on. The logic here is similar to political processes, which holds that when people engage in similar roles for a very long period, it leads to automatisms, decreased learning, and possibly degeneration and corruption. The duty towards changing roles over time may accomplish the enforced reflection and processes of contemplation about how one progresses over time in terms of one's contributions to workplace dignity, and its more practical meaning in the contemporary world. Hence, these implications of dignified democracy have to be integrated within contemporary literature on HRM, which will follow below.

### 6.1.4 Outcomes and Challenges of Democracy

A democracy perspective on how dignity can be implemented in organizations has a major impact on how organizations function, and how they are organized and managed. This follows from the perspective that within traditional hierarchical designs, such as the top-down structures which are so familiar to many organizations, dignity can only unfold under conditions of benevolence, or the enlightened individual at the top who is genuinely concerned with the welfare of those affected by the organizational operations. However, to ensure a less individualized perspective on dignity (i.e., being dependent upon an enlightened individual), democracy is needed. Hence, a number of direct outcomes are postulated among the democratic organization, based on previous research (De Jong and Van Witteloostuijn 2004; Keef 1998).

First, profits are distributed in a fairer way. As organizational production is shared among all workers, distribution of its profits is also aligned more closely along the production line and the workers. The notion of neocolonialism is well established (Harvey 2007), in relation to the exploitation of Western corporations of the Global South (South-America, Africa and East-Asia), and the major problem is that these firms make huge profits exploiting cheap resources and labor overseas, and a more dignified solution would be a closely knit profit-system, where the profits earned in the selling of end-products is distributed in a fair way along the complete supply chain, including the laborers in mines, cotton fields, and so forth. This ensures not only more dignity and fairness *across* the supply chain, but also empowers local communities across the world. A rather straightforward approach would be to calculate the percentages of contribution of all the parties involved, which could be used for distribution of the profit made on the end-product.

Second, more local and direct advantages of democracy include the higher innovation and creativity established in organizations, as workers are empowered to voice their ideas, complaints and comments (Harrison and Freeman 2004). Better decision making as a result of the expression of multiple voices is also an outcome of democracy (Johnson 2006). Hence, these lead to the so-called business case for democracy

(Johnson 2006), or the notion that organizations operate more effective and efficient when they are managed as democracies. Notwithstanding the perverse nature of the business case, as it does not take into account anything else than the performance of the organization, a more fundamental point is that efficiency and effectiveness are no conceptual enemies of workplace dignity, as the efficient operation of a production line or process may constitute a dignified way of achieving the goals of the organization and the workers. There are, however, two issues to take into account here. On the one hand, efficiency is not an outcome in itself, and can only be used as a mean towards an outcome. An efficient way of working enables products to improve in inherent quality and to free up time for workers to engage in other activities, and should be differentiated from the related notion of mass production, which is the efficient realization of large numbers of products at the same time with the same aesthetics and functionality. While this may be an outcome that is appreciated as such (e.g., as computers are now globally equally functioning, it allows for people to communicate on a global scale), it may also be a devalued outcome, as mass production lack craftsmanship (Sennett 2008), and thus adds little to the sense of individual accomplishment of the worker contributing to it, or the consumer buying the product without any meaning or origin attached to it, rather being universalized in its characteristics and thereby bearing no relationship to the person(-s) producing it, in a certain country somewhere in the world. Thus efficiency is not entirely alien to dignity, yet having a relationship to it that needs further elaboration.

On the other hand, enhanced efficiency should be treated as the opening of opportunities, and not the closure of existing ones. In other words, the dominant approach within contemporary organizations is that efficiency is needed in order to save costs, which tends to be synonymous with laying off workers. In a dignified organization, efficiency gains result in the opening of space and time for development and learning; it is through the enforcement of efficiency that workers can be allowed more time to explore, reflect and set out new paths for development of both themselves and their peers and organization. Hence, this establishes an alternative view on how investments in the firm are used. However, in times of economic difficulties and decreasing profitability,



organizations may be faced with problems to remain liquidity (e.g., through existing salary obligations), a process normally leading to layoffs (Lopez-Bohle et al. 2016). However, as argued before, layoffs can be prevented as they constitute dignity violations, and alternatives can be found through the democratic means existing in organizations, for instance through timely problem identification (e.g., planning, saving in economic better times), quick adaptation through employee involvement, and so on. Hence, this way, democratic organizations do not only perform better, but are also more sustainable in the long run (Johnson 2006).

Finally, democracies are important in the context of business ethics. As explained earlier, a closer connection between those who make a decision and those who perform upon those decision, will be likely to lead to decision making that takes into account the ethical implications and context. In light of the new theory, democracy enables decision making to be closely aligned with dignity, as corporate managers with narrow views on maximization of profitability at the expense of people and resources are less likely to dominate in the workplace. The link between ethics and democracy is also advocated by Rhodes (2016) who concluded, in analyzing the emissions scandal in the Volkswagen factories, that the only viable way through which corporate scandals are to be avoided is via radical democracy, in the sense of a direct ownership of the power by the social body (e.g., the workers). Thus, democracy is not only needed to empower people and to create better organizations, but also as it concerns the 'right thing to do' (Harrison and Freeman 2004), and ethics can only arise under democracy (i.e., free press, trade unions, social movement, etc. Rhodes 2016).

However, as with any organizational form, there are inherent tensions with democracy, just as with democracy at the state level. These challenges have been described in detail elsewhere (Hernandez 2006; Johnson 2006; Stohl and Cheney 2001; Varman and Chakrabarti 2004), and hence, it is not needed to reiterate every challenge discussed in the past. The most common threat to democracy is degeneration, or the signal that democracies have reached their optimal point of functioning, after which they are in desperate need of revival in order to survive (Varman and Chakrabarti 2004). The underlying cause of

a malfunctioning democracy resides in the notion of stability, or the idea that once democracy has been established, it does not need much maintenance, and can be relied upon in their effectiveness onwards. Hence, it is this false belief of security in democracy that undermines the system from within; it is not the external factors that necessarily deteriorate democratic functioning, but the beliefs that exist within democracies, amongst others the factors that are commonly attributed to the rise of group think (Huczynski and Buchanan 2014), such as false beliefs of consensus and suppression of minority voices. Moreover, democracies are threatened by processes that lead people to perceive their roles and positions in terms of entitlements and rights without taking into account their duties. This may also be exacerbated by the differences in interests between individuals and groups, and also explains resistance of current elites towards democracy, as alignment of what is good for a particular individual (either a manager focused on bonuses and control over the organization or a worker interested in career progression and climbing the career ladder) and what is good for an organization (sustainable performance and viability) does not have to occur immediately. It is therefore that a perspective of workplace dignity is needed, which begs the very question to both individual and organization: is a certain act contributing or potentially damaging the dignity in the workplace? If for instance, a worker is positioned in a management role, she has duties towards both the workers and the higher level management, and in case the role is primarily used to enhance career progression, the ultimate question is whether the person is contributing to the dignity of the people involved, or merely using them as instruments towards a mean (i.e., her own career progress). In other words, career progression may result as an outcome of a focus on dignity promotion in performing the role of a manager, as it serves as an indicator of the contribution that a person has made, rather than postulating the outcome as an end in itself. Similar signals of degeneration can be perceived on the level of power abuse of charismatic leaders, political games and corruption, and conflict avoidance rather than conflict resolution, all of which can be explained in the same manner where democracy is hampered by individual needs of people to enhance their own outcomes. The standard (economic)

explanation here is that individuals are by definition self-maximizers, and thus move strategically to enhance their own outcomes. This would explain the continuation of corruption as the undermining force of democracy. At the same time, this needs to be understood in the light of morality of corruption itself; the fact that it needs to happen behind closed doors signals the very shadiness of the practice itself, and the confirmation of those involved to be engaged in behavior that is detrimental to workplace dignity and a healthy operating society as such. Hence, corruption (or degeneration more generally) only shows the escalated nature of individualized possibility with the mere confirmation of the social unacceptability of it in its hidden manifestation, which is evidence of the presence of a moral compass in the wrongdoer. The question that should be asked, therefore, is not about the reasons of an individual to engage in these actions, but the wider context in which this is established and permitted. The lack of social consensus regarding appropriate, dignified course of actions will therefore allow the constitution of behaviors inherent to degeneration of democracy (Stohl and Cheney 2001). It is therefore needed to integrate more strongly the notion of democracy with dignity, and to be able to achieve this integration, the chapter therefore focuses on the more specific roles dignity can play in the cooperation of people within organizations, which traditionally has been referred to as human resource management.

## 6.2 HRM and Workplace Dignity

While the implementation of dignity has been linked to the concept of workplace democracy, this does not immediately inform a better understanding of the more precise implementation of dignity into the practices of organizations in terms of what has been referred to as personnel management, or more contemporarily, human resource management (HRM). While the terminology around HRM has traditionally been instrumental, perceiving human beings as resources rather than living beings, it has been argued elsewhere that HRM could be redefined into Human Dignity Development (HDD rather than HRM;

Bal and De Jong 2016). Despite the relative perverse terminology used in HRM, it serves as an important indicator of how contemporary research and practice regard the role of the individual in the organization. It is surprising that in relation to democracy there has been very little work on the role of individuals, and there is clearly a lack of knowledge regarding democracy and the individual, perceived from the psychological or HRM perspective (Cheney et al. 2014). While there is more knowledge on governance of democracies (e.g., De Jong and Van Witteloostuijn 2004; Kruse 1996), special attention should be devoted to the role of the individual employee, as this also relates to the origin of the theory on workplace dignity.

### 6.2.1 Revising HRM into WDD

It has been long established that modern human resource management has a strong instrumental value to organizations as well as researchers (Paauwe 2004). Textbooks and academic articles (Jiang et al. 2012) stress the importance of people to achieve sustained competitive advantage for organizations, and how HRM systems, policies and practices may contribute to improved organizational performance, through which both organizations and employees benefit. While there is a critical body of literature on HRM pointing at the contradictions between what is good for the organization and what is good for the employee (Van de Voorde et al. 2012), and there is literature on the role of HRM and ethics (Cleveland et al. 2015; Greenwood 2002; Schumann 2001), there is no full theoretical integration of dignity perspectives with HRM. This is important, as the fundamental assumption of many studies in the field of HRM is based on utilitarianism and an instrumental perspective on the role of employees. Hence, HRM is generally not genuinely interested in the people as human beings, but in how they can contribute to performance of the organization, and therefore are (a) replaceable and thus lack unique individual properties in their roles at work, and (b) do not have any entitlement to belongingness, and therefore organizations exist beyond the mere presence of organizational

members, to the point where virtual organizations can exist where no people are working and which only function in a way to earn money, such as the many headquarters of multinationals in Amsterdam, where no people are actually working, but which only serve as ways to avoid paying taxes in other countries. The marginal role of human beings in HRM is further emphasized by the willingness of HRM departments and scholars to be fully engaged in the processes of laying off people, thereby assisting with administrative processes, legal aspects and support for reintegration, all indicative of its very position in the contemporary organization.

The notion of critical HRM is fully academic, and does not have a proper meaning in practice, but the strongest degenerative force of HRM does not just reside within its own terminology, but its full integration with the 'business case', or the notion that HRM serves the goals of the organization by designing policies and practices that aim to strengthen organizational performance, *no matter what*. A dignity perspective on HRM is therefore not only appropriate in the context of the current book, but in the wider context of the state of the literature on HRM as such. Hence, HRM is needed to be relabeled into a term that is not just explicitly deviating from the notion of people as resources as well as the notion of people management (which is in direct contrast to principles of democracy), but also captures a wider meaning about the ultimate goal of the existence of an organization. The term Human Dignity Development was coined in a previous book chapter (Bal and De Jong 2016), but this did not reflect the accurate meaning of the current theory, and therefore, the term Workplace Dignity Development (WDD) is coined to indicate the proposed destination of human resource management as both a scientific discipline and an organizational function or practice. Part of WDD is encapsulated by what is traditionally the focus of HRM departments including staffing, development, performance management, and organizational exit (Marchington and Wilkinson 2013). Each of these will be discussed below and explained how a traditional approach needs to be reformulated into a dignity approach.

## 6.2.2 Branding and Staffing

There are two important aspects in relation to the existence of an organization prior to a particular individual joining this organization. On the one hand, organizations need to engage in showing the values that are important for the organization to the outside world, an activity that has also been referred to as *employer branding*. On the other hand, organizations are continuously engaged with having enough people to conduct the necessary work, and planning for future needs, which is referred to as *staffing* (also referred to as resourcing, but this has similar connotations as HRM). Branding and staffing are important in the context of workplace dignity, yet, a number of critical remarks need to be made in order to understand the proper relationship between these and what constitutes workplace dignity.

First, employer branding is a term that is borrowed from the marketing literature (App et al. 2012), which can be considered in terms of the ways in which employers attract potential recruits by positioning themselves as an employer that takes care of the needs of employees for development, career progression etc. However, there are two problems with this. First, organizations struggle with the balance between promises made and promises kept (Rousseau 1995). In the recruitment phase, organizations tend to make promises to employees they want to hire in order to be an attractive employer. When the organization overpromises, and is unable to deliver upon its promises and obligations, employees are likely to experience a breach of their psychological contract, with the ultimate response to leave the organization (Bal et al. 2008; Zhao et al. 2007). However, more fundamentally, a second problem arises in decoupling of employer branding as a result of marketing itself, which is a derivative of corporate propaganda. In the rise of consumer society (Bauman 2000; Gabriel 2005), organizations are presented through marketing techniques (i.e., propaganda) as a product to be consumed by both consumers and workers, and resulting from having a particular desirable status, corporations become desirable places to work for. This process neglects any potential dark sides of organizations (e.g., Google is consistently rated as one of the most favorable places to

work for, and is used across many business schools as example of a good employer), and ignores the question of how resources are made available for corporate propaganda and favorable employee treatment. Hence, corporate propaganda has become a goal in itself, and not necessarily related to the recruitment of people who fit in well with the company values, but to send strong signals to the outside world of how the company desires to present itself.

The problem here arises as these signals do not bear any relationship to reality, or actual practices existing within the organization. A well-known example is multinational Unilever, which increasingly presents itself as focused on sustainability, and for instance financially supports critical art (such as the exhibition of the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei in Tate Modern in London). At the same time, Unilever completely ignores the original foundation of the company itself in the soap industry that started the company with palm plantations in Congo, where people who have been working in the poorest circumstances for this very company are ignored and remain living in absolute poverty. It is this decoupling of public engagement of companies in various activities that aim at portraying an image of the 'good organization', and the reality of the hardly visible destruction caused by the same organizations, that are particularly indicative of the problematic nature of the contemporary organization and the role of branding (see for many other examples Klein 2014). A brand is, therefore, nothing more than the public image which is created, sustained and often false and flawed, and in itself constitutes a violation of workplace dignity due to its conceptual inconsistency.

The aim of the dignified organization, therefore, is to dissociate from decoupling through a close integration of the organizational practices and the image of these practices which is communicated to the outside world. Communication with external stakeholders, such as communities and potential recruits is important in the context of dignity, as it is about social legitimacy and accountability of the dignified organization towards external parties, in explaining what is conducted within organizations and how it contributes to communities and others, but it is important as well to show the exemplary function of organizations (Rhodes 2016), in that they do not exist primarily to increase

shareholder value and profit maximization but in their social responsibilities as well. Hence, dignified organizations strive for consistency in their practices and the image that is constructed (if at all) to the outside world about what is important in the context of the organization. Branding thus serves primarily the role of exemplifying what the values are of dignified organizations, and how they differ from traditional organizations, in addressing the need and values of dignity in all the practices of the organization.

Subsequently, staffing follows from branding in that employees may be attracted who subscribe to the value of the dignified organization. In an organization that is genuinely focused on promotion of workplace dignity, while using principles of workplace democracy, new entrants need to be integrated in the values of the organization, and therefore staffing begins with the hiring of people on the basis that they subscribe to the values, and are willing to contribute to those values. Taking into account existing dynamics of attraction-selection-attrition (Schneider 1987), which describe the ways in which people are attracted to organizations, while organizations at their turn select the ones who seemingly best fit within the organization, and those employees who eventually perceive a low fit with their organization leave, a dignity perspective includes the notion that people start to work for organizations but also may realize over time that they had different expectations, or that they have different needs (e.g., in terms of the job they desire, or the location from which they work). Hence, a workplace dignity framework does not position itself in a fixed place concerning the flexibility-permanence debate (Bal and Jansen 2016), indicating the choice between optimal organizational flexibility (i.e., having no constraints in hiring and firing workers) and full employment security (i.e., where workers are stuck in golden cages with high salaries and security in their current organization, but high transfer costs when moving to another organization).

A dignity perspective includes the notion that organizations are by nature dynamic systems, and that it might be necessary to have more people involved during a period of time without the necessity of permanent commitment of people towards the organization. However, the dignified approach towards this issue pertains primarily to the ways in which these decisions are made. The problem resides within the power



dependencies involved; in a situation where an organization has power through its control over valuable resources (e.g., money and work), which a person desires to acquire through investing labor, it may lead to a situation of exploitation of the worker. Hence, staffing is a typical activity that needs to be aligned with principles of democracy in order to ensure fairness, decency and dignity. When workers in a team are jointly involved in the hiring of a person, and taking into account the principles on which the organization is designed, staffing becomes something that contributes to dignity, as it is a chance for a connection between the organization and the outside world (a person in this case) which may contribute to more dignity.

The aim of this process does not just have to be focused on a mutual expectation of permanent employment of the person in the organization, but there are two factors important here. First, voluntary mutual agreement is necessary to achieve a result (e.g., employment for a particular duration of time), as only through voluntary decisions and a free will dignity can be achieved (Rousseau 2012). This means that both applicant and organization have to freely agree to the terms of the relationship. Second, the notion of temporality is important here (or unimportant); if both parties agree that there is a need for a specific task to be completed for the duration of a particular period (e.g., half a year, or 2 months), this may constitute a dignified exchange of two parties doing business. However, when a person is hired to be part of the organization's wider structure (and hence to be a 'permanent' employee), this is not a legitimized status of acceptance and inertia. In other words, the traditional (or generalized perspective of the) permanent employee experiences certainty of having a job in an organization with stability until retirement, but the problem with this notion is that it might be resulting from a situation or duration of employment of a person that is defined by a good fit, and positive contribution towards dignity, and therefore can be an outcome, but again, is not the end in itself. The underlying principle of dignity and democracy state the responsibilities and duties of individuals (to be engaged with the promotion of dignity), and if successful in this over periods of time, it may lead to long-term employment and stability (which may be valued as it allows people to focus on important tasks and not to be distracted by

daily duties such as finding a new job). However, the opposite should also be taken into account, where a lack of possibility to contribute to workplace dignity should enable workers to move to other places beyond the organization. True flexibility resides not in the organization's right to get rid of people when they deem it appropriate but in the worker's choice and ability to broaden the horizon, which is then supported by organizations.

### 6.2.3 Performance Management and Rewards

When people become part of an organization, they may be inducted into the culture and practices of a firm, thereby increasing the fit between the person and the work situation. When people work for an organization, the primary way to assess their relevance to the organization is via controlling and monitoring their performance. Hence, in the traditional HRM domain, performance management is a somewhat neglected yet crucially relevant concern. Analyzing the principles of performance management along traditional measures, it can be defined as the ways in which management assesses and inspires people to perform well. In a dignity paradigm, performance is important, as it is a necessary mean towards the promotion of workplace dignity, and this entails individual efforts of people towards the contribution of those goals. Organizational goals can be defined along the lines of workplace dignity, and subsequently through democratic means teams and departments can establish the ways in which they can contribute to those goals, and how individuals contribute as well. However, while performance management in hierarchical systems are defined top-down, with strict monitoring systems to evaluate whether people have performed at the level expected and in comparison to their coworkers, a dignified paradigm takes a more individual-centered approach without the strict monitoring, taking into account the individual capabilities of workers and the professional autonomy of workers within their organizations. When workers (or teams) are contributing in a suboptimal way towards dignity promotion, reflection and analyses need to be conducted to identify the root of the problem, and through democratic

means suggestions of development, alternatives and solutions need to lead the process of continuous improvement. Hence, performance management is an essential task of teams and workers themselves, and follows the same democratic bottom-up approach as discussed earlier. Yet, the goals people individually and in teams set for themselves also need to be clear and achievable, as it will contribute to dignity, while unclear goals may be detrimental in achieving employee motivation (Bal and De Jong 2016; Rousseau and Shperling 2003). Moreover, a major problem resulting from a myopic focus by management on performance, is that employees spend their time optimizing their achievements on the criteria on which performance has been defined, through which other activities (socializing, helping, learning and exploration) are neglected.

Furthermore, a close relation exists in traditional HRM between performance and reward, with rewards being theorized as the outcome of performance. Notwithstanding the critical literature on pay-for-performance (Gerhart and Fang 2014; Larkin et al. 2012), the very idea of the dependencies of pay and performance are still widespread, and constitute the fundament of many (implicit) assumptions underlying HRM. However, there are many problems with this assumption. First, it is impossible to define and accurately assess what individual (or team) performance actually is, and how it should be rewarded as such. With teamwork being more important nowadays, and with sequences in organizations (buying, processing and selling products), it is impossible to generate any accuracy about which part of a product is produced by a particular person (or team). Yet, a deeper issue pertains to the complete incomparability of performance across domains or occupations. While teaching is a profession that generates much less ‘revenue’ as the work of an investment banker, it is accordingly financially rewarded, as the perversity of relationships between and pay and performance demands description of performance in terms of financial revenue. As there is no objective way in which these occupations can be compared in order to assess what level of rewards are fair, pay for performance constitutes a societal myth rather than an objective reality which can be used accordingly in organizations.

The more important issue, however, constitutes the role of rewards in terms of outcomes and processes of dignity. Moreover, rewards are

important in the dignified organization via two processes. Larkin et al. (2012), in their analysis of the psychological risks of pay-for-performance systems, conclude that the best way of rewarding people is via scale-based salaries, with only small portions being variable, as the psychological costs of pay-for-performance are detrimental for its effectiveness. Hence, without returning to a communist argument of equality of rewards despite one's efforts or contribution, there is a need for a clearer formulation of the role of reward in the dignified organization. More precisely, rewards are not just solely based on either individual performance or on societal norms, but are resulting from the interaction of mutual processes. Hence, the first question should be related to how much people need to be able to live a decent life in society, from which minimum wages can be derived (or in extension, a basic income). As the level of economic development differs across countries and regions, this number will differ accordingly, but it presents the minimum level for which people need to be rewarded in terms of having work and being paid for it decently.

The second issue arises around income inequality, which is frequently mentioned across this book and other sources (Stiglitz 2012; Varoufakis 2015) as one of the primary signals of malfunctioning economies and (global) society. There are two problems with income inequality, which are the stagnating wages (or real incomes) of the poorest and working classes during the last decades, and the rapidly increasing wages of the 1% (or the 5 or 10%) wealthiest in organizations and societies. The increase of the latter occurred at the expense of the former, and the dignified organization not only assesses the minimum level for which workers need to be remunerated, but also the ratio that can be used within organizations to determine the differences in rewards across members of the organization. While joint agreement can be reached within organizations that those with more direct responsibilities, such as those in managerial positions, are entitled to having higher (extrinsic) rewards than people in teams, the issue is how these differences can be established without higher level managers rewarding themselves with huge bonuses etc. Again, a democratic approach to rewards can be used to ascertain these ratios (between the lowest earnings and the highest) in organizations, and through mutual agreement can be enforced.

Moreover rewards can be dissociated from entitlements, through which they can fluctuate according to income of the organization (which can also be repaired via individual or collective savings), and also fluctuate according to the needs of an individual worker. As explained before, the importance of income fluctuates over the life course; for workers with young families and mortgages, income is more important, while at higher ages, when (generally stated) mortgages have been paid off and there may be less financial obligations, income becomes less important (Kooij et al. 2011). Hence, determining salaries in organizations is not purely a matter of input-output ratios, but also needs to take into account democratic agreement (e.g., through consensus and unanimity), ratios between lowest and highest earnings, and the needs of particular individuals according to their private situation.

## 6.2.4 Learning and Development

Learning and development are at the heart of the democratic organization, as well as dignity. Hence, it could be stated that learning is a central outcome of democracy and striving for dignity, as it presents the ways through which individuals and organizations can improve. Without learning to take place, people tend to rely on automatic behavior, which not only may be prone to lead to more errors (as people conduct their jobs without using too much cognitive effort), but it also leads to declined motivation and higher burnout, as jobs without challenges become boring and monotonous. This does not mean that mundane, simple tasks are by definition lacking dignity, as ‘mindless work’ may have a strong intrinsic value (Elsbach and Hargadon 2006). However, jobs that are *only* about mindless tasks for which little cognitive effort is needed, and of which there is little or no interruption, may become deeply undignified, especially when it is perceived in its wider context, appearing as an assembly line job producing products that are profitable at the expense of these workers, and sold for high prices to end-consumers, such as it the case with Apple products (Lucas et al. 2013). These jobs are without learning, and as learning and development are not only necessary to improve functioning, but also a

value of dignity and democracy in itself, these jobs should be criticized for the lack of potential to learn and develop. In these work circumstances, workers are nothing more than instruments or resources, without their own intrinsic values, and thus true meaning of work resides in the opportunity for people to develop themselves. In sum, learning and development are central to the dignified democracy, but they do not represent the luxuries of being part of the system, but at the same time, they function as necessary means through which people can find their destination, seek fulfillment, and ultimately contribute to dignity. Hence, learning is not a 'free act', but it results from the duty of an individual to strive for promotion of dignity, and in order to be able to do so, people need to learn and develop, and be open towards alternative (world-)views, such that learning can take place.

### 6.2.5 Employment Relations

Another central aspect of traditional HRM is the management of employment relations, or the balancing of employer and employee interests. In WDD, employment relations are also central, but extended towards all relevant stakeholders in- and outside the organization. Going beyond the separation of employer and employee interests, the focus of WDD is on how dignity can be promoted through the interactions and collaboration of the multiple stakeholders of organizations. Democracy here is key, in that democracy not only includes the voting mechanisms to reach decisions, but also expression of voice as a mechanism through which stakeholders are represented and present in organizations. Thus, on the one hand, internal management systems may be developed in organizations to reach effective and efficient operations, for instance through elaborated works councils or representatives. This ensures daily operations to be managed at the lowest level possible, while more general concerns may be debated and decided upon using involvement of workers and representatives across the organization. On the other hand, democracy can be used to create open systems, in which organizations are not managed purely on the basis of closed doors, where decisions are made by top managers and subsequently

communicated to the outside world, but where the decision making processes involve external stakeholders from the earliest achievable point in time. For instance, decisions about expansion of organizational activities can be involved in the local communities, to be able to align with the needs and wishes of local communities, and to potentially create stronger networks within existing communities, such a dignity promotion becomes a joint responsibility of the various actors involved.

### 6.2.6 Exit

A final point needs to be made about the management of employee exit. Previously I have discussed the role of layoffs in violations of workplace dignity, as the dismissal of an employee without a necessary ground to do so may constitute a violation of dignity, where the person is used as a mean and not valued as an individual. Being fired is a traumatic experience for employees (Datta et al. 2010), which is not only artificial in the absence of necessity beyond pure economic reasons, but also creates unemployment and thus the need of an individual without a job to seek new employment, and not to experience adverse health effects of being unemployed. In the dignified organization, layoffs are perceived as undignified, and I propose two alternatives. First, laying off people is unnecessary when alternative solutions are possible, for instance through redeploying people elsewhere (even beyond the organization), but more importantly, layoffs constitute a state of the organization that has passed a certain threshold or point of no return, in which the organization can only survive as a result of laying off people. The causes of this may reside in poor planning and management on the one hand (which can be improved through greater commitment of employees in their work and planning processes), and a lack of learning and development on the other hand. Organizations that do not invest in developing their employees will suffer in the long run, as their workers are unable to be able to improve their own functioning and to enhance their ways of working. Consequently, this may affect organizational functioning in the long run, and threaten its very survival. However, some circumstances are beyond the organizational control (such as economic crises,

which were beyond the control of most organizations), and as such may present complexities in upholding current financial obligations to the workers. As explained before and elsewhere (Bal and De Jong 2016), there are several solutions which tend to be ignored by companies when layoffs are announced, including temporarily reducing salaries of workers, findings ways to reemploy workers in different jobs or departments, liaising with other organizations to reemploy workers, creation of enough financial buffers, and so forth. Hence, layoffs should not be considered before all of these alternatives have been explored.

Yet, on an individual level, it might be the case that a worker is not motivated, or underperforming despite having the capabilities to deliver performance. Development is important here, as a decision from the organization to part ways with a worker cannot be made without investing in seeking the causes of why motivation is low as well as investigating whether the worker has enough ability and opportunity to conduct the job well, and if not, the organization carries a responsibility to do so. Despite the notion of workplace dignity as a duty of an individual when entering the workplace, it cannot be assumed that every worker is aware of this duty, and is able and willing to act accordingly. While this is partly resolved through voluntary induction, training and creation of social norms, there may be workers who are unwilling to make such investments resulting from felt duties. In those cases, there are multiple ways in which a worker who is underperforming, yet unwilling to make necessary investments or where the organization is unable to adapt job responsibilities in line with the capabilities of a person, can be supported in his or her transfer to another job or employment, including extensive consultation, training for reemployment and so on. The necessary question that needs to be raised by the stakeholders is how a person can be supported to new employment, while taking into account the dignity of the person, the organization, and others involved. In sum, the activities traditionally part of HRM become redefined under a WDD approach, which addresses the relevance and meaning of the activities at the fundamental level, by asking how these activities may contribute to the dignity of the workplace. If this is taken into account while designing systems of how people are treated in the organization using a



democratic approach, dignity is more likely to be promoted than under conditions of an instrumental, HRM-related perspective.

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# 7

## Workplace Dignity and Individualization

Workplace dignity has been conceptualized in terms of Kantian duty combined with Daoist approaches towards the establishment of what has intrinsic value in the workplace. This definition directly addresses the instrumental nature of the contemporary workplace. Yet the relationship between workplace dignity and individualization can be perceived to be much more complex, which potentially can be described as a paradox. The current chapter discusses how workplace dignity is defined in terms of individuality and individualization, establishes both an analysis of the underlying assumptions in contemporary management research considering the role of individualism, and presents a way forward in terms of describing the relation proper between workplace dignity and individualization.

### 7.1 Exploring Individuality in Dignity

Workplace dignity may present a paradox regarding the individual human being (see also Putnam et al. [2014](#)); on the one hand, a stronger focus on individual welfare and well-being may accentuate the

individualized nature of the workplace, with not much sense of collectivity in a place where people primarily identify as individuals. On the other hand, through the same focus on individuality of the person, workplace dignity tries to reconnect the respect for individuals with the workplace, and thereby avoiding instrumental use of employees in the workplace (which is essentially the denial of someone's individuality; Kateb 2011). However, through emphasizing the individuality of the human being in the workplace, it also risks the problem of neglecting the collectivity of workers, and thereby omitting the very workers who already suffer from the increased individualized responsibility in relation to their work and careers. This way, workplace dignity endangers the very aim it postulates. This creates a paradox of individuality under a dignity-paradigm: implementation of dignity is supposed to create more respect in the workplace for individual concern, but in reality might achieve the opposite where workers are purely individually responsible in a labor market where people are disposable and only have an instrumental value to organizations. To resolve this paradox, this chapter will first discuss the various meanings of *individual* in relation to contemporary management, and how it plays out at various levels (within organizations and society). Subsequently, the chapter addresses how individualization has been used in the contemporary management literature, and how specific topics have been influenced by individualism. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how a dignity paradigm informs these debates.

### 7.1.1 Individualism, Individualization, and Individuality

Neoliberalism as a political-economic doctrine has had two major effects on the field of management studies (Bal 2015, 2016). On the one hand, neoliberalism legitimizes a view of workers as merely *instrumental* to achieve organizational goals. Philosophically rooted in utilitarianism, instrumentality has been counteracted before (e.g., Habermas 1984), and the ultimate critique of instrumentality pertains to the very act of using people as a means towards a goal, and the justification of the sacrifice of human beings for a particular goal, which cannot be



justified philosophically beyond the practicality of an individualized choice for sacrifice. It was Immanuel Kant who (also) counteracted utilitarianism, and in partly postulating the theory of workplace dignity on the basis of Kantian morality, the current theory explicitly addresses the limitation of instrumentality through introducing the notion of dignity of all that is part of the workplace. Dignity implies a unique worth of each individual being in the workplace, including humans, animals, living matter and non-living matter. However, the notion of individuality needs further exploration, as there is currently no theoretical consensus of what it denotes. Moreover, it needs to be discussed that there are different notions of individualism, individualization, and individuality, which differ from each other in defining the relevance of the role of the individual under a dignity-paradigm.

First, individualism can be defined as the assumption that individuals are independent from each other (Oyserman et al. 2002), and refers primarily to the tendency of societies and cultures to differ in terms of how values are constructed—either as personalized entities of choice and freedom or as common goals and fates (Oyserman et al. 2002). Hence, individualism is primarily used to describe how countries and cultures across the world differ in how they perceive the role of the individual and the collective in society; and while Western countries such as the US and the UK score high on individualism (individual choice, personal freedom, and self-actualization), other countries across the world score generally much lower on these values. However, individualism, certainly in relation to uses in cultural management studies such as those studies based on Hofstede's work and House' Global Leadership studies, is described as a static phenomenon, in terms of rather dispositional features of society. More positively stated, individualism may refer to the relationship between individuals and collectives at a certain point of time within a context (e.g., country or culture).

In addition, it is important to acknowledge the role of *individualization*, as this refers to the process which is much more aligned with neoliberalism (or neoliberalization; Harvey 2005). Individualization denotes a process of change within societies towards increasing individualism, and as such denotes a process that is spreading across societies. Hence, while individualism can be regarded as the state of

individualization at a certain point of time within a specific context, individualization should be perceived as the process of how globally, people are becoming more independent from others, aided by both a need and desire for independent and free existence, as well as societal structures in which people increasingly are approached as individuals rather than collectives. As the world is truly global now with digitalized connectivity enabling people to interact almost universally, it is notable how underlying the more political-economic invasion of neoliberalism across the world, individualization has been the societally accepted way through which political-economic ideas have been spread (Dawson 2012). Even though a full discussion on individualization is beyond the scope of the chapter, there are a number of key changes underpinning individualization.

First, there is an increased desire among the people to self-identify in terms of individualized identity rather than collective. This process has closely aligned with the rise of consumer society (Gabriel 2005), and gives rise to the individualized expression of identity through one's status, possessions, and careers. Yet, this process cannot be perceived without its societal context, in which it is stressed that individuals have a responsibility to construct their own identities (Bauman 2000; Dawson 2012). This increased individual responsibility has been pervasive as it has far-reaching implications; people nowadays have to construct their own identities (e.g., through one's life styles, career, social status, and possessions), but at the same time they are held responsible for their own lives, including their careers, well-being, social networks, and so on. As a result of withdrawal of governmental welfare systems from the state (an essentially neoliberal activity; Harvey 2005), individuals lack the protection of safety nets for those unable or unwilling to act upon individualized responsibilities. Privatization of social welfare means that the government is not taking care of its citizens, who are expected to rely upon themselves and existing networks in case of illness, unemployment, etc. Hence, individualization is expressed as a *task* for individuals to construct their own lives, and thus modern human beings have to be engaged in life design (Savickas 2012), rather than accepting their position in society and life, and accepting life as established through forces beyond individual control. In the contemporary world, people

have the task to build or craft a life, which can be expressed through a career, well-being, physical fitness, and social status. It is no surprise to see people in Western societies fully engaged in running, exercising, and sports as it manifests the need for maintenance of the human body. The crucial parameter here is control, and in particular the control an individual can exert in relation to his/her own life, determining the path and direction of destiny, which subsequently creates a somewhat paradoxical predicament in which people experience a highly individualized responsibility to ensure well-being and success, yet at the same time being fulfilled of the idea of determination in the modern world, where destiny is strongly related to genes and brain functioning, and the ultimate expression that there is no free will (see e.g., the work of philosopher Dennett). Between these two versions of reality, the contemporary individual is struggling with finding the proper place in which these converge, or disappear altogether. Meanwhile, individualization has reinforced itself as a process in conjunction with neoliberalization, as a continuous stream of propaganda has supported individualism as a something desirable in society. It is not surprising how the first sentence of a *Psychological Bulletin* review on individualism mentions that individualism is not only a good thing, but also quintessentially American (Oyserman et al. 2002). Individualization, therefore, has been pervasive in creating a strong norm of the individual identity as well as individual responsibility. This has been sold through the idea of the American Dream with its global appeal of freedom and endless opportunity, using meritocracy: the notion that there is a direct relationship between working hard and having success in society. Hence, it seems there is 'a world of opportunities' (Bauman 2000), which in reality is tightly constrained through the existence of dominant elites and power structures that impede social mobility and merely enhance existing dividing lines between the haves and the have-nots. Thus, we observe here a similar tension between individualized control and determinism of the absence of the free will (Žižek 2001), and the subsequent escape of one's predicament through various ways, such as workaholism, drug addiction, and extreme sports, all of which test the boundaries between the two, in the experience of where determination meets individualized choice,

while enduring the constant risk of passing the threshold where individual control is forever lost.

An important note needs to be made in reference to the generation of people born during the last 25–35 years. Individualization started in the 1950s with the rise of consumer society and in the 1960s with the global student protests calling for freedom, but really took off in the 1980s and 1990s when neoliberalism became institutionalized (Graeber 2013; Harvey 2005), and after two generations and a technological revolution, the youngest generation in Western countries has been born without a sense of collectivity in an individualized society where collectivity has no real meaning anymore (Twenge 2010). Neighborhoods are formed by home owners and residents who are temporary inhabitants, moving from place to place depending on work, and at the job, workers are individually negotiating their contracts and working conditions (Lawler and Finegold 2000; Rousseau et al. 2006). It is not surprising that due to individualization, trade unions are in decline (De Leede et al. 2004), as the youngest generation entering the labor market has not been brought up with a sense of collectivity or collective representation, and ways of organizing for the youngest generations occur via social media and online platforms where there is no *real* conversation, yet a relative context-free engagement without obligation. Hence, the more pervasive effects of individualization pertain to the deeply ingrained societal attitude towards the concept of responsibility as well as the lack of insight into the collective nature or possibility of society. Hence, the true meaning of individualization as a process resides in the observation that the status-quo is unchallenged through the unconscious acceptance of individualization as a core driver of society (i.e., the hypernormalization of individualism; see also Chap. 9). There is simply no perceived alternative, as the perception of a need for an alternative can only result from an observation that current structures do not suffice at the fundamental level. In the absence of this, there are few obstacles for continuation of the trend.

In this sense, neoliberalization has ‘won’ the ideological battle with social-democracy, communism and so on, in conquering the basic assumptions of social life, and in particular in the perceptions of its counterpart as integrated in its very structures. What may seem

collective is now fully integrated in its very domain of individualism (defined here as the pursuit of individual success), and thus not only legitimizes the status quo, but more importantly expresses the fundamental lack of alternatives. For instance, the Egyptian Arab Spring in 2011 was claimed to be started and not possible without the use of social media such as Facebook (even though this very notion has been criticized; Graeber 2013), and thereby postulating the necessity of these networks for the creation of collectivity. Social media, such as Facebook, are therefore perceived to be crucial drivers in collective action, while at the same time representing the ultimate individualism of the user and the business model. In other words, there is almost no area of life in which individualization (and in neoliberal terminology, *commodification*) has not infiltrated, and where collectivity has not evaporated. Another example is Airbnb, which neoliberally commodifies bedrooms, but also has a more symbolic notion: a house is no longer a single entity but a collection of available rooms, which can individually be rented out, and where inhabitants do not have to know each other. Meanwhile, this is publicly sold as new forms of collectivity (through using terms as the sharing-economy etc.), but in the absence of any overlapping idea among the people (and especially younger generations) of what collectivity means, it is easily exposed as mere individualism. The notion that in every act, in every post on a social media website, a piece of data is generated, which forms the business model of these companies. This shows that there is no other explanation than in the transformation of collective acts (such as in every post on Facebook about the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street and so on) into data to be used and sold by these companies and as such represent a commodification of everything, and the total absence of any alternative. Another relevant example of the lack of collectivity (and with it, true solidarity) is shown in the non-violence of the Occupy movements in the Western countries. A lot of explanations have been presented about the non-occurrence of violence by the occupiers in the Occupy Wall Street movement (e.g., Graeber 2013), but the most important lesson from the unwillingness to engage in violence is the individualized nature of society, such that violence cannot be constructed beyond its individualized nature, in which it is primarily criminalized rather than having its collective purpose.

In other words, to postulate a necessity of violence for protest groups to engage with, there is a need to have collective goals, which is enforced through solidarity within the group, in which people literally back each other. However, in the absence of a clear meaning of collectivity, individuals and groups have difficulties in determining the role of violence. Hence, it was not just the explicit denial of willingness to engage in violence, but the inability to construct a deeper meaning of violence for the achievement of goals among younger generations. It was therefore not surprising to witness the shock among Occupiers when police violently broke down the movement across the world, in that for many, it was the first time they encountered violent acts in their lives. While workplace dignity has a clear vision on the role of violence (which is to be condemned as the very act of violence aims to deny one's dignity), it does not postulate a utopian vision of a world without violence, and hence, the question is how an alternative system can be conceptualized.

A further exacerbation occurs in hijacked terminology itself, through which alternatives first have to distinguish themselves from existing captured terms before presenting their own value. The term *social media* is integrated fully into society through which the term itself has lost its meaning—it has little meaning in relation to social beyond individualized self-expression and the commodification of it, through which the term social has become empty itself. Hence, there is a need for new terms where existing ones have become part of existing structures, while the continuing confusion among the people (and media and politicians) about the relationships between existing terms and reality does not cease to exist. A direct consequence is that terminology needs to be unpacked where seemingly dominant interpretations are shared without explanations, but taken for granted, not only by the people, but by academics as well. This extends to the field of management and organization studies, where individualization as such is relatively undebated, but nonetheless ingrained in much of the theoretical frameworks and terminology, and alike, needs to be unpacked in order to capture its true meaning for contemporary management.

Finally, the translation from the earlier discussions of individualism and individualization towards a viable conceptualization of workplace dignity leads to an understanding of the individual in terms of

its individuality. Individuality is not merely a representation of human beings in the workplace, but indicates the intrinsic worth attached to all that is part of the workplace, including human beings. However, it is insufficient to ascribe individuality purely to human beings, as it fails to specify the relationships to other entities, as well as it would present a human-dominating perspective on the workplace, thereby ignoring the more difficult positions between people and the planet, evidenced for instance by the human need for global travel at the expense of the planet in the name of progress and exploration. Individualization is noticeable here in the need for each individual to explore the world, instead of relying upon the stories of the great explorers. Hence, individuality resides in the uniqueness of characteristics of land, resources, animals and human beings, and the acknowledgement of their intrinsic worth due to their uniqueness. Individuality thus expresses the dignity of all parts of the workplace, which postulates an escape to the proposed downfall of individualization towards the inevitable loss of collectivity into the abyss of commodification, and extreme individual expression in favor of the undistributed profit and skewed proportions of contemporary society. It thereby aims to resolve two fundamental issues. First, individuality in its respect for the uniqueness of the characteristics of an entity is sustained through dignity, as it formulates the duties of the Other towards it. Stated in a more conceptually traditional way, it postulates the entitlement of a being or thing towards the uniqueness, and thereby a right to be protected, respected and promoted. The fundamental relationship of protection and respect with dignity is found in the individuality of an entity, and therefore the necessary limitation on its use instrumentally as it contradicts the very notion of itself.

Second, individuality realigns individualism with collectivism through the mechanisms of dignity. As dignity not only postulates the uniqueness of each entity being part of the workplace, but integrates uniqueness using the relational framework with the duty towards the Other and nonhuman matter, it resolves the tension between individualism and collectivism. As dignity establishes the relationships between people, it elevates the individual human being beyond its individual concerns, and forms the foundation for interpersonal communication, that can be experienced as well as the duties towards other entities.

The duties define the relationships itself, and are the basis for collectivity, as no longer the primary *modus operandi* is based on pure self-interest, an opening is created to define both mutual interest and collective good in the extension of the dyadic level into the collective through the interconnections of people with each other.

## 7.2 Individualization and Individuality at Work

Individualization and the workplace are inherently related, as neoliberalization has always focused on how aspects of life can become commodified, or be entered into the workplace. However, neoliberalism as such has resided particularly within political-economic and sociological writings (Morgan 2015), and has been absent largely from management and organization studies, through which it has seemed as if neoliberalism was absent from these disciplines. However, I have written before how neoliberalism has influenced the field of work and organizational psychology (Bal 2015, 2016; Bal and Jansen 2016; Bal and Lub 2015), and the arguments brought forward in these earlier publications should be extended to fully understand how neoliberalism has profoundly influenced management studies, and to deepen the arguments presented in these publications and Chap. 5 of this book.

### 7.2.1 A Surface Level Analysis of Individualization

Following the earlier discussions of individualization as a core aspect of neoliberalism at work, we can observe a number of influences through which individualization affects the work experience. First and foremost, individualization has profoundly changed the relationship between employee and employer, and as such the role of organizations and workplaces. As Harvey (2005) argued, neoliberalization has increased a focus on privatization, government withdrawal from social benefits, class restoration, contracts, flexible specialization, commodification, lower wages, job insecurity, and so on. Over the last 6–7 decades, this has had profound influences on how management scholars would assume



the employment relationship to be formed, and especially during the last 20 years, it is notable how many academic publications start with acknowledging the rapid societal changes which have affected employment relationships alike. Consequently, workers have become more responsible for the results of their work, are expected to develop their careers, should be flexible, keeping up with rapid technological developments, and in some state of disavowal of their predicament (Bauman et al. 2015). The latter point is relevant here, as it defines the state of the contemporary workplace, and in particular the prevailing attitude of the modern worker towards her/his position: there is an understanding of the situation one is in, but at the same time one is overwhelmed with a great sense of hopelessness and inability to make a change (Bauman et al. 2015). This is partly due to the hijacked nature of terminology, which limits people to postulate alternatives within existing terminology, due to the risk of capturing terms within the existing order, and hence its reduction to conceptual meaninglessness (see e.g., flexibility; Bal and Jansen 2016).

The individualized nature of work in conjunction with the decline of labor unions has spurred the rise of new concepts in the field of management studies, such as psychological contract (Rousseau 1995), idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau et al. 2006), self-leadership (Breevaart et al. 2016), proactivity (Parker et al. 2010), workplace flexibility (Bal and Jansen 2016), employability (Van der Heijde and Van Der Heijden 2006), job crafting (Tims and Bakker 2010), and engagement (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). The interest in these concepts is not particularly surprising given societal changes, yet there is little acknowledgement in these literatures of the true nature of these concepts, as well as how these concepts could have been used in a paradigm of workplace dignity. It is hardly acknowledged that these concepts have arisen under strong neoliberal pressures, and an analysis of the origin of workplace flexibility has shown that it was primarily through neoliberal means that the concept gained more popularity, while it in particular has been used as the legitimization of the trade-off between organizational flexibility and enhanced employee flexibility, with the latter being used as the publicly desirable feature of the new economy, where people experience flexibility and are truly flexible. Despite the now

widespread realization of the 'dark side' of these concepts (e.g., Bolino et al. 2017), there is still little explicit mentioning of the true nature of these concepts.

As stated earlier (Bal 2015), contemporary management studies have been profoundly influenced by neoliberal notions of instrumentality and individualization. On the one hand, the contemporary management literature has fully engaged the idea of instrumentality, and with it the idea that people in organizations have one primary aim, which is to contribute to organizational goals, which tend to be narrowly defined in relation to profitability and shareholder value (Lazonick 2014; Stout 2012). Hence, most, if not all, concepts in management studies are used to obtain their legitimacy in showing that they contribute to those organizational goals. Organizational behavior concepts (e.g., engagement) achieves its relevance, or in scientific jargon, its predictive or concurrent validity, when it significantly predicts organizational performance over time. It is notable how scientific terminology has been adapted to neoliberalism, and that the notion of concepts having their intrinsic value has become undermined by the quest for significant relationships. In other words, the potential intrinsic value of high engagement (if that would be a desirable outcome as such) is instrumentalized towards its positive effects for performance and so on. Hence, from the instrumentality of people in organization, we have seen a translation into the instrumentality of concepts, which can be exchanged freely as a commodity; it does not truly matter whether one speaks of commitment, engagement, or psychological contract, as these terms are used completely interchangeably, using similar terminology, theories (e.g., social exchange theory; Blau 1964), and arguments. All of these are merely instrumental, and more cynically stated, are used as domains in which academics can reside, build their careers largely co-existing with academics in neighboring subdisciplines, and as such constitute fields of residence for academics rather than contributing to advancement of scientific knowledge as such.

Another impact of neoliberalism has been individualization of the employment relationship (Bal 2015). Individualization can be perceived at multiple levels, and needs to be understood at the level of assumptions firstly. As explained above, contemporary management research

tends to contextualize research within the global environment in which rapid changes dictate how markets and organizations operate, and as a result, workers need to be flexible and adaptable (Bal and Jansen 2016). As there is little discussion of the need for collectivity and the role of governments to ensure either the creation of jobs or the protection of those in jobs, it can be observed that individualism underpins the contemporary management study. It has now been fully integrated into management studies that workers are responsible for their own well-being and career success and the primary question of research thus pertains to how they can achieve this, and potentially how governments and organizations can support workers in becoming the self-reliant, independent agents in the neoliberal society. All terminology is consequently adapted to fit this framework, and we can even see how well-being has become an important outcome as such because it is conditional to survive and thrive in the contemporary workplace (Van De Voorde et al. 2012). Well-being is taken for granted as it allows people to engage in work, and therefore should be enhanced, as it is one of the tasks of the contemporary worker, who is in control of his/her own life. There is, however, little acknowledgement of the absence of well-being beyond being a failure of the individual to ensure fitness, and the task to repair well-being in order to be able to contribute.

Thus, the core fundament of contemporary management research has fully integrated the neoliberal idea of the ideal workplace as a purely transactional marketplace for labor where people should be fixed such that they are able to work. It is noticeable how existing concepts have been used in an instrumental and individualized way (such as well-being), but also how new concepts have been introduced over the last decades, including those mentioned above, all of which indicate the notion of the individualized workplace. When the workplace is individualized as a result of neoliberalism, academics are in these instances merely followers of societal trends, and observe changes such as increased self-reliance, and move accordingly and focus on proactivity, self-leadership and so on. Hence, the terminology itself results from neoliberalism, and concepts become inherently confounded; whereas trust and commitment may initially have been thought of as constituting elements of the workplace, they become commodified in relation to

the concepts of neoliberalism itself, such as psychological contract. The latter term is relevant in the context of the current analysis, as it denotes the inherent neoliberalization of workplaces as a key phenomenon of management across the recent decades. The psychological contract describes the mutual obligations between employee and organization (Rousseau 1995) and is postulated to be an important driver of the contemporary relationship between employee and organization.

It is, however, striking how the notion of a *contract* has been largely ignored in the literature on psychological contract, thereby largely focusing on the mutual obligations which tend to be less ideologically driven than the notion of a contract itself. Yet, the assumption of a contract underpinning the employment relationship (and usually used as having a similar meaning as the employment relationship), is inherently neoliberal, and while contracts are an essential aspect of the marketplace, this carries an inherent assumption about the meaning of the relationship as individually negotiated, and contractually in nature, and not aimed at community, authority, or equality (Fiske 1992). In showing relationships between psychological contract experiences and commitment, trust, and satisfaction (Zhao et al. 2007), the contractual natures achieves its place in the domain of management, and with it, the appropriate tools for managers for psychological contract management. Psychological contracts are by definition individually experienced (Rousseau 1995), and do not take into account collective needs and or shared interests. Hence, psychological contracts are individually focused, and tend to ignore the role of collectivity, through which is fits well with a neoliberal design of the workplace. For instance, there is no research available on the impact of psychological contract inducements (e.g., a fulfilled obligation of training or development) on others, such as coworkers, as the negotiation of an inducement may come at the expense of others in and outside the organization.

A further neoliberal influence in management studies beyond the choice of concepts pertains to the theoretical framing of research (Bal 2015). There are essentially two mechanisms here through which neoliberalism manifests itself in theoretical work in management. Beyond the well-known observation that economics has primarily been neoliberal in the dominance of neoclassical economics (Stiglitz 2012), a

similar concern can be perceived in management. Neoliberalism can be noted in the choice of theories, such as is the case in the work on business ethics from a contractual perspective (Van Oosterhout et al. 2006), in which the contractual notion of the workplace is taken as the starting point of theorizing the workplace. Here, the theory itself is neoliberal, and willingly ignores a potentially alternative theoretical framework based on more collective or less instrumental concerns. However, neoliberalism can also be seen in the use and application of theories, and in particular in the selective use of particular theories. For instance, the popular Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964) describes economic, relational and ideological types of exchange among people, but research primarily takes an instrumental approach towards the theory, reasoning on the instrumental nature of employment exchange relationships, whilst ignoring other types of exchanges. Commitment is used in a similar, instrumental way, theorizing the rise of commitment as forming part of an instrumental exchange between employee and organization, in which commitment is used in order to enhance performance, in a way that the organization utilizes the loyalty of an employee, which results from a primary normative obligation to do so. Commitment in this framework is nothing more than an individualized moral obligation of an employee, who faces the ultimate consequence of uncommitment personally through the experience of cognitive dissonance: in a state of reduced commitment, the worker has to act through either accepting the predicament of being in a job which does not satisfy and elicit true commitment to a goal, or to resolve the situation at work, or ultimately seek employment elsewhere, all of which are under the responsibility of the worker him/herself, without taking into account the organizational responsibility of creating circumstances through which people have the opportunity to commit in a positive way.

It is also striking to see how 'the dark side' has become a popular topic in management studies (Bolino et al. 2017; Khoo and Burch 2008; Liu et al. 2013), particularly focusing on the negative consequences of concepts which are postulated to be 'good' in themselves, such as leadership and proactivity. For instance, the Bolino et al. (2017) chapter in an edited book on proactivity at work systematically analyzes the various ways in which high levels of proactivity may lead to negative

consequences for employees themselves, for coworkers and for organizations (and is entitled “The dark side of proactive behavior”). However, there is no discussion in the paper of the problematic nature of proactivity itself (and neither in the rest of the 20-chapter book; Parker and Bindl 2017). This may summarize the current state of the discipline in which critical reflection upon the nature of concepts and theory itself is largely absent, and in which concepts are used as natural manifestations of work experiences without any larger societal or ideological context. While proactivity should be understood, and at least acknowledged, as resulting from highly individualistic tendencies in society, it is still perceived to be dominantly related to the ‘true’ nature of the contemporary workplace where individuals are merely expected to be proactive, and hence the question for academics is to investigate the antecedents of proactivity such that every worker can become proactive (in all absurdity of such a statement).

### 7.2.2 A Deep Level Analysis of Individualization

Despite the relevance of the analysis of direct, or visible, manifestations of individualism (and in extension, neoliberalism and commodification) at work, there are also factors which through more indirect ways reinforce an individualized perspective on management and thereby stifle alternative views in management. These pertain to both institutional factors and relatedly the lack of critical thought in contemporary management studies. Generally, individualization as influencing management studies does not only affect the topic of research but also the researcher her/himself. In contrast to other scientific disciplines, there is an inherent relationship between the academic and the research, as the academic chooses to study a specific topic, thereby including his and her own experiences and normative frameworks into it. Instead of some claims, there is no objective scientific area of management studies in which workplace behavior can be studied in an ideology-free space (Bal 2016), where objective truths about human nature can be discovered. Hence, it needs to be acknowledged that there is a strong relationship between what has happened in universities across the recent decades

and the topic of academic research, as universities being part of the system has also become neoliberalized (Ball 2012). Thus, the state of scientific research on management has also been influenced by the neoliberal institutional framework in which it operates.

In a system where valorization, impact, and engagement are increasingly amplified as outcomes of research, it is not surprising to see researchers becoming less critical of management practices themselves, while becoming more corporate in the search for practical tools for enhancement of organizational performance, something which is not only valued by top-tier journals, but also by funding bodies, and organizations. Hence, academics need to become more aligned with organizations, as universities themselves are increasingly corporate. Hence, academics operate in a social space with pressures to conform to standards which are externally set, rather than by themselves. The belief in the possibility of ideology-free, or objective, research reinforces the system, as it allows the researcher to refrain from questioning the assumptions on which research is based, and is not unlike the technocracy often postulated as the ideal government structure in neoliberal states, where decisions are made based on expertise rather than on ideological belief. The truth, however, is that technocracy and management studies are deeply affected by ideology and neoliberalism, and the major problem resulting from this observation is the hidden nature of it. Consequently, as institutional frameworks have been influenced by neoliberalism alike, there is little incentive for academics to become more critical beyond their own personal drive towards it (and for which they should be praised), and more inclined to align research with corporate interests (more about this in Chap. 8).

A second factor of importance to the individualized nature of management studies is the disavowal of the question to the true validity of concepts. That is, generally, concepts in management and organization studies are taken for granted without a deeper exploration of the context in which they emerge, and what the 'true' meaning of concepts really entails. For instance, while the problematic nature of proactivity has been discussed in the past chapters, there is a deeper layer in the nature as well. While earlier the neoliberal (and hence, individualized) nature of proactivity was explained, in the sense of proactivity as a task,

as something that is now expected of employees in the contemporary neoliberal labor market, another level needs to be added in relation to the concept itself. More specifically, the true validity of proactivity is not yet addressed as there are multiple problematic issues in relation to the term itself. As the term has arisen from neoliberal rhetoric, it is rather meaningless in relation to existing terminology such as activity, reactivity and inactivity. Just as the *neo* in neoliberalism is meant to indicate a positive progressive force, *pro* in proactivity can be primarily understood as something that one cannot be against, and thus the term itself is captured in its rhetoric aim, in something that should be a characteristic of the modern worker. However, proactivity is both theoretically and empirically subjective and relative, which problematizes the very concept itself. As proactivity has no objective element attached to it (i.e., there is no specific behavior that is described as being proactive beyond general indicators such as taking charge or strategic scanning; Parker and Bindl 2017), a definition of what is proactive is always relative, as the term implies that a certain behavior is more actively engaged than other behaviors. The reference of these other behaviors can be oneself, but generally is aimed at others, and empirical assessment is commonly aligned with this notion; empirical analyses tend to focus on showing whether high scores on proactivity scales correlate with high scores on potential antecedents and outcomes, and compare these with people with low scores on proactivity scales (i.e., between-person designs). Hence, by definition proactivity is relative and subjective, in that it defines the level of activity as proactive in comparison to others, which confirms the competitive nature of it.

Moreover, there is no absolute criterion on which a level of proactivity is assessed, through which it becomes defined in the terminology of the current state of affairs; in other words, what is proactive in this day, may be reactive tomorrow. Next, even when proactivity is internally defined, and interventions are designed in order to enhance one's level of proactivity (hence, without necessarily making interpersonal comparisons, but with-in person comparisons), the question remains what this means in relation to reality (such as the intervention study of Strauss and Parker 2015). When proactivity is increased within a person, there are two fundamental questions: how does this relate to



the meaning of proactivity in a social context, as an increase of proactivity in a more general sense may imply the notion of normalization of behavior as being part of everyday working life through which the conceptual meaning of the term changes itself. The other question is whether ceiling effects pose a natural limit to what can be understood as proactivity, or in other words, whether the meaning of the term changes for the individual as a result of enhancement of the behavior itself. When someone has become more proactive, does the person perceive the newly integrated behavior as proactive or as normalized, in the sense of appropriate in a context where people are expected to show certain behaviors. In layman's terms, there is a further contradiction in proactivity which has been largely ignored; proactivity is defined as behavior that an employee displays at work but behavioral action repertoires are naturally limited. An employee is limited by the constraints of time and space in engaging in proactive behaviors, and it seems unlikely that an employee is able to engage in proactivity during the full day, as there will be little time left in terms of doing core tasks and so on. Proactivity cannot be equated to performance of the core tasks of one's job, as it would mean that proactive behavior is nothing more than job performance.

As these natural limits are hardly taken into account, little is known about what proactivity really means, and whether it can truly be elevated beyond the neoliberal rhetoric in which the concept has emerged. A final concern pertains to the inability to conceptualize beyond neoliberalism in the ultimate captivity of a scientific discipline. Current definitions of proactivity describe the phenomenon as self-initiated changes made at work to improve current circumstances, including performance and innovation (Strauss and Parker 2015). Hence, the omission of a specific direction in the definition itself allows for proactivity to be interpretable in multiple ways, and as a result to be used freely depending on the nature of the research. In the lack of a normative assumption guiding the research, one cannot assess what proactivity really means or does in the workplace. Moreover, it neglects the context in which behavior arises; while some studies have criticized the focus on proactivity in domains where work is highly regulated (such as in hospitals or airports; Parker and Bindl 2017), this neglects the much more deeply

ingrained nature of proactivity as something that is established within a particular setting, such as time and space, and interacts with dominant societal notions and expectations. Proactivity is not just determined by the appropriateness of the context, but also by the legitimacy of it within its social domain, and the more general expectations that people have to become proactive in order to survive in the contemporary labor market as well as the neoliberal state. It cannot be denied that the influence of academics on the establishment of societal norms in relation to proactivity has played an important role in normalizing this very notion. Hence, academics cannot just claim to be engaged with objective, value-free, research, but are obliged to acknowledge the normative assumptions underlying their research, and to engage critically with their research.

## **7.3 A Dignity Perspective on Individualization**

Both surface level and deep level analyses of the manifestations of individualization in management studies have shown the problems resulting from an academic discipline that is influenced by neoliberalism and individualism in structure, culture and practices. While Chap. 8 discusses the more structural and cultural aspects of the work of academics and how this could be transformed into more dignified organizations, the remainder of the chapter discusses the practices and subjects within management studies and how these can be transformed under a dignity paradigm.

### **7.3.1 Dignity, Individuality and Management Studies**

As explained earlier, a dignity paradigm aims to resolve the paradox between individuality and collectivity through its focus on respecting the individuality of everything in the workplace, while at the same time postulating dignity through the duties of a person entering the workplace, thereby connecting to others in a collective sense. This notion has been largely absent from management studies, and by introducing

dignity to the workplace, it offers various ways in which concepts, such as psychological contract and proactivity, regain a sense of true validity and meaning in the workplace. It has been noteworthy that duties and obligations towards others have largely been absent from the management literature, and tend to be narrowly defined in terms of contractual arrangements. For instance, the psychological contract has been described as the mutual obligations between the employee and the organization, and it is interesting to observe that generally the origin and nature of these obligations are not discussed (Conway and Briner 2005). In other words, organizations have obligations towards the employee(-s) but there is no indication where these obligations originate from. Moreover, the limited body of research on ideological contracts (Thompson and Bunderson 2003) tends to formulate obligations originating from ideology primarily in the direction of the employee; thus the employee has certain obligations to the organization, and they may result from the organization having a certain ideology (or religious character), which the employee has to adhere to. However, while informative in some types of organizations, it does not specify clearly what these obligations are, and how they should be interpreted. Hence, a dignity approach towards the psychological contract would result in a specification of the various obligations being part of the psychological contract, and define the exchange between organization and employee.

While in Chap. 6, it was advocated that workplace democracy as organizational form fits the notion of dignity best, this does not indicate that dignity is by definition absent in non-democratic organizations. Hence, while it has been argued that psychological contracts emerge in every relationship between a worker and an organization (Rousseau 1995), a further specification of dignified exchange relationships are needed, especially in traditional organizations where higher level management enact the contracting role of the organization in setting the boundaries and content of the contracts for their workers. A dignity perspective on the psychological contract therefore postulates that the mutual obligations arising from employment should strive for the respect, protection, and promotion of dignity in the workplace. Hence, traditional areas which are captured by the psychological contract obtain a new meaning; for instance the distinction

between transactional and relational obligations (Bal et al. 2013) obtain new meaning when linked with dignity. More practically, this means that transactional obligations from the employer to the employee not only include decent pay, but should take into account that the pay and other benefits that an employee receives are contributing to the dignity of the employee and her/his dependents, whilst at the same time not creating inequalities beyond acceptable levels at both the lower and upper side; pay below certain thresholds cause employees to be unable to live a decent life, while extraordinary high pay create inequalities as well, thereby raising the question where the true costs are, and at the expense of whom high salaries are paid out. Hence, while psychological contract research has traditionally focused on individualized perceptions of employees concerning their assessments of whether their pay and other benefits were commensurate with the level of made promises or their own contributions to the organization, a more relevant question is whether these contribute to workplace dignity, and thus, whether pay is also aligned with the needs and interests of others in and outside of the organization.

Moreover, relational obligations lie at the heart of the dignified organization, and form the invisible glue that holds organizations and communities together. However, relational aspects in psychological contracts (i.e., whether employees are provided with high quality social atmosphere, training, and interesting job content) tend to be individualized and instrumentalized in research, such that the primary interest is in relating the fulfilment of these aspects to outcomes such as commitment and performance. A dignified approach would include a more explicit acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of relational aspects in psychological contracts, and a more explicit link of these relational aspects with others in the organization. For instance, while training is important not only to be able to lead dignified lives, to enable people with the tools to contribute to dignity, and as it is one of the building blocks of democracies, it is also important in relation to others, as training may enable people to share their knowledge with others, while at the same time, training should not be used in an exclusive way, entitling some people in organizations to receive training while withholding it to others (for strategic purposes).

### 7.3.2 Implementation of Dignity in Management Concepts

In addition to psychological contracts, many other management concepts have been used with an implicit assumption of individualism. This means that these concepts are used in a way that it is assumed that behavior is an individual's responsibility, rather than a shared responsibility of individuals, groups, organizations, and society. For instance, an implicit assumption underlying employee engagement is that it is the responsibility of the individual employee to become engaged, and to have a job which is engaging. Organizations may contribute to engagement, but do not carry an inherent obligation to ensure engaging jobs. While one solution to this pertains to the introduction of new concepts in order to obtain a clearer view of the future workplace (such as workplace dignity), another solution involves the reconceptualizing of existing terminology into more dignified concepts. Hence, this acknowledges that terms such as the psychological contract have a clear neoliberal underpinning (the notion of a contract itself), but by explicitly referring to this origin, it also provides the opportunity to reframe existing terminology. Throughout the previous chapters, proactivity has been used as an example concept which has emerged as a primary neoliberal, individualized construct in management studies. Is it, however, possible to postulate proactivity in the dignified organization? If proactivity is perceived as anticipatory, future-focused behavior to improve circumstances in a positive way (Parker and Bindl 2017), and if proactivity has a certain added value to notions of activity and reactivity, it can be stated that it may have a specific value within the dignified organization. In other words, there is nothing inherently wrong with these types of behaviors, but the problem arises when it is conceptualized and treated as a primary neoliberal concept, implying a norm of proactivity (i.e., everyone *should* be proactive), and a normative view of the concept itself (proactivity is inherently a good phenomenon). Reestablishing proactivity as dignified, implies that proactivity may lead to 'good' outcomes, but only when aligned with the notion that proactive behavior (and in Kantian terms, motivation) is aimed to contribute

to promotion of workplace dignity. Workers may become proactive in organizations at a certain point in time (hence, proactivity is defined within a specific situation rather than generalized to become a personality trait or general behavioral tendency of a worker), to improve things at work, not just with a specific focus on improving their own situation or work conditions, but taking into account the needs of others. Proactivity has too often been viewed as elegant terminology for additional, unpaid work which benefits the organization (cf. organizational citizenship behaviors, which has the exact same connotation), and within an environment where proactivity is the norm, this may result in workers experiencing high pressure to engage in activities that they feel hesitant of engaging in, and engage in activities in additional time spent working. A dignity approach would postulate that proactivity is primarily resulting from a particular situation in which there is an experienced need for action, through which people jointly may decide how things are done, and not just resulting from individual pressures to act. This way, there is explicit attention for people who are for whatever reason unable or unwilling to be proactive in a certain situation (and with it, not implying that the person is not proactive at all), as well as for the needs of groups in organizations. Especially in democratic organizations, proactivity is a useful mean through which goals may be achieved, but instead of linking proactive behaviors directly to a person's personality or behavioral tendency at work (through which proactivity is perceived in a deterministic way), a more situational perspective allows the possibility to have more sustainable links between the need for proactivity to occur, and the abilities, willingness and opportunities for people to act in certain ways focused on the promotion of dignity in the workplace. Hence, proactivity is not just aimed at improving circumstances for an individual, but primarily used for the improvement of circumstances within the group or beyond the organization, through which the individual is also profiting in terms of more social cohesion, more intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and so on.

Similar arguments can be made for other management concepts, such as idiosyncratic deals, self-leadership, flexibility, employability, job crafting, and engagement. All of these concepts have been framed theoretically based on individualized concerns, with a strong normative view

that the contemporary worker should be high on all of these. While there is now more research on team and organizational outcomes of these behaviors as well as the dark side of these, the suggestion in this chapter is that these concepts can be enriched through taking a dignity perspective. For instance, idiosyncratic deals (or i-deals) have been conceptualized as the individual arrangements of workers with their organizations which tend to increasingly replace collective arrangements (such as collective labor agreements; De Leede et al. 2004; Rousseau et al. 2006). Previous research has primarily focused on the individual outcomes of i-deals (Liao et al. 2016), thereby ignoring the important social role of i-deals. More importantly, however, is that i-deals research has neglected the meaning of individual treatment of workers itself; it has largely taken for granted that individualization of work arrangements is increasing, and as a result employees are individually responsible to create the conditions through which they are likely to get the 'best deals' compared to others (Ng and Lucianetti 2016). Such a perspective on individualization postulates the workplace as a competitive environment, in which workers compete for scarce resources. Dignity, however, implies that workers (and in extension the workplace) should be treated with their unique individuality, taking into account the different needs, capabilities, and motivations of each worker. However, this approach cannot be perceived separately from the larger context, and in particular the treatment of others in and outside the organization. The basic question then, is how i-deals can contribute to the promotion of dignity. When i-deals are negotiated at the expense of others, dignity of others is violated, hence, there is no promotion of workplace dignity.

For future research, it is therefore important to further understand how individualized treatment may contribute to the standing of an individual employee in the organization, as well as taking into account and contributing to the dignity of others in the organization. A similar case can be made of job crafting, which is theorized to be individual actions (and thoughts about one's job) towards improvement of one's job (Tims and Bakker 2010). However, without taking into account the context in which these actions emerge, it is impossible to postulate the precise meaning of these actions, and only in case of crafting jobs towards the promotion of dignity, the term obtains its (proposed)

meaning in the workplace. Therefore, integration of actions labelled as job crafting with dignity may provide further understanding of which behaviors can be classified as truly contributing to a work environment where people can contribute towards positive goals, and which behaviors are potentially classified as job crafting, while in reality undermining social cohesion at work, or damaging relationships between workers and others (including the broader environment). Hence, it is needed to formulate a closer link between dignity and existing management concepts in order to be able to legitimize the existence of these very concepts in the contemporary workplace. Chapter 9 will further integrate dignity with management concepts in both theoretical and practical terms.

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# 8

## Dignity in Universities: An Example Case

Until now, the book has presented a largely theoretical description of workplace dignity, how it is conceptually defined, and how it can be implemented in management studies, and in organizations using principles of democracy. The current chapter aims to take another step in the process of implementing dignity in organizations. More particularly, the chapter systematically analyzes current practices in one type of organization that has been influenced strongly by neoliberalism and serves as an important example case for other types of organizations in both public and private sectors. As most readers of this book will have some relationship to universities, either by being affiliated to one, or in the past by being a student, using the contemporary university as an example case will offer enough possibilities for familiarity among readers, but also provides the opportunity to more systematically analyze current cultures, structures and practices within organizations, and to formulate how alternatives can be postulated on the basis of workplace dignity. Hence, the current chapter aims to formulate the principles and practices of the dignified university, and thereby laying the foundation for the establishment of the dignified organization. To do so, first it will be analyzed how universities in contemporary (Western) society have

become the way they currently are, and subsequently is it outlined how they can become more dignified using principles of workplace dignity and democracy.

## 8.1 The Contemporary Corporate University

It is well established how the contemporary university has dramatically changed over the last decades (e.g., Alvesson and Spicer 2016; Ball 2012; Marginson 2006). Where the origins of universities can be found in the theoretical pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and truth, it is noticeable how universities in the neoliberalized world have become more and more business-like, influenced by a range of factors dominating in neoliberal society. Universities are not alone in this process, as other sectors which used to be primarily run in the public domain have become subject to the influence of neoliberalism, aiming for state withdrawal of social benefits and far-reaching privatization (Harvey 2005; Jessop 2002). As such, health care, government, energy suppliers, housing, police, armies, telecommunications and public transport have all experienced similar changes during the last decades, most of which with drastic consequences. The theoretical idea of the neoliberal economists was that everything needs to be brought to the market so that the invisible hand of the market can do its work (Harvey 2005; Sedlacek 2011), and sort out the optimal price-quality ratios and through competitive means the best providers of goods and services will survive, while sub-optimally performing companies will either disappear or taken over by larger, wealthier companies. This economic axiom, which has proven to be erroneous and to have disastrous consequences on the state of the economy, well-being of the people and quality of life in countries, is still dominant in many countries and perceived to be conventional wisdom among economists (Stiglitz 2012). The idea has been that neoliberalization of these various sectors would secure better quality for better prices, but the reality has shown the opposite, and while public protest has spurred against many acts of privatization, the university has played a significant role here, in its position as educator (of new generations of workers, leaders and academics), as well as institutions of knowledge,

which by definition are to be placed outside the assumed hierarchies of market forces, in its very aim of taking a critical position against any established body of knowledge presumed to dominate, or to be perceived as ‘normal’.

Moreover, in their capability to express discontent with the current state of affairs, academics are in a unique position to analyze their own predicament and the reasons why and how they have allowed universities to become the way they are currently. Yet, at the same time, academics have been blamed for playing the same game as happened across many professions, and that is to surrender to managerialism (i.e., essentially an organizational translation of neoliberalism; Alvesson and Spicer 2016), and thus experience a similar need to understand and find ways to escape their predicament. To do so, the extensive literature on the neoliberal university will not be repeated, but a short overview of the malfunctioning university will be offered, in order to present a way through which workplace dignity can be integrated in universities, not only to postulate a theoretical and practice overview of how universities can be developed to become more future-proof, but also to present an impression of how the future organization may be developed from a dignity perspective.

### 8.1.1 The Neoliberal University

The contemporary university has become neoliberal in its very structures, goals, cultures, and role in society (Ball 2012; Peters 2013). The neoliberal university is understood through the notion that universities are no longer institutions of learning per se, but they have become part of the economy, and fulfill an important role in the smooth operation of the economy and labor market. This is evidenced by the idea that university education is no longer a way for people to learn and develop themselves intellectually, but a way towards employability (a notion which in itself is increasingly contested by the growing number of students who despite their debts find little chances on the labor market after graduating). Moreover, universities are now increasingly expected to manage their own revenue streams, and to ensure that enough

revenue is generated, through tuition fees, grant funding, and commercial exploitation of research. Hence, universities, such as in the US and the UK, have become export products by offering (expensive) programs to foreign students, typically from Asian countries such as China and India (Gov.uk 2013), thereby boosting the economy of the country itself. It is consequently forgotten how the fees that foreign students pay are adding to the exploitation of Western countries of the Global South (Varoufakis 2015); Chinese parents often need to take a second mortgage to finance their child's education overseas in the US or the UK, in order to boost the chances of their child on the local labor market. The hefty fees universities charge are adding to enormous student debts, not only among home students, but increasingly among foreign students, for whom the fees represent an even larger amount of money in local currency. However, the idea of the university playing a significant role in the economy of a country has more pervasive effects, which will be discussed below in relation to general administration and management of universities, research, and teaching.

### **8.1.2 Management and Administration in the Contemporary University**

In the neoliberal university, administration and management have come to dominate the very structures and processes of how universities are run and managed. Moreover, the explicit managerialism (Alvesson and Spicer 2016) in contemporary universities allows the use of management terminology (e.g., competition, revenue, USP and so on), and the idea itself that universities are 'managed', in similar ways business is managed. Resulting from neoliberalism and in particular ideas of New Public Management, universities have become institutions of management and bureaucracy, and lost their role of place of learning (Izak et al. 2017). This has coalesced with the introduction of management speak in universities, particularly in the US and the UK; universities are competing with other universities on a global scale, and rankings are introduced to create a hierarchy in the universities worldwide; no longer budgets are defining the capabilities of universities, but the reverse is

the case: budgets need to be accumulated in order to rise in the rankings. An often discussed example is the research ranking exercise in the UK, the REF, which represents the British attempt to create a hierarchy in top universities, middle-ranked universities and lower universities (usually teacher-oriented universities). Despite the lack of monetary incentive to participate (the costs for universities to produce all the necessary data, statistics and reports outweigh the monetary benefits), there is (almost) no university which withdraws from the voluntary exercise, in the obsession with rankings. For top-universities, the pressure is to remain high in the rankings, while (all) lower ranked universities create plans to rise in the rankings, and across the universities, a similar story is told of growth (in output, student numbers, grant income and so on). There is no discussion of the true meaning of rankings, the dubious differences between universities on the rankings, the lack of true validity of the measures, the impossibility to compare all universities on a rather limited set of indicators and so on.

Instead, the rankings have greatly contributed to the competition among universities, as there is a clear indication of how the universities can move up in the rankings (by increasing the output on the indicators which define the rankings; Marginson 2006). In fact, the introduction of a limited set of indicators responsible for the position on the rankings (for instance, the score on the 'research environment' aspect of universities in the REF can be almost perfectly predicted by the number of graduating PhD-students and grant income), leads to a situation where the original purpose of the university has disappeared in favor of the accomplishment of growth on the key indicators as determined by the rankings. One of those consequences has been the increasing number of PhD-students who are 'pushed' through the system, and in the absence of a hard criterion of critical thinking as constituting the core part of pursuing a PhD, research is conducted that is publishable rather than contributing to real understanding and being critical towards the state of art in scientific disciplines. Other consequences of framing universities as competing with one another is to discourage collaborative research across universities, and even leading to universities



implementing aggressive hiring strategies to get the best researchers in their institutes, aiding to the careers of top researchers as well. In a context where competition is emphasized, collaboration is less likely to be established, and it is primarily through the personal networks of academics that collaboration remains lively, as the individual needs of academics for collaboration are still remaining, and through the same ranking systems not discouraged at the individual level (e.g., authors of articles from different universities can all submit their work to the REF, whereas an article with authors from a single university can only be submitted once to the REF). The main point, however, is that the ranking mechanisms may have both explicit and implicit aims, but through the implementation of it, creates various kinds of consequences for both institutions and individuals which may alter the complete system dramatically.

While the ranking mechanisms are officially aimed at promoting 'research excellence', it generally creates various side effects which hardly contribute to the purpose of universities as centers of learning (Izak et al. 2017). For instance, a newly proposed role of prohibition of 'portability' in the UK REF framework indicates that over the 6 year period between moments of assessment, individual researchers are limited in their possibility to change institutions, as the publications they publish in a certain university cannot be claimed anymore for the REF by the individual researcher when moving to another institution. While initially designed to protect universities in their 'investment' in academics and to retain the rights of the output of research conducted in their institutions, it also creates a system where researchers are 'locked' in their universities. The bottom line, however, pertains to an increase of the bureaucratized system, in which procedures and rules are introduced in order to ensure quality and research excellence, and often act as remedies against the side effects of other procedures. However, bureaucracy in its exposed nature does not have research quality as true objective (Alvesson and Spicer 2016), as the system has evolved to the position where the bureaucracy as such leads academic processes. Academic freedom has thus lost against the increasing levels of bureaucracy, dictating the ways research ought to be conducted and reported.

### 8.1.3 Contemporary University Cultures

While the structures of universities have changed increasingly over the last decades in the process of managerializing academia, this has also affected dominant cultures in universities, which not necessarily revolve around the idea of institutions of learning but of deviations of it, in vanity or bureaucracy (Alvesson and Gabriel 2015). Universities are increasingly obsessed with branding and marketing and in line with dominant ideas of competition, universities need to brand themselves as a unique institution with specific qualities and areas of excellence. Universities cannot just coexist along each other but use propaganda to establish a public image of the university as a particular institution. This process is streamlined within universities through marketing departments who strictly control social media websites and all external communications of a university in order to ensure they comply with the projected image of the university itself. Research output is instrumental here, as it can be used to showcase the excellence of the university. Outcomes of research therefore need to be interesting for the general public, and researchers are encouraged to 'sell' their research, often through overstating the implications of their own research.

The internal practices within universities, however, are less glorious than pictured in the branding activities of the marketing departments; universities have been one of the very few organizations where employees could be employed using 6-year temporary contracts, such as is the case in some universities using Tenure Track systems, and where people can be easily dismissed after 10 years of working for not meeting the complex criteria (i.e., after 4 years of working on a PhD, and 6 years on temporary tenure track contracts). Moreover, both teaching and research staff is increasingly hired on temporary contracts, and have little job security, posing risks on their career progression unless they have enough output and grant income. While promotion systems (including 'promotion' from a temporary to a permanent contract status) have become increasingly bureaucratic, this has never been intended to create more transparency or protection of employees, as the usual list of requirements allow both administrators (such as HR-managers) and

line managers to decide whether staff have achieved these and to what extent achievements have been sufficient. Hence, the bureaucracy has also aided to pseudo-transparency, where rules exist on paper, but where managers retain the power to decide, depending on their willingness to act in a specific way. This has led to the university as a political environment, where academics are expected not only to manage their scientific achievements (output, grant income, teaching, impact), but also to manage the political environment of the contemporary university. This applies especially to those at the early stages of their careers, when people are increasingly working on temporary contracts, even on zero-hour contracts, while at the same time, inequality manifests through the differences with those having reached a status of insiders, who form the elites in universities: professors on large salaries, deans, senior administrators and university leaders, who generally benefit strongly from the political dimensions in universities and the absence of or strongly reduced influence of trade unions and works councils. In their elite status as nomenclature, senior officials in universities exert great power and are on the right side of bureaucracy which they can use as powerful tools to discipline individual academics. Notable is the general lack of involvement or democracy in universities (Bal and De Jong 2016).

Another sign of managerialism in universities is notable through the changes in funding. With an increasingly individualized society where through propaganda, citizens are indoctrinated about the negative aspects of collectivized funding for universities, and as such has contributed to the idea of the university as a service-provider, where students through their 'investment' in an education seek employability and preparation for a successful career in a certain domain. Universities have indeed become more dependent on external funding and less on government funding (or a collectivized way of financing higher learning). Absent is the notion of a societal value on university education and research and consequently a collectivized way of financing it, and instead university education has become privatized, and universities have become and will increasingly become entrepreneurial and focused on the market to enhance their revenues. As rankings have become all important, universities have laid out a 'growth-strategy', implying the need to obtain more funding, students, and so on. As a consequence,

universities are involved in off-shoring, for instance through opening campuses in China or Malaysia (Ball 2012), in order to generate funding beyond the own national borders. It is striking how throughout universities, neocolonialism is widespread, and financial revenues are generated at the expense of developing countries. This process has also been exacerbated by the idea of democratization of universities as now accessible to a larger population as ever before, with up to 50% of the school children in the UK going to a university. This ignores the inherent elitist status of universities as institutions where learning and studying was performed by a small elite of academics.

The extension of universities to include a wider population of students was never meant to actually raise the educational levels of students to the levels of the past, but to adapt the level of education within universities to include more students entering universities and thus to generate more revenue (at the expense of individual citizens who accumulate enormous debts just through going to university). This has also partly hollowed out the meaning of university, especially in comparison to other types of education, such as colleges, polytechnic institutes and more applied and vocational schools, all of which are now called universities through which it is difficult to ascertain the differences between different levels and purposes of (higher) education. As a result of growth as strategy and the obsession with rankings, universities needed to hire more staff, and consequently the labor market for academics became more competitive as well, both for universities trying to hire the best researchers, and for academics as well looking for jobs that enabled career progression and which pushed wages up for top researchers, while at the same time aiding to the precariousness of those on teaching and temporary contracts.

An unintended effect of the rankings and higher turnover of staff in universities has been that organizational knowledge has rapidly declined. As (star) professors move around quickly through the system, following offers from universities for more research time and opportunities and higher salaries, there is a decline of seniority in universities on the basis of long experience within a certain place. As a result, there is little available knowledge among academics about how things should be done within their university, as people move from university

to university, bringing with them their experiences in universities elsewhere, but not necessarily in relation to their current universities. Universities have responded to the need to retain knowledge by implementation of enlarged bureaucracy, procedures, and monitoring in order to ensure that academics contribute to the criteria defined in the rankings, and in reaction to some high-profile academic fraud cases, also introduced strict monitoring procedures to seemingly avoid academic fraud to take place, notwithstanding the notion that academic fraud is always based on the denial of the existence of an unwritten norm rather than a written one. As academics move around 'freely' through the system, from one university to another, the bureaucracy is largely maintained by administrative personnel, who in their responsibility to ensure that rules are strictly lived by and monitored create a sense of legitimacy of their own jobs through enforcing the bureaucracy on academics. For instance, the research assessment in the UK now demands that accepted publications should be available online within three months, which allows administrators to exert pressure and essentially power over academics to control their behaviors. As more of these external and internal demands and procedures are imposed upon academics, administrators see their roles increased within universities (Peters 2013), ultimately limiting academic freedom to the level where universities dictate what type of research should be conducted and for whom.

#### 8.1.4 Research in Universities

There is a wealth of research on research in universities and hence, no need to reiterate extensively arguments that have been made earlier about the relevance and rigor of contemporary research cultures (Ball 2012; Pearce and Huang 2012). The main point, however, is that due to the rankings and the rise of the neoliberal university, research has become inferior to publication, and this is especially notable in management studies. For instance, there has been critique on management journals for ignoring the economic crisis of 2008 (Starkey 2015), while at the same time publishing volumes of research that is either boring or irrelevant. However, despite the ongoing debates about the link between

relevance and rigor in management research, two observations can be made; first, that the majority of research published in top journals are boring and only relevant to a particular group of researchers within the domain itself. Research in top journals hardly address critical notions about paradigms and underlying theories of research, thereby adhering largely to the status quo within research domains and not advancing understanding of critical phenomena. Second, and more important than a dominance of boring research, is that the meaning is largely contested. In other words, researchers may have little difficulty in arguing the relevance of their research, as management is an applied discipline in itself through which almost every research question has some practical relevance. However, the argued relevance differs from the real relevance of research, which concerns the more difficult aspects of management in its contested meanings, contradictions, societal contexts, and exploitative nature. In a system where working in academia manifests itself through a focus on careers, researchers are incentivized to publish in top journals, no matter what topic of research it may concern. Hence, output has come to dominate content, through which the purpose of research has been forgotten and production is everything (Ball 2012). In other words, many researchers cope with a lost sense of meaning, and do no longer have a clear idea of what it is that academics really do, or ought to do.

### 8.1.5 Teaching in Universities

Again, there has been an abundance of research on contemporary university education (Izak et al. 2017), and in addition to what can now be considered as the main body of knowledge regarding the state of affairs in contemporary university education, there are a few specific points to be made. First, it is well known that university education is now primarily aimed at employability, consumerism and value for money. This is especially notable at university and collective level, and while individual students may still have sincere motives to follow university education (to learn and critically think about issues), it can no longer be ignored that entire programs and universities are designed around employment

success rather than on content. This has far-reaching implications, especially in business schools, where students expect value for money, and primarily focus on employability enhancement. An indicator of this change can be found in the importance of internships and placements of students in organizations starting in the first year of their university degree. This adds to satisfaction for many parties; students appreciate the opportunity to enhance their employability through early experiences with working for a company (even though it often remains administrative work), organizations appreciate the availability of very cheap temporary staff and the opportunity to indoctrinate students from a young age, and universities pride themselves in being an employability-enhancing university through offering these internships. Hence, the role of internships cannot be understated, but at the same time, they potentially even decrease learning as students are taught in organizations how to conform to organization practices and cultures rather than enjoying the opportunity for extended independent critical thought over the course of a university degree in order to formulate their own ideas about desired work cultures and so on. Hence, serious academics also experience a direct competition with organizations when students need to choose between attending a lecture or doing an internship, and even more so in their efforts to show students the reality of the effective corporate propaganda towards the students, in which corporations may freely present themselves as desirable employers, while at the same time hiding the darker aspects of organizational life (to the inexperienced students).

At the same time, the content of education in business schools is more focused on how to be a manager (and hence, how to fit in the system) than on offering critical perspectives on management and organizing. Direct application is all important here, as abstract thinking without a direct relationship with practice is no longer deemed appropriate. A special notion should be made about language, as terminology is important here. Students may value critical thinking as much as many academics do, but the term itself is contaminated with multiple meanings. For instance, populist movements have traditionally been 'critical' of dominant elites, but at the same time, this criticality has no deeper meaning as it distracts from the real reasons of inequality.

Hence, in the same line, criticality without its necessary context in which it is generated is directionless and ultimately meaningless. Therefore, critical thinking as a widely praised goal of university education also needs to be conceptualized within its appropriate context, where it is able to obtain its true meaning and purpose. However, in an employability paradigm preparing students to fit in, critical thinking is likely to be populist rather than reflecting deep analysis. As true critical thinking is absent in the curricula of many business programs, students are unable to create their own realities, and therefore try hard to fit in, adapt to dominant business cultures to become employable; the idea here is that having other ideas is equal to not being employable, through which concepts such as the innovativeness of younger generations are a myth, as they are primarily occupied with adapting themselves through changing their identities to become corporate. This explains why during their degree (male) business students walk around in suits, *playing* businessmen, not just as preparatory act, but to change their identities to the business standard as a symbol of corporate compliance and stifling creativity. In this, the suit represents the dominance of neoclassical economics, the self-interested agent, who is well aware of what the business is like. This act of recreation of dominant business culture in universities by the students is only threatened by the naivety of the student herself, who captured by psychological and intellectual development of the self remains unaware of what is needed to become the business chameleon, thereby remaining herself and offering a chance for positive change in universities.

## 8.2 A Dignity Perspective on Universities

From the previous overview of the contemporary university, it can be understood that dignity is largely absent as an institutional concept in universities, and therefore presents an important example case for other sectors (including the private sector). While the true purpose of universities is increasingly ambiguous, the treatment of both students and staff is not dignified at the institutional level, and the prevailing structures are largely hierarchical and not democratic. Hence, the future of



universities are not by definition positive (Izak et al. 2017) and many challenges remain for universities to regain their proper place in society. To do so, a dignity perspective on the structure and organization of universities helps to formulate the idea of what a university could and should look like. In the following, therefore, a framework is presented for the overall idea of universities, and more specifically, the role of research, teaching, and administration within universities.

### 8.2.1 Dignified Universities

The notion of the dignified university has largely been absent and is in need of clearer formulation. In the remainder of this chapter, dignity in universities is explained through the specific practices that belong to the purpose of universities in society. However, at a more fundamental level, it needs to be established that universities play an important role in society, not just as part of the economy (Parker 2016) or as vehicles for employability of children and adults, but as institutions of democracy and free speech in society. While at the political level, democracies may be endangered through populist movements and turmoil in society, universities have a specific role in society as places where the value of true critical thinking is elevated beyond anything else. Hence, while corporations, public institutions, and non-governmental organizations may be dictated by specific agendas and consequently engage in different strategies to achieve those aims, universities should by definition not be controlled in a hierarchical way in order to stimulate an open debate which is not controlled by forces of hierarchy. Hence, universities should provide a safe space where debates can be held without specific agendas of organizations and institutions to dominate the conversation. Moreover, especially debates and topics which have a particular societal sensitivity can take place within the context of universities, as places outside the hierarchy and order of ordinary society. This is not to say that universities operate in a different space, and constitute ‘ivory towers’ where academics pursue research that has little to do with what is happening in society.

In contrast, universities ought to be deeply integrated in society, and increase their positioning within society, as they tend to be public

institutions of elitist entry, instead of elitist institutions of public entry. In other words, universities are currently still largely financed by public money, but at the same generate huge burdens for students to enter universities as tuition fees dictate a monetary threshold rather than an intellectual one (as is the case in the UK), through which university entry is becoming more and more elitist (i.e., for those able to afford university education rather than those who have the intellectual capabilities). However, the dignified university acknowledges itself as an elitist institution, indicated by the notion that the university plays a particular role in society, and employs an intellectual elite occupied with investigation of relevant themes of research. However, elitism merely indicates that those working for universities are chosen from a particular group of people with intellectual skills, and university education may be aligned with the principles of selection of students for the attainment of degrees focused on acquiring and advancing those skills. Nonetheless, the role of universities is largely public, and therefore should be open to the general public. This indicates not only a physical openness to the public through free and unrestricted entrance to university campuses, and the digital presence of research output online (e.g., through open access of articles), but also an openness to inclusion of society into the very practices of universities. Thus, universities often consist of multiples faculties and (interdisciplinary) research centres, which tend to be groups and networks of people within universities (and then primarily researchers, not even students). Postulating universities as public institutions imply that such centres would be open and filled with not only researchers and students, but also other stakeholders, such as community citizens, civil servants, representatives from business, and other interested parties such as NGOs. Hence, this positions the university as a (physical) place which is open to various groups in society for debate and learning. In the notion of the university as a business, there is little room left for the social roles of universities in stimulating public debate and so on, and the consequences are that such activities are performed by individual academics rather than being institutionally appropriately supported.

In other words, the dignified university heavily emphasizes the role of universities in society. However, in the undignified university, strong

links between universities and business may flourish as well (such as is the case between neo-classical economists and large corporations). Hence, there is a need to explicate the specific role of universities in society. While it is impossible to postulate *the* role of universities in society, a major role pertains to the critical engagement with society (Izak et al. 2017). In particular, the role of universities should be proposed in terms of the need for ‘reversed logic of hypernormalization or disavowal’. In society, many principles seem to be normalized, or perceived to be acceptable given the current circumstances of societal norms. Hypernormalization originally stems from the late Soviet era, where people across society pretended to live as if there was really progress towards real communism instead of a state at the brink of implosion and the reality being a fake one. In extension, we can observe similar practices in societies and organizations occurring. Alvesson and Spicer (2016) refer in this context to what seems normal or what is accepted cynically, indicating a state where people in society know that a particular practice has become normalized even though it is unacceptable, but still treat it as normal, due to a fear of repercussion when questioning those very practices, or out of a cynical acceptance resulting from a perception of individual impossibility to tackle a problem or change a circumstance. In other words, hypernormalization is rife in society, where citizens accept a situation because they perceive no alternative, or due to a process of disavowal; a willingness to deny someone’s own responsibilities in life. For instance, one such a hypernormalization concerns the consumption of chocolate, which is sheer impossible without slavery to be involved in the production process. Hence, while (in the Western world) chocolate can be consumed without any problem of justification, at the same time, people in Africa are kept as slaves in the production of it. The primary aim of universities therefore concerns the reversal of hypernormalization; using the reversed logic, one can assess the validity of a statement and expose its true dignified nature.

More practically formulated, reversed logic of hypernormalization functions in the following ways in order to contribute to dignity in the workplace: for every (important or contestable) act or decision, one should ask whether the complete reversal of the act would produce similar, if not better, outcomes in relation to dignity enhancement.

Reversed logic also concerns the questioning of dominant practices in society as a result of hypernormalization. Two (earlier used) examples may illustrate the function of reversed logic. First, the response towards increased threats of terrorism in (Western) Europe has been a militarization of society in order to 'protect' citizens. It is not strange anymore to observe heavily armed soldiers in major cities and airports across Europe. Beyond the questioning of these practices on the level of corporate lobby of the weapon industry to create a dominant discourse of fear and terror, it should be questioned whether the militarization has any dignifying effects, and in contrast only contributes to more fear in society. Hence, the normalization of presence of armed forces in Europe should be questioned in terms of whether the absence of armed forces would make society actually *less* secure, and the true question pertains to whether a complete reversal (and resulting reversed strategy) of these practices would contribute to more dignity in the ways in which young men (and partly women) whose parents or grandparents immigrated to Europe, lead their lives, and are able to lead a dignified existence through which they do not 'radicalize' and be attracted to violence. A complete reversal of existing logic in politics and media is needed to postulate such ideas, and universities play an important role here.

Another example pertains to bureaucracy, which has come to dominate the contemporary workplace and in its expanding form and domain stifles creativity and dignity. A similar reversed logic can be applied, in the question whether the removal of a procedure would produce similar, if not better, outcomes in terms of dignity of the stakeholders involved. For instance, research within universities is increasingly dictated by procedures about ethics, ethics committees and ethics officers. These procedures have been designed around the need for researchers to adhere to certain ethical guidelines. However, these guidelines have been existing, such as those described by the American Psychological Association (APA), and the introduction of a variety of procedures to follow those guidelines do not reveal the real concern, which is about the proper education of researchers (on the role of ethics in academic life) and the lack of trust in professionalism of academics. Hence, the procedures are generally counterproductive, and the necessity of those rules can be contested through postulating whether

the complete removal of those procedures would produce less ethical research. While the answer to the question is subject to debate, and will be largely contextually determined, the underlying theme concerns the reversal of what is considered to be normal in contemporary university/society, and the hypothesis that the denial of an action may produce similar, if not superior dignity in the workplace. In line with this reversed logic, it is needed that academics become active shapers of their own disciplines, and revise their own positions in academia from individuals towards collectives of academics contributing to what the aim of universities should be (Chatterton et al. [2010](#)).

### **8.2.2 Research in the Dignified University**

Implementing a dignity perspective on research in universities, requires an understanding of the true role of scientific research in society. An often heard cliché statement is that great scientific breakthroughs do not result from the contemporary incentivized systems, but only take place in a context of academic freedom. While this is partly true, it does not necessarily lead to a situation where academics have unlimited freedom and carry no responsibility towards the institution itself, and the outside world. As postulated in the overall theory of workplace dignity, academics alike have duties towards the enhancement of workplace dignity. For instance, many departments across universities are actively involved in research and finding solutions to the consequences of environmental pollution, and these types of studies deserve greater attention and support, as finding dignified solutions to climate change are particularly important for the survival of the planet. Within a dignity paradigm, there are two important aspects to cultures of research within universities. First, research should not just be focused primarily on practical implementation, and scientific research should not be too easily equated with valorization and the public use of research outcomes. Instead, research should be resulting from imagination of academics (Izak et al. [2017](#)), and based on concerns of what is relevant and necessary to investigate. The principle of doing research should be that researchers are focused on doing 'good' research (the road to which is defined later).

In a paradigm where output defines the quality of research (such as the impact factor of a journal), the true meaning of research is lost, as the outcome of research does not necessarily dictate the quality of the research. Hence, too many irrelevant publications in top journals may have resulted from a system where academics work towards a particular outcome (such as an article in a particular journal), without taking into account the importance of the topic itself. Hence, dignity assumes a focus on the importance of good research, rather than extrinsic outcome indicators, which merely serve as status symbols (Alvesson and Spicer 2016). Research therefore starts from the interest in a particular phenomenon, and subsequently the critical engagement with it, and empirical assessment of its validity in reality.

The second aspect pertains to the process of defining what *good* research is, which does not just take place individually within a researcher focused on determining an area of interest. In true spirit of workplace dignity, a democracy perspective informs the optimal ways in which research is envisioned and realized. Democracy within research does not indicate a voting system where members of a department vote on which topics should be investigated, but democracy refers to the process of deciding what is important and what good research is (Graeber 2013). In other words, 'good' research cannot be statically defined (beyond some of its methodological or scientific indicators, such as validity and reliability of investigation), but emerges within the academic debate within and beyond universities. However, this is a perpetual process of balancing the academic freedom to investigate whatever one is interested in, and that what results from interactions with stakeholders about what would be important to investigate (which is not just a redefined form of academic consultancy but which takes place in ongoing interaction between university and society). More practically, members of a department may jointly discuss and debate how research is conducted, which questions are investigated, which methods are used, and which goals are to be achieved. Teamwork is essential here, but the emergence of research does not have to take place purely within universities, as democracy, and in extension, the democratic university, can only exist through the inclusion of all the relevant stakeholders in the formulation and execution of research. These interactions also take

dignity into account, as academics serve as experts-with-a-duty, focused on how research in universities may contribute to more dignity in society (especially in applied sciences).

The earlier mentioned research centers, which tend to be the primary way through which universities aim to combine research activities of multiple academics across disciplines, would benefit from including not only academics and students, but also the wider communities and stakeholders around the university. Again, different stakeholders have different duties and expertise to bring in, such as academics serve as scientific experts, while others have different roles. When research is created within those wider communities, it may more strongly contribute to more dignity in how universities operate, create knowledge and disseminate it across society, and form institutions of learning through the direct inclusion of people, being university student or not, into the very practices of universities. Focusing purely at output targets therefore, becomes undignified in the pursuit of knowledge and learning. Academic output (articles, books, etc.) form the result of research rather than the primary aim of the research. While academics maintain their expertise in defining the methodological and scientific boundaries of what is good research, the inclusion of stakeholders will contribute significantly to the formulation of what is dignified research, and how research may contribute to a more dignified society.

### **8.2.3 Teaching in the Dignified University**

Teaching in the contemporary university has become a strictly separate domain from research, and this has been amplified due to various processes. On the one hand, talented and successful researchers have made a claim to spend more of their time on research than on teaching, as the latter is time-intensive and does not reap the same rewards as research output. As a consequence, over time, a sharper distinction has been created between teaching and research, with an increasing amount of staff within universities solely having teaching contracts, while researchers can be distinguished between more successful ones who are able to decrease their teaching load, and the ones who have to struggle between

balancing teaching needs and conducting relevant research. On the other hand, teaching and research have become separate entities in themselves as a result of various processes. More specifically, universities have become dominated by the separation between the two pillars on which they were founded, and for instance the difference in the UK between teaching and research rankings (TEF vs REF) are exemplary of the current discourse on the role of universities. However, both research and teaching are driven by the same factors, and rankings and output indicators dominate both areas. The UK is a frontrunner of the change in teaching systems, with a proposed official teaching ranking of universities which may provide universities the opportunity to raise tuition fees based on their position in the rankings. These rankings constitute the ultimate privatization and commodification of university education, and are based largely on student satisfaction and the jobs that students obtain after graduation.

Notwithstanding the bureaucratic complexity of assessing exactly what types of jobs graduates are able to obtain, it represents the commodification of university teaching towards the preparation of adolescents for a job. With employability as a primary outcome of university education, it is not surprising that research and teaching have become two separate domains, as research does not lend itself to be readily applicable, even though more applied researchers (including those in business schools) may claim so. Hence, many university programs have been dictated increasingly by the output criteria set by the needs of big corporates, and focus on employability of students, or in other words, the ability of graduates to easily fit within corporate culture. This has occurred largely with an appearance of criticality, with hardly a truly critical culture embedded within programs. Many programs include proclaim the teaching of 'critical thinking', which in reality often occurs within the same set of basic assumptions, rather than engaging criticality towards the assumptions as such. This constitutes no dignified approach to university education, as it undermines the idea of education having a worth in itself, not just as preparation for corporate careers. A fundamental aspect of dignity (and democracy) is that learning exists as a foundational value, not just as an instrumental way towards the achievement of a goal. Despite the often claimed



value of education in society (Alvesson and Spicer 2016; Ball 2012), there is a complexity in the choices made by students for a particular degree, as the choice itself is already an indication of the dividing line between degrees which are more promising in the establishment of a corporate career (e.g., accounting), and degrees with traditional lower prospects of such a career (e.g., arts). Hence, by choosing, students reaffirm an expectation of what they are likely to envision for their futures. Nonetheless, in a system where universities position themselves as pathways to employment (Alvesson and Gabriel 2015), it is not surprising that students as young adolescents and worried parents in times of economic uncertainties are drawn towards those programs which promise a smooth transfer between university and labor market. The meaning of the university as a place of learning and critical reflection disappears and the act of choosing an education that does not promise the great corporate career (e.g., arts, social sciences) almost becomes an act of resistance against the notion of success in society, thereby postulating the breadth of university education as a deviation from societal norms, through which an ironical situation emerges in which university programs become more and more alike, offering the same kind of degree in the idea of homogeneity of corporate demands and wishes regarding the profile of the ideal student.

A more dignified approach, however, acknowledges that university education is *not* about employability, but a place of learning, after which graduates may choose where to pursue their interests and needs, be it through working for large or small organizations, be self-employed, work for charities and so on, depending on where they feel they can contribute optimally to enhancement of workplace dignity. Internships and placements of students in their first years of their degrees is undesirable as it exposes them to a potential conflict between the idea of a university and the corporate interest of imposing behavioral norms on adolescents who are vulnerable in their emotional, cognitive and mental developments. The corporation as an institution of indoctrination is not farfetched (Wedel 2009), and protection to the propaganda of these institutions is needed, although covered with a blanket of paternalism. A necessary idea of the university is to establish a place of safe learning, where students without any interference of outsiders are able to develop

their own attitudes and ideas. This seemingly contradicts the idea of the university as being open to the society, and having a role in the center of society. However, such a role can be enacted by those who are able to fulfill these roles appropriately, and contribute to dignity in society. As dignity is not something that is particularly well-known across society, it is necessary that students are introduced to these ideas and provide them with opportunities to critically reflect on these very ideas, and either integrate them or replace them with better ideas and ways of organizing the workplace. The space to critically reflect is not merely physical, but also represents the more symbolical role of the university as providing the student with an opportunity to learn *without* the risk of being punished when failing or making errors, as true learning only takes place when students and teachers are allowed to make errors, to fail and to learn without negative consequences. Early exposure to dominant corporate beliefs might interfere with the need to form one's own ideas and to reflect on what the workplace is constituted of.

The emergence of teaching in the contemporary university has become the product of a position somewhere on the line of extremes between either disinterested academics whose research time is negatively affected by teaching duties, or enthusiastic teachers without research time who dedicate their working lives to building relationships with students and preparing them for the world outside the university. While this may reflect the polarized states of contemporary views towards teaching, the role of dignity in university teaching also manifests through other ways, such as the return to the basic assumption of what the university is founded for. While university education tends to be highly structured within programs, degrees, and curricula, it is notable how these bureaucratized forms of education have become to dictate the views of how education is supposed to work and lay out programs for students. For instance, foundations accrediting programs (such as for instance the CIPD in the UK accredits HRM-programs) dictate the structure and content of existing programs, which only adds to levels of bureaucracy of learning. While there have been some initiative to offer broad programs (such as University College Roosevelt in the Netherlands offering Liberal Arts and Sciences), it does not take into account the true meaning of universities of places of learning,

through the absence of a research culture in those institutions. In other words, the absence of an integration of teaching with research does not resolve the critical issues around the separation of teaching and research as two separate entities. The only dignified approach is to understand and acknowledge that there is no difference between teaching and research, and that both are just ways of learning, which takes place simultaneously among those employed, and those enrolled as students. The only way through which this is achieved is a true involvement of all stakeholders into the process of learning, researching and studying particular phenomena of interest within a particular domain. Hence, an abolishment (in the long-term) of the dividing line between teaching and research underpins the dignified university, through which learning and knowledge need to be created outside the existing order in which curricula, accreditation criteria, employability enhancement and rankings dominate, towards the establishment of places of learning where interests and problems are defined, which lead to joint research of academics, students and others.

This does not imply that existing differences in expertise, skills, and so on are not taken into account, but a more dignified approach emerges when in these joint projects, lecturers and professors provide others with the possibility to learn from their expertise and skills, while students update lack of knowledge through reading textbooks, etc., and exert necessary efforts into updating their skills, facilitated through the system. This approach has many similarities with the system of problem-based learning (Wood 2003), which is an educational approach to facilitate learning through existing problems, but this system is complemented with the active involvement of academics into guiding research-led learning.

A special note needs to be made about democracy at universities, which is of special concern to many universities nowadays (Levy 2013). In line with a dignity paradigm, democracy within universities provides a necessary way forward in order to escape the managerialist paradigm currently dominating universities (Peters 2013). Yet, at the same time, it may seem as if democracy is undesirable as for instance allowing students voting rights about (key) decisions to be made in universities may lead to decisions being made in favor of short-term

interests of students (who in principle may constitute the largest group of—direct—stakeholders to the university).

Nonetheless, this critique on short-termism and pursuit of interests should not be addressed at the concept of democracy as such, but at how it is used within organizations. When decisions are purely made on majority basis and do not postulate any other obligations of stakeholders towards the maintenance of the university itself, the critique should be based on the ways in which democracy is implemented rather than the concept itself. In other words, following an approach in line with Graeber (2013), democracy is not purely a way of making decisions through voting, but a way through which decisions are made on the basis of consensus. Hence, in order to achieve consensus among all relevant stakeholders, it means that there is an important role for learning, development, and information in the system itself. Put differently, both students, staff, and others need to engage in training and learning and make information available freely in order to be able to enact the role of an individual in a democracy, thereby learning the meaning of citizenship in organizations and society, through which learning and enacting co-occur.

### 8.2.4 Administration of the Dignified University

The final part of universities which has to be discussed in relation to dignity is the administrative side of universities. As stated above, democracy should be implemented in organizations in order to regain a sense of autonomy among university staff, which has been largely lost against the management of universities, which has been keen on implementing bureaucracy and various ways through which monitoring systems can be used to control academics. Democracy therefore can be used to achieve a shifting of the power balance towards those who are directly responsible for the execution of the core process within universities, which is the learning process.

Moreover, the artificially created distinction between teaching and research has led to a maltreatment of many teaching staff in offering them only temporary contracts or even zero-hour contracts, while research staff

experiences an enormous burden towards permanence of their status, with researchers in their early careers under high workload and increased job insecurity through tenure tracks, which not only presents insecurity and stress in the uncertainty of obtaining a permanent contract, but also presents complexities on the more mundane level, such as obtaining a mortgage in order to buy a house. Notwithstanding the fluctuations in student numbers over the years that may lead to varying teaching needs, organizations and universities alike are functioning better when workers have stable contracts and relationships with their organizations. Furthermore, fluctuations in student numbers can also be managed through better collaboration between universities, for instance through encouraging faculty to teach across different universities, and to allow students to follow courses and modules across different universities. In order to achieve those goals aiming to increase collaboration across universities, it is needed to remove the managerialist view of universities, and the tendency of university management to use discourses of competition between universities. As universities do not operate in a commercial domain but serve a public interest, competition is an unnecessary act in the optimal functioning of universities.

Whereas a dignified approach towards universities emphasizes the role of learning and knowledge advancement, it is therefore necessary to even stronger encourage collaboration among universities within and across borders, something that individual researchers have understood for long, but still needs to be integrated in universities to the extent of structures and cultures. Moreover, to achieve more collaboration and more effective activities in the dignified university, it is needed to reduce administrative burden where replaceable with professionalism and trust in the work of academics. Applied to dignity, it should be questioned to what extent procedures and bureaucracy contribute to greater dignity. It may be the case that procedures have a strong protective element which provide fair chances for workers or students, and therefore protect the dignity of these people. However, it may also be that procedures dictate behavior instead of relying upon professional judgment, and therefore negatively contribute to dignity as it takes away opportunities for meaning and participation of workers into the core processes regarding their work. Hence, the dignified university can be perceived to integrate its

core parts, and in its pluralist form, is able to bring together the coherence of research, teaching and administration in order to achieve greater dignity of the organization. Through democracy, it is established what the true purpose is of the university, and how teaching and research should be conceptualized around it.

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# 9

## Moving Forward with Dignity

The previous chapters have discussed how dignity can be defined and conceptualized, and how it can be implemented in management studies, and the workplace using notions of democracy and equality. In Chap. 8, a first attempt has been presented in which a real case is studied, and in which dignity is introduced through means of reversed logic and an explicit return to the basic purpose of the university. However, introducing dignity to management studies poses important conceptual and empirical questions for the future to advance understanding of how dignity actually operates in the workplace, and how it may inform various debates and decision making processes in the workplace. This chapter, therefore, presents a way forward on the basis of workplace dignity.

### 9.1 Dignity Work in the Workplace

The theory of workplace dignity postulates that the ultimate functioning of the workplace is to enhance and promote dignity of people, animals, and so on. Despite these aims, it is evident that many existing



(large) organizations have few aspirations towards the promotion of dignity, and many new, starting organizations have not yet integrated (explicit) notions of dignity in their design and functioning. Hence, the question is how this can be achieved, and while responses to this question have been generated in previous chapters, it is necessary to devote some more attention to the role of decision making processes in organizations. As Kennedy et al. (2016) recently noted, many organizations are still dominated by hierarchies and therefore a way forward may be to specify the dignity of low-ranking employees, as Kennedy et al. refer to non-managerial workers in organizations. While this represents a pragmatic way of introducing dignity to organizational life as it currently exists, it is nonetheless important to conceptualize the dignified organization. To achieve goals of becoming dignified, it is essential that people in the workplace engage in *dignity work*; that is the various activities that contribute to protection and promotion of dignity. As most contemporary organizations do not directly incorporate such goals in their policies and practices, it is important that dignity receives a place on the agenda first. To achieve this, it can be done either via management through incorporating a belief that current practices and cultures within organizations are no longer sustainable and that change is (desperately) needed, or via workers who use collective means to ensure that the organization can no longer continue in a situation of status-quo without acknowledging the need for change. While the former may somewhat be unlikely, as a result of existing elites resisting to enforce change (Žižek 2001), it is apparent that the introduction of dignity to organizational life needs to take place at the level of the workers.

Notwithstanding the various efforts that have been undertaken during the recent decades to decrease the influence of workers on management, such as the breakdown of trade unions and individualization of work, it is needed that workers refine the meaning of collective action, and use those means to allow dignity to truly take a place in organizational decision making and existing practices (Westermann-Behaylo et al. 2016). Hence, it is through the everyday decision making processes that dignity becomes salient, while at the same time, the manifestation is suppressed in the pressure for accentuation of alternative realities, of those of performance, individual career success and so on.

Yet, due to the rising awareness of the malfunctioning economy (Stiglitz 2012), and climate change and its impact on the planet (Gifford 2011), there is now an increased sense of urgency in respect to the need for action (Klein 2014). There are two conditions which contribute to the implementation of dignity into everyday action: (1) the implementation of dignity into education, and (2) the introduction of dignity into organizational practices.

First, as workplace dignity introduces a redefined normative framework of understanding how organizations operate and how the role of people in the workplace can be specified, it is evident that these ideas need to be developed further, and more particularly, how it could be implemented into the practice of workers and managers. As generally, it could be stated that a theory of workplace dignity presents guidance for the opportunity to raise questions which have not been asked before, it demands the discussion of how these questions can be raised in the workplace. One important avenue is concerned with education; it has been claimed extensively that business schools played a primary role in sustaining and enhancing neoliberalism in society (Giroux 2014; Parker 2016), and therefore ignoring their role as institutions of critical reflection. Considering the importance of education, it needs to be established that students (at whichever level or degree), should be offered a way of thinking in terms of true critical reflection of existing practices, and dignity provides the opportunity to do so. A straightforward question that students ought to be exposed to is whether an act or behavior contributes to the respect and promotion of dignity in the workplace. Moreover, the key towards formulating answers resides in the debate of what can be considered as dignity or dignified. At the bottom of this discussion lies the question whether through a certain act (or in Kantian terms formulated, the act resulting from the will), the dignity of the workplace (and all in it) is being violated, respected, protected or promoted, and whether the non-engagement in the act would lead to less violation or more promotion, while the choice for an alternative way of acting would potentially lead to more dignity in the workplace. This is at the heart of dignity work, and results from the interactions between people (or for instance, students at university) about what can be perceived to be dignified and not. The integration of this question

into everyday thinking and decision making, is key to dignity work, and essential in the creation of the dignified workplace. While this may seem to be a somewhat artificial addition to organizational life, as decision making processes may often have to occur in fractions of seconds, or with short deadlines. This focus on quick decision making may result from a cost-benefit rationale, which may be in contrast with dignity, or the notion that some things do not have a price, but an intrinsic value. However, the speed of decision making does not allow elaborative contemplation of the potential consequences, and therefore it should also be understood that workplaces cannot survive without the explicit discussion of the consequences of one's actions.

Therefore, the integration of the dignity-question into everyday decision making processes also constitutes a change process which can be achieved through education and deliberative training and debate. In other words, the second means of achieving dignity integration into the workplace not only acknowledges the importance of future generations of workers (thus, acknowledging the role of education for the younger generations), it also postulates the importance of introduction of dignity in the contemporary workplace. This can be achieved through the academic development of dignity as a theoretical concept, but which then subsequently can be translated to more practical means. Practitioner publications, media engagement, presentation at public events, consulting work, and MBA teaching all can be used to directly engage with the public and the various workplace stakeholders to inform current discussions about the role of dignity in the workplace, and how it can be promoted to form an alternative to dominant neoliberal thinking. It is evident that the dignified workplace is not looming as a utopia on the horizon, yet, it remains important to raise awareness of dignity in the workplace.

Hence, this approach aims not only to postulate a paradigmatic alternative to neoliberalism (and its associated concepts as managerialism and capitalism), and therefore, presenting a grander vision of the establishment of the workplace in macro form, but also to inspire the mundane reality of working life, and to introduce a straightforward question about how our practices in the daily workplace violate or contribute to dignity. While it has been documented extensively how people

experience barriers to behavioral change (Gifford 2011), it has also been stressed how public support constitutes one of the strongest drivers of change, and introducing the ‘dignity-question’ provides a relative straightforward concern which may be at the center of debates around how the workplace can be designed, changed, developed, and thought of in relation to the future. In the light of this, it is useful to refer back to the stage-model of dignity, which was presented in Chap. 3. According to the theory, there are multiple stages of dignity to be present (or absent) in organizations. While emerging organizational forms, and in particular the work of individuals (for instance as self-employed workers), may have a strong focus on the promotion of dignity, this may be more difficult for existing organizations, dominated by hierarchy and structures which do not necessarily support the enabling of the dignified organization. Hence, for existing organizations, it may be more pressing to focus on the lower stages, that is, the prevention of dignity violation to occur as a result of organizational practices. Important here is the notion that existing organizations start at the lower levels, and gradually build their way up the dignity framework, and as such are initially occupied with the prevention of dignity to be violated in and their beyond their organization, and meanwhile progress towards ways in which dignity is respected, protected and eventually promoted in the workplace.

Practically, this means that organizations (and thus people within the organization) systematically analyze (and measure or assess) to what extent the practices of their organization violate dignity in the workplace. For instance, this requires an overview of all that forms the input of the organization, which may include human labor, natural resources, animals, buildings, transportation, energy use etc. Moreover, this process should be complemented with an overview of what is conducted within the organization, as well as who are affected by the outcomes of the organizational process, such as customers, communities, land, animals, the environment and so on. The subsequent question is whether all of these are used and treated such respecting their intrinsic worth, and whether they are used merely as an instrument, without having an intrinsic value. The establishment of an answer to this question does not reside just with a few decision makers in the organization, but forms an essential activity within the organization as a whole.

Through democratic decision making, consensus should be achieved in considering what constitutes dignified practices, how violations can be prevented, and how organizational practices can be designed such that they strive for the higher stages in the model. A reasonable critique may result from the observation that democracy may allow dictators to be elected through democratic means, but again, the problem here does not reside with democracy as such, but in the ways people are involved and disengaged from democracy, through which the legitimacy of democracy is lost. Hence, it remains important that democracies are actively maintained, and that dignity remains with democracy, similar to how democracy needs to be within dignity.

Two observations should be made here: first, this approach is not utopian and does not propose or expect a workplace where dignity violations do not occur. The use of the analysis regarding the implications of organizational actions towards dignity aims for the reduction of violations, and the promotion of dignity, but it also acknowledges the possibility of dignity to be violated, and the potential paradoxes which are present in the workplace (Bal and Jansen 2016) and which may create dignity violations to take place *despite* the good will of the organization and its members. However, dignity work not only associates itself with the prevention of dignity, but also raises the question which efforts, when dignity is violated, can be undertaken to repair dignity, and thus to create a situation of greater dignity through the explicit acknowledgement of its crucial role in organizational life. Recognizing the workplace as creating inequalities (Galbraith 2012) and thereby power dynamics and hierarchies through which a focus on rights does not suffice, opens the ways for dignity violations to occur. Yet, the very recognition itself is important as it postulates an alternative in the observation of what is wrong, and can be perceived to be wrong and shared among the people. Hence, in order to postulate what the dignified organization looks like, dignity perceptions need to be shared.

The second observation concerns the impossibility to postulate a static perspective of what can be considered ‘to treat with dignity’, and the necessity of democratic means towards it. From the everyday interactions, dignity arises and as such is a living entity, extended to the level of defining dignity purely in the relational notion, through which the

person and the object are no longer defined in a static way, as essentialist entities which exist ‘out there’, but merely defined through the interactions between people and objects. This raises important questions as to the relationships between people and objects beyond the level of dignity as a duty towards an object. Taking the (pragmatic) perspective of an essentialist view (postulating the objective existence of matter), and defining dignity as manifesting through the relationships and interactions, offers the possibility of theorizing dignity as evolving, continuously through the interactions among people about what dignity is, and what the duty towards intrinsic worth implies in the workplace.

### 9.1.1 Reversed Logic of Hypernormalization

Introducing dignity into the workplace assumes some effort on behalf of workers, managers, academics and the general public concerning the establishment of what is considered to be dignified. In Chap. 8, the use of reversed logic of hypernormalization was introduced to conceptualize the role of dignity. However, this needs to be explained in greater detail, including the role of intuition. Hypernormalization refers to the dominant way of surviving the late Soviet state, in which the absurdity of everyday life was accepted in the lack of a foreseeable alternative. Hence, people lived pretending that the current system was actually achieving what it aimed to achieve, whilst ignoring the reality of what could be observed in society. Two elements were crucial here, which are the completely individualized nature of one’s own true feelings and the sheer lack of perceived alternative. As one was not able to share one’s true beliefs, one’s disappointments with the system, and one’s utter lack of happiness, it was necessary to keep one’s own feelings to himself, and not even share it with a partner or children. This was due to the potential negative consequences one might suffer by revealing the true beliefs, such as incarceration or end of one’s careers or social status. A similar process is noticeable in contemporary Western society, where individualization has led to a strong belief in the duty to lead one’s own life and to be responsible for it (Bauman 2000), through which happiness has become a moral duty of Western society.

Hence, we do live in a state of hypernormalization in Western society, where dominant norms are projected on citizens, and where (threatening) deviations from neoliberalism are fought through streams of propaganda to the citizens (Harvey 2005). Many politicians do not shy away from projecting their perpetual neoliberal visions on their citizens, and sell it for a return of control to the citizens, while in reality just reinforcing neoliberal fantasy. For instance, enormous efforts were undertaken by existing elites to project the Occupy Wall Street movement as consisting of unreliable, violent people whose ideas would threaten the existing order (Graeber 2013), while at the same time Western countries exposed themselves through rising levels of militarization of society by police and army, without any critical reflection upon it. Moreover, at the same time, state and corporate propaganda portray positive images of themselves, while discounting potential counterideas as violent conspiracy theories (Wedel 2009). The essential notion here is that practices are being normalized to a state of hypernormalization through means of and indoctrination. It is thus not surprising to observe that alternatives cease to exist. While some older politicians and academics return to an idea of Marxism or socialism as alternative to neoliberalism, it is readily appraised as radical and potentially threatening the status-quo.

At the same time, at the other end of the spectrum, and increased sense of hypernormalization of fascism is taking place, especially through the means of populist politics, where people are led to believe that their anger concerning the contemporary workplace and society is being listened to, while at the same time, their voices are merely used in order to find democratic means for installation of non-democracy. As pointed out in one of the seminal works on neoliberalism (Harvey 2005), neoliberalism operates best within a system defined through lack of democracy (which explains why capitalism thrives in China), and hence, the rise of populist movements to establish some type of fascism, merely confirms the dominance of neoliberalism, and more essentially, the hypernormalization of it in contemporary society. Noticeable is the sheer lack of perceived alternatives, and the complete incapability of politicians, academics, and others to postulate real alternatives, and while this merely sustains the status-quo, it also is a very aim of hypernormalization itself, in the succeeded notion of a complete lack of

alternative, and the belief that ultimately, there is no better system than capitalism. Hence, here we see the true boundaries of normalization and where it advances into hypernormalization: in the postulated lack of alternative, a practice is lifted beyond something that is being done as a form of acculturation in society into something that is beyond questioning, and observed to constitute a newly created taboo in society and organizations. For instance, the recent rise in boot camp training in Western countries is postulated as a typical Western, individualized desire for individual physical fitness (cf. health and fitness as an individual task; Bauman 2000), but the underlying militaristic notions are ignored as a new societal taboo; boot camps are therefore hypernormalized in a society obsessed with the individual responsibility for fitness, without taking into account the association of the boot camp (and with it the physical closeness to) with military training, something that is not surprising given the general militarization of democracy, and the underlying agendas that may drive these forces, reminiscent of the 1930s, and portrayed in movies such as Leni Riefenstahl's 'Triumph des Willens'.

The goal of dignity work therefore is to use reversed logic of hypernormalization, which enables the reestablishment of the meaning of practices in the workplace using reversed logic in order to assess their true place and goal in the workplace. Reversing the logic is needed to understand the true purpose of the workplace, and takes place through asking whether a certain action contributes to workplace dignity, or whether not performing the action would be more likely to respect dignity (i.e., which version would produce more dignity). To understand why certain practices are hypernormalized, it is necessary not only to study in detail the practices themselves, and to analyze what they really mean in relation to reality (or discovering the truth-as-it-really-is within hypernormalized practices), but also to understand the context in which hypernormalization occurs and thrives. For instance, the recent militarization of society has been the result of a strong campaign of fear, especially in relation to (hypothetical or real) immigrants, who may be terrorists as claimed by the politician. In effect, immigrants are treated so poorly that it is not surprising that a very small minority resists their undignified treatment, and in reality retaliates the inhumane treatment



through engaging themselves in undignified attacks against innocent citizens, which then feeds the populist movement again.

Analyzing this deeper, it is apparent how terrorism is largely a response to and facilitated by Western aggressiveness (in the Middle East), which again is due to a strong lobby for and interest of the weapon industry in the wars. Here it can be observed how terrorism is related to the workplace, as it also results from a need from the weapon industry for buyers. Hence, the influential weapon industry creates revenue through extreme forms of cynicism. Dignity is not taken into account in any of the steps along the chain of events, which ultimately starts with the manufacturing of weapons to create a profit, an industry which can only survive by ignoring dignity. Hence, while militarization of society (and as a symptom, the rise of boot camps) cannot be explained in relation to the promotion of dignity, further analysis shows that dignity is absent largely across the metaphorical supply chain of events, forces and arguments presented to realize the current state. Reversed logic, in consequence, is needed, to formulate the lack of necessity considering a discourse of obsession with physical fitness, especially combined with a militaristic tendency towards the glorification of fitness. Hence, reversed logic includes two essential steps of reasoning: first, it is need to expose the underlying truth of hypernormalization. This can be achieved through focusing on the hidden realities of today's practices, which are manifested through a specific focus on those left behind, the victims of hypernormalization, those who are fundamentally unable or unwilling to join contemporary society as it is, and as consequence suffer physically, mentally, or psychologically due to 'real existing capitalism' (Žižek 2001). Thus, reversing logic starts with analyzing what is actually being perceived as normal in contemporary society, seemingly undebatable, and which has potential meaning and impact on the workplace. Building on that notion, the role of reversing logic is to ascertain the implications of hypernormalization for the establishment of dignity, and to investigate the possibility of reversing logic to achieve similar or better outcomes in terms of workplace dignity.

An example of how reversing logic may aid understanding of the workplace and its impact on communities is a certain coffeeshop in a major city in the Netherlands. Coffeeshops in the Netherlands tend to

sell soft-drugs (i.e., marihuana, hash), and tend to be associated with crime and generally nuisance to local communities. A newly opened coffeeshop in the city, however, hired multiple employees who primarily are stationed outside of the coffeeshop. Through being present on the pavement, they not only contribute to less crime and nuisance on the streets, but through their friendly approach, they also actively contribute to greater safety in the streets and the neighborhood. Their role is important, as within a society where these establishments are actively pushed into discourses of criminal activity, a reversal of the logic shows that these places may actively contribute to more safety and better atmospheres in the (poorer) neighborhoods, thereby fulfilling a role in the local community. To do this, it is necessary to return to the true aims of certain practices and organizations, and to pose the question what the ultimate purpose is of the workplace and the specific organization or activity being involved. Contrasting the hypernormalized practices or attitudes with what the true purpose could or should be (enhancing dignity), leads to another concern which is about the legitimacy of the practice considering the true purpose, and whether abolishing the practice would lead to even greater dignity. The goal of reversing logic is nothing less than to turn the tables around, and to establish whether alternatives can be formulated on the basis of twisting around the logic of today. While social democracy can be theorized as capitalism with a human face (Žižek 1989), it does not adequately address the fundamental nature of greed and selfishness as defining current structures, where a dignity paradigm tries to actively resolve the various human needs and characteristics into a framework of organizational life.

A special role pertains to intuition, which is aimed at making judgments based on affective reasoning (Sonenshein 2007), and which describes the ways in which people engage in judging upon a certain practice without extended, rational deliberation, but as a result of paced, intuitive judgment, which then post hoc may be rationalized through justification (or cognitive dissonance). Notwithstanding the negative aspects of using heuristics, as they are also used to discriminate and be influenced by prejudices and racism, it should be understood that intuitive reasoning serves an important aim in relation to dignity, as people may have strong intuitions in what concerns dignity and what

lacks dignity (Weick 1995). Some anecdotal evidence exists for this notion; a picture of a deserted canoeing stadium from the Athens 1996 Olympics, which has been used in multiple presentations by the author, generally elicits a state of being uncomfortable, as intuition informs us of the ‘hidden’ nature of these events as exploitative mechanisms travelling across the world and leaving behind ruins of what was used to be and no longer has meaning (Kostera 2014). An earlier example concerning corruption shows that the hidden nature of corruption shows the awareness of its adverse moral implications, which in reversed mode, understands the establishment of what is dignified in contrast to what is hidden, corrupt, detrimental to humans, animals, and the environment etc. Hence, following intuitive reasoning on where dignity is lacking and how it is contributive to workplaces can inform decision making processes, such that it allows for intuition as a precursor for learning and the formation of institutions (Crossan et al. 1999). However, intuition should always be followed by reason and moral justification of a decision involving dignity (Sonenshein 2007).

## 9.2 What Does Dignity Achieve?

Throughout the book, dignity has been presented as an alternative paradigm on which organizing can take place and on the basis of which organizations can be formed and developed. However, so far, the macro implications of dignity have not been discussed, and while the primary reasons for theorizing dignity have been based on social-economic factors determining the workplace of today, it is not yet explained how dignity potentially addresses the main social-economic questions dominating today. In the following, the 11 manifestations from the first chapter will be discussed in relation to how dignity may resolve these issues.

### 9.2.1 Dignity and Manifestations of the Crisis

The most prominent political-economic paradigm casting a shadow over contemporary societies across the world has been neoliberalism, with the recent triumph of a businessman into the White House as the prime

example of neoliberalism perpetually pervading society. While neoliberalism preaches unlimited economic freedom, deregulation, governmental withdrawal from social services and commodification/financialization of everything (Harvey 2005; Jessop 2002), dignity offers the opportunity to redefine the role of instrumentality in neoliberalism through postulating the opposite of neoliberalism: whereas in the neoliberal state, all is instrumental towards the achievement of economic goals and profit (and in extension, individualized self-centeredness and greed), in workplace dignity, nothing is purely instrumental, but has its inherent worth, which is not to be violated. Hence, in any economic activity, workplace dignity presupposes that respect for the intrinsic worth of all that is part of the workplace is respected, and therefore positioned upfront, through which it is no longer possible to regard people, resources, land, and the environment as mere means towards the achievement of profitability. It explains why an oil pipeline through protected and sacred lands in the US violates the dignity of the native people and the land, through the enormous risk of spills and pollution. It also explains why a bank which still is profitable violates the dignity of people when they engage in mass layoffs in order to cut costs, and it also explains why gentrification of neighborhoods is problematic, as it forces poorer people to leave their communities and search for cheaper areas to live, while at the same time new residents live on the lost grounds of evaporated communities, spoiled by the stories left behind. In other words, workplace dignity replaces the idea of neoliberalism by introducing worth and value beyond monetary ones, and therefore also calls for a reorientation of how people exist in their communities and interact with others.

Workplace dignity also addresses the paradoxical nature of individualization, which was explained in greater detail in Chap. 7. Aligning the need to express one's own individuality in the workplace as well as being part of a collective through interactions about the precise meaning of dignity brings together fundamental values of individuality and collectivity, as in a dignified workplace, people no longer are merely responsible themselves for their well-being, but this responsibility is redefined in terms of duties towards each other, and thus posing the question what one can do for the other, what one's duty is towards the other, not only

in finding what connects people, but at the same time valuing the individual human nature, recognizing each other's uniqueness.

Yet, the notion of dignity is not purely aimed at the individual, and how individuals interact with each other. Raised above the micro, individual level, dignity also addresses the obsession with profit maximization and shareholder value. While companies have increasingly prioritized these outcomes above all, thereby endangering complete organizations, as the banking crisis showed where many institutions had to be saved by the government in order to survive, workplace dignity explicitly recognizes the different forces that exist within organizations. However, without discounting shareholders completely, it poses the question to *all* stakeholders what their duties are towards an organizations' success. Dignity presupposes that stakeholders communicate about the ways through which an organization is able to contribute to greater workplace dignity, and how the organization is able to balance the different interests. Workplace dignity does not provide utopianism by picturing organizations in which dignity is never violated, but it recognizes the duty to be aware, and to exert the effort to reduce the risk of dignity violation, and if such happened, to engage in resolution and repair of a violation (Tomprou et al. 2015). While financial success is important in order to sustain organizations, and be viable across time, a more fundamental question pertains to how financial success is achieved, and workplace dignity offers specific directions for this. Financial success cannot be achieved at the expense of dignity, and the more important question is to postulate ways in which companies generate economic activity while at the same time respecting dignity. Many green energy producers are examples of how dignity can be sustained through economic activity. The deep involvement of many multinational companies in practices which systematically violate dignity may pose questions whether dignity is attainable in the globalized world, where control is limited to national borders, where companies move around freely. However, such a statement can only be made within the context of the current workplace, whereas enough examples have existed and exist where it is possible to respect dignity in the context of work (Klein 2014).

As Klein (2014) rightfully pointed out, the economy and companies are largely responsible for climate change and the refusal to combat

climate change in an effective way. The major way through which companies will change to engage in true efforts to protect is not via regulation and stricter laws, as companies have found ample ways to overcome regulation and influence regulation itself in their own favor. However, through democratic means, companies have to be changed from the inside, and integration of dignity into the very activities of a firm by use of workers and managers making decisions not purely on instrumental arguments and the 'business case' but on the extent to which it contributes to dignity, will lead to more direct efforts from organizations to manage climate change and to enforce a rapid transition to renewable energy and protection of the environment. While the exploitation of natural resources and the land has not been taken into account in economic models, it is necessary to formulate the importance of it, and the axiom that these are not to be treated as means to achieve profitability. While some attempts have been made to formulate an accounting philosophy on the basis of calculating the costs and benefits of human resources (i.e., people; Flamholtz 2012), a dignity paradigm postulates that, which has dignity, has no price. Incorporating the explicit valuing of all that is in the workplace into accounting terminology to advance dignity may fit accounting logic. When these approaches would contribute to greater dignity in the workplace, they could be used and implemented, but at the same time, are not capable of replacing the notion of duty belonging to each human being entering the workplace. Put differently, when regulation and financial methods can help in defining the role of dignity in more practical terms, they ought to be used, but should also coexist with the debate and interactions among people in defining how the organizations' activities contribute to dignity.

Similar to the environmental concerns following business activity, poverty is also largely resulting from inequalities created through the neoliberal system. Exploitation of the Global South (Varoufakis 2015) and neocolonialism (Boussebaa et al. 2014) have achieved very little for the development of non-Western countries, and in fact only contributed to more poverty across the world. Profits have largely been drawn from the periphery while remaining in the core of the exploitative system in the US and Europe. A workplace dignity perspective postulates that trade and collaboration with countries worldwide may be a vehicle

towards greater dignity, through profit sharing across the supply chain, empowerment of communities around sites of economic activity, and true development and protection of people and the environment. It also postulates the sheer lack of dignity in the existence of tax havens, and follows a straightforward conclusion that profits should be shared across the supply chain, and as such taxes should be paid accordingly. Through the withdrawal of organizations from paying taxes, they stop contributing to the social order created through government, through which there is essentially no order than the (quasi-)fascist regimes which have emerged as part of populism, and which largely follow the doctrine of neoliberalism and facilitate undignified acts of organizations on a large scale, which then only contributes to greater exploitation and poverty. The only viable way out here, is to understand and acknowledge the limitations of current paradigms and the need for alternatives which explicitly address the role of individual people as well as one's duties towards the workplace. For instance, the notion of income inequality has been upfront in media and academic debates (Piketty 2014), and while inequalities manifest at different levels (e.g., within-organization, across organizations and countries; Cobb 2016), organizations have played a large role in creating income inequalities as well as influencing regulation and laws sustaining even larger income inequalities (Galbraith 2012; Wedel 2009).

While there is no straightforward answer to how much inequality is fair or justified, a more relevant issue pertains to the dignified way through which inequalities are determined. While communism showed that inequalities cannot be completely erased, as it undermines people's individuality and leads to more hidden ways of creating inequality, it is also important that inequalities are determined societally. The inequality ratio within Dutch universities is a factor 12, which means that the lowest paid worker earns 12 times less than the highest possible earning professor/dean/senior administrator, which provides the opportunity for people to move across pay scales, but at the same time offers a framework of how much should be sufficient, as recent debates concerning the appropriate level of remuneration of top managers have not led to dignified solutions. Understanding and general agreement that people who engage in management roles generally have more responsibilities

and duties towards dignity and the people in the organization, may take into account the need or desire for higher (extrinsic) rewards, but the level should be determined using democratic means to establish what is dignified. For instance, a fixed ratio between the lowest paid and highest paid worker implies that for managers to earn more, they have a duty towards the others in the organization, as only through raising salaries for the lowest paid workers, managers would be able to earn more themselves.

This approach takes into account that people may have extrinsic motivations to engage in work (such as advancement of their careers, income, and social status), but through limiting these needs to the needs of others, dignity is more likely to be taken into account when combining the needs of different people in the workplace. Anger regarding income inequality is not purely aimed at the height of the income of top managers itself, but at the distribution and rise of incomes at the expense of the lowest earning groups (Stiglitz 2012). Hence, dignity offers an important way through which these ratios can be determined involving all relevant stakeholders. As the involvement of stakeholders in these decision making processes is largely absent, it is not surprising that people have become indifferent to politics and are increasingly questioning the validity of democracy itself, leading to various populist politicians who aim nothing less than to eradicate democracy and freedom of speech to facilitate neoliberalism to spread even further. However, the problem resides not so much in democracy itself, but how democracy has been hollowed out from the inside, with a lack of direct representation of people in democracy and the felt duty and responsibility of representatives towards their voters. The relevant issue is to reestablish the value of democracy for the people in order to understand that direct involvement of the people is a necessary condition for dignity in the workplace, and that therefore, the anger currently visible across societies also constitutes a re-engagement of people who had become completely indifferent to the political system. Thus, they seek ways through which their voices are heard again and taken seriously. A reconceptualization of the workplace in terms of dignity allows the re-engagement of the people towards the goals they prioritize, and as such should be aimed at transferring anger and frustration with the



current system towards the establishment of dignity. As entering the workplace is not a neutral act, it should be noted that people also carry a duty towards the enablement of dignity in the workplace themselves, and offering ways in which this can be achieved is important in order to turn anger into positive energy towards dignity enhancement.

The rise of the lobbyocracy and corpocracy (Wedel 2009) poses a direct conflict with the needs of the people, as large corporations not only dictate government how to act, but increasingly become government itself, with a rising number of people working for government who directly come from large corporations. The consequences of this in the undermining of democracy in society are profound, and return to healthy democracy without interference of business in the essential running of government may take decades after the contamination of government with business interests. However, through dignity it is possible to envision an alternative in the idea of necessary conversations between government and business. Recognizing that corporations and government will interact with each other, the question is not whether this should be avoided but whether and how they can jointly contribute to greater dignity, and thus respecting the people, the land, resources, animals and the environment in both of their activities. This means that business is recognizing its own duty towards the workplace, and acting upon it, and thus, contributes to government to combat climate change, poverty, inequality and so on, rather than sustaining it in order to ensure profitability.

Yet, it is not only large corporations who pose the largest threat to dignity violations, through prioritizing profitability over the dignity of the workplace, but government itself also poses a threat, for instance through militarization, mass surveillance and allowing corporations to pervade government itself.

In a world where life becomes digitalized and virtual (Mason 2015), human behavior can be traced to the level where individuals do not take conscious decisions but act habitually or at random, which are recorded nonetheless through digital media and smartphones. The possibilities for governments to gather data are endless, and as part of a discourse of fear of terrorism, governments allow themselves to engage in mass surveillance. At the same time, large internet firms compete with governments

in collecting digital data, as these data reveal not just intentions, but actually observed behaviors, which in accordance with Big Data law, are predictable and reveal an order largely hidden from mankind so far. This order essentially reduces freedom and captures the essence of existence to be framed in the scope of a company driven by profit motives, and as such does not readily contribute to dignity. As suggested before, the digital information produced by individuals, should be owned by the very person producing it, such that large companies cannot obtain profits on the basis of data produced by individual people, without their approval or involvement of the sale of their data. For governments, the desire to collect and store data about individual citizens is attractive as it may be used later in time when needed. However, with the rise of populist movements slowly turning into fascist states, an extension of the possibilities for governments to collect data about individual citizens only produces problems and dangers in terms of the protection and anonymity of the individual citizens. Hence, the function of government is also to respect the dignity of the people, and as such to protect their anonymity as much as possible in order to protect them from discriminatory actions from the government itself.

Finally, the lack of leadership integrity as introduced as one of the primary problems in contemporary society can be solved through an explicit integration of dignity with leadership. Without the specific need to define and formulate a new type of leadership (e.g., dignified leadership) beyond all the existing ones, the theory postulates the necessity of reframing the role of leadership in organizations and society. More specifically, dignity presupposes duty as being central to the role of people in the workplace, and therefore, leadership in a dignity perspective has two key foundations: (1) leadership is based on the role of the leader as representative of the workers, hence, leaders are not just those who act on behalf of the organization, ensuring organizational goals to be met, and making sure that workers contribute to those goals, but leaders represent their workers, and thus operate to create a context in which workers have the opportunity to contribute to greater dignity and to create a living. Moreover, (2) leadership is built on the basis of duty and contribution, and as such, leaders have a responsibility not only to ensure dignity to thrive in the workplace, but even more so as they

act as representatives of workers in a team or unit. The justification for managers to earn higher salaries is primarily built on the basis of more responsibilities taken for the organization, and in extension the contributions of the organization towards greater dignity. Hence, when people are perceived as, or selected or asked to become a leader or manager in the workplace, they carry specific responsibilities beyond those of ordinary workers. It is through the incorporation of these responsibilities that leaders will avoid greenwashing, or the decoupling of intentions and acts.

When each individual responsibilities are known in the organization, and when they are shared within and across organizational boundaries, they are more readily hold accountable towards those responsibilities. When organizations become what they truly are—hollow shells only obtaining meaning by the people being part of it, it should be understood that the responsibilities reside in people as well, through which it is no longer possible to attribute a claim or complaint towards the organization as such. In a dignified organization, the responsibilities are resulting from a democratic process determining the activities performed by the organization, and thus the organizational members carry a responsibility towards those activities. When these activities do not contribute to dignity, but instead violate dignity, the people within the organization are held accountable, and should be able to reverse practices through democratic engagement, for instance through seeking consensus with and beyond the organization in terms of its legitimacy within society. This not only contributes to more dignity, but will also ensure that organizations are better integrated within society, thereby proving itself to be more sustainable in the long run.

### **9.3 Practical Examples of Working with Workplace Dignity**

While presenting the means of how one achieves the answer to the dignity question using reversed logic and understanding of the hypernormalized nature of workplaces (and societies), and providing an overview of how dignity may address societal-economic concerns, it does not

specify the more practical implementation of dignity in the workplace. Hence, it is needed to form a clearer understanding of how dignity informs the practices of how people communicate, interact and act in the workplace. While the contemporary workplace is increasingly made up of self-employed workers who are not formally employed by organizations, the primary way through which the majority of workers is employed is via an employment contract with an organization. Hence, even though employment is increasingly flexible in terms of the relationship of a worker with the organization (Bal and Jansen 2016), the norm is still very much the contract between a worker and an organization. This contractual relationship not only offers the possibility to exchange valuable resources over time whilst valuing the contributions of workers over time to enhancement of dignity (Bal et al. 2010), but it also creates a stable status whereby the uncertainty of not having employment with its associated adverse impact on health and well-being is prevented through the formation of relationships between workers and organizations. In the democratic form, it also allows people for participation and learning within their organization, and thus to elevate the experience of working beyond work as means of survival. Hence, a profile picture of the dignified organization integrates all that has been discussed throughout the book, including a design of how HRM can be turned into Workplace Dignity Development. Traditional hierarchies in the organization cease to exist as it destabilizes organizations (Timming 2015), and democratic means to make decisions ensure better decisions to be taken and to be more readily accepted within and across the organization.

Democracy is defining the way an organization operates, and this not necessarily implies that for each decision voting systems should be implemented. While for key decisions unanimity may be required through means of consensus, it may be sufficient for other decisions to be made using voting, and for daily practices, workers should be empowered and trusted to make the right decisions. Trusting in the professional autonomy of workers is important not only to raise real empowerment, but also as it constitutes a core element of society and indicates the importance of people at the work floor be able to make their own decisions, engage in craftsmanship, and experience ownership

over their own daily activities at work. To make democracy work in organizations, it is necessary to avoid fixed task descriptions which leads people to overly focus on their narrowly defined tasks being part of their job. While in some sectors, such as health care, tasks may be allocated only to those who have passed the necessary training and possess these skills, and clear boundaries are therefore needed in light of specialization. This however, does not indicate that others should not be offered the opportunity to obtain the skills needed (if possible). In other words, even in contexts where tasks are specifically described in terms of optimizing work processes to be as safe as possible, it is also necessary to postulate the most dignified way of treating people in the organization.

As one of the key problems in the light of rising life expectancy concerns the length of working careers (especially when people may live to become 120 years), it is no longer attainable having working careers of 30 years and increasing time of retirement. However, given that working careers will extend to span perhaps five decades or more, it is even more important to postulate the possibilities for people to change their careers, learn new skills and so on, to be able to switch jobs or careers if desired or needed. Reversing the logic of careers, leads to the question how people can contribute to greater workplace dignity. In effect, decreased motivation of workers should be considered as suboptimal levels of dignity in itself, which may lead to lower chances among these workers contribution to dignity and receiving dignity. As it is impossible to generalize on the causes of decreased motivation, the more important question pertains to how dignity as outcome may help both formulate the possibility for workers to engage in work, change careers, and interact with others. As 50-year careers may generally become less rewarding and motivating over time, structures could be implemented which facilitate workers to have smoother transitions across jobs, sectors, work and family demands, and education when there is the need to switch careers. However, at the more mundane level, dignified democracies may stress the value of task rotation such that workers also avoid boredom and decreased motivation at the daily level.

A similar case can be made for people in heavy physical work, such as construction or manufacturing. While in the past and currently, organizations have willingly and knowingly treated construction

workers instrumentally, through exploiting their labor for a number of years, after which these workers were burned out, and withdraw from the workplace with physical injuries into early retirement. This can be perceived as violation of the dignity of the workers, as they are forced to spend part of their lives with limited physical capabilities due to them being exploited earlier in their lives. A more dignified approach would understand these concerns, and therefore, earlier in their careers search for solutions to reduce the burden of work, for instance through offering part-time work at the construction sites, and helping workers searching for alternatives elsewhere (such as to work in the morning on construction sites, and in the afternoon as taxi driver to balance the physical burden of work). An individualized approach is always necessary with strong involvement of the worker and others who can play a positive role. At the same time, while physical demands of jobs should be balanced carefully, there is also a strong value of training such that people can combine different tasks at the same time, through which people may experience more meaningful jobs and are able to conduct their jobs for longer motivated as a result of their jobs having more variety. While the dignified organization cannot be discussed in detail as the specific constellations result from the interactions among the people of how specific structures and cultures can contribute to greater dignity, there is a final general observation to be made regarding the role of the individual in organizations in practical terms. While the traditional career trajectory and the glorification of social status are very examples of hypernormalization of existing practices in the workplace, there is an important role to be found for individual *liberation*. This refers to a process where individuals realize that they live and work in a hypernormalized workplace, where many of the practices, structures and cultures are perceived to be normal, only as a result of specific conditions that have made these practices possible. For instance, an Eastern European colleague explained that the traditional fear in the late Soviet era concerned the unachievable performance target setting, the five-year planning cycles, and the strict monitoring, only to discover in contemporary academia in the UK, that these conditions were fully integrated into the contemporary education system. Hence, there is a need not only for collective understanding of the absurdity of the late capitalist, neoliberal

system which is increasingly reflecting late communism, but also an individual liberation from this predicament. As people generally see few opportunities to escape the absurdities of hypernormalization, there is a need for individual, psychological liberation, in terms of the individual understanding of the system itself, and the refusal to go along with the conventionally set indicators for progress, such as advancement of income, social status, and so on, as well as the means towards progress, including the bureaucracy, strict monitoring, and performance targets. Personal liberation not only frees the person from the burden to conform, but also opens doors towards the establishment of an alternative, in terms of the opportunities for individuals to escape the normalization and to set new indicators of importance, such as the relevance of dignity as an outcome of organizational practices rather than the advancement of profit at the expense of others. In traditional terms, it is needed to open one's eyes and see the truth as it really is. Only then, personal liberation may occur, and is one truly able to reverse the logic of hypernormalization, and to formulate real alternatives.

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# 10

## Conclusions

In this book, a new theory of workplace dignity is presented, in which a theory is developed based on existing conceptualizations and definitions of dignity and developed a new perspective through postulating the dignity of the workplace as such, thereby attributing an intrinsic worth not just to people, but to all matter in the world. The book also explained how this theory can be implemented in organizations, and how it may help understanding existing concerns and problems with respect to the workplace, organizations, and workers. Chapter 9 presents an overview of the book, and addresses various issues which have not yet been discussed in relation to dignity. Moreover, it also present a future research agenda for the investigation of how dignity manifests and interacts in the workplace.

### 10.1 Overview of the Theory

This book has started by explaining why an alternative theory is needed in the light of recent events and trends in societies across the world. Without aiming to present an exhaustive list of all the factors

that have affected the contemporary workplace, it should be stated that especially neoliberalism as political-economic paradigm, has influenced contemporary thinking in management studies to such a degree that its presence is generally ignored (Starkey 2015). Moreover, it is taken for granted that core principles of neoliberalism such as the rational decision maker, the self-interested agent, the commodification of everything, and instrumentality have readily been integrated in the bulk of management research (George 2014). With its inherent instrumental and individualistic notions, neoliberalism falls short in providing management theory with the necessary means to formulate a paradigm on which organizations can be developed and the workplace can be founded to become more sustainable and viable, and which addresses the relevant management issues of today. Moreover, neoliberalism, by being taken for granted, has been visible at many levels of research in management (Bal 2015), in the choice of theories, models, and concepts neoliberalism manifests, but also in how theories are used to explain the reality of the workplace, and how practical implications are presented on the basis of findings from research in management. As these notions have been so pervasive, it is needed to formulate an alternative theory at the paradigmatic level, in order to be able to reformulate the meaning of management at the bottom-level, and to understand what the basis is for alternative forms of management. In other words, the question is what the basic assumptions are of a plausible alternative theory of management.

This book has, after reviewing the literature on dignity over the last 2000 years (Düwell et al. 2014; McCrudden 2013; Rosen 2012), introduced the concept of ‘workplace dignity’ as an alternative paradigm on which organizations can be founded, designed, and developed. Workplace dignity differs in two important aspects from the more traditional notions of human dignity, as for instance used in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: workplace dignity includes not only humans, but everything that is being part of the workplace, including animals, land, the environment, and matter. Moreover, the theory of workplace dignity postulates duties as being central to how dignity manifests at work; it is through our duties that we experience what our

role is in society and the workplace, as it defines the position of becoming part of a workplace as a non-neutral one: a person buying, selling, becoming an employee, a contractor or an employer, has specific duties towards the workplace. Hence, this turns around the notion of dignity as primarily being a right, which does not necessarily advocate the role of one's responsibility towards the other. This dignity entails the respect, protection, and promotion of the intrinsic worth of all this is part of the workplace. Hence, the duty that a person carries is to contribute to greater dignity in the workplace, and when acting, take into account the consequences for dignity of others and objects in the workplace. In case of a potential violation, the question is whether alternative behaviors can lead to less violation, or repair of violated dignity (Lucas 2015). The intrinsic worth therefore not only pertains to human beings, but to everything, which poses some fundamental challenges in terms of defining what dignity is exactly and how it influences reality. Intrinsic worth denotes the uniqueness of each being, which has been one of the key principles of philosophy around human dignity (Kateb 2011). Hence, it is possible to postulate the uniqueness of each human being, and to design ethical implications following this very notion. For instance, Kantian perspectives dictate that because people are unique, they have dignity and therefore should be treated as an end, and not as a mean towards an end.

However, a Daoist approach towards dignity, which has been adopted in the current book, assumes the dignity of everything. In practical terms, it may constitute a dilemma of how dignity can be integrated fully in the workplace. While it may be possible to reach an agreement on what a dignified approach towards employees may entail (e.g., that workers are not just treated instrumentally, but that their inherent worth is respected), the more difficult concerns emerge when the dignity of animals and land are taken into account. The notion that an animal has a unique worth may be at odds with the notion that animals are used for consumption, and as such are treated as means towards the fulfillment of human desire for a carnivorous diet. The question that should be asked, therefore, is whether it is possible to respect the dignity of animals who are used for consumption. The act of killing an animal

itself may be perceived to violate the dignity of that particular animal, and this needs to be theorized in more detail. A pragmatic observation regarding this issue is that in order to minimize the impact of the killing, it should be conducted such that it elicits the least possible amount of stress and pain of the animal, and that the meat produced by it, should be both sold and consumed locally, to decrease the negative impact of meat production on the environment.

Moreover, respecting the uniqueness of an animal implies that the consumption of the animal occurs consciously, and thus the individual respecting the uniqueness of the animal through being aware what it consumes. However, true dignity may reside in refraining from killing animals altogether, such that their dignity is protected in the respect for animals through not using them for consumption. Nonetheless, the current state of society does not allow simplified solutions to these problems; for instance in a Dutch coastal area dominated by dunes, a number of deer live, but as they do not have natural predators in the area, government sees itself obliged to kill a number of deer each year in order to avoid overpopulation in the area (and whose meat is sold for consumption). While this has led to protests among animals activists groups, the relevant question (while not being directly related to the workplace), is whether through a dignity-discourse democratic means of decision making may lead to pragmatic solutions in which the dignity of the animals, the land, and the people in the communities is respected and protected as much as possible, and if a certain act leads to dignity violations, which repairs can be implemented. For instance, through linking the dunes area with natural pathways to other nature reserves, the deer may roam more freely, and spread themselves across nature reserves, through which in the long run, populations can be maintained through natural means rather purely through manmade interventions. This implies that trade-offs have to be made between short-term and long-term solutions.

Despite potential pragmatism in the treatment of animals, the relevant issue is revealed when the dignity of flowers and trees are considered. While flowers and trees are living beings, and should be treated with dignity, instrumentalism cannot be merely guide human

interactions with all that grows on the land. The massive deforestation of the Amazon in favor of soy plantations feeding the hungry cows consumed in the West shows that it is a global responsibility to respect the dignity of flowers and trees (amongst others). However, the instrumental approach is not replaced by a mere focus on restoration of natural lands (in its artificiality of it, as the influence of mankind on nature is visible almost across the world). The replanting of a tree after cutting one does not suffice, as the products of nature are still being used in an instrumental way. That is, the dignity of a flower dictates that we observe the beauty of the flower, but by cutting the flower, taking it home and putting it in a vase, we instrumentalize its beauty into the enjoyment of those living and visiting the home. Hence, the relationship between humans and all other things in the world, have an inherent instrumental nature; these things are used by people to enhance their own quality of life, and the truly dignified way of treating these, is by being aware of the instrumental relationship one engages in, and building upon this awareness, to act in ways to minimize violations and to enhance promotion of dignity. The alignment can be theorized on the basis of the role of people in the workplace; while the work of people is essentially instrumental in the workplace, as it aims to produce something that can be used by themselves or by others, and therefore is a means towards an end, it should be described in terms of how it contributes to dignity. Hence, dignity cannot be sacrificed for instrumentality, and in the example of a tree to be transformed into paper or a flower to be picked, the issue is whether the use of this tree and flower leads to promotion of workplace dignity: that is, is the intrinsic worth of these taken into account *as well as* the intrinsic worth of all around the tree, the flower and us. Hence, a theory of workplace dignity does not entail the nonexistence of instrumentality (and in extension, the existence of financial motives, greed and so on), but it reformulates the primacy of how different logics operate in society and the workplace. The crucial question, therefore, always pertains not to the use of particular resources and the employment of people, but to the extent to which these decisions are being made through explicitly acknowledging and creating an active role for dignity.

### 10.1.1 On Duties

As Rosen (2012) rightfully argued, duties are somewhat unpopular in contemporary moral theory, and one of the reasons may be that at both the individual and collective level, it is rather complex to theorize a duty, as the logic of greed and self-interested rational agent may prevent an explanation of why people would experience duties. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of literature on dignity has focused on rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Notwithstanding the complexity of enforcement of rights, especially among lower-status groups, the introduction of duty is important in order to understand the precise meaning of dignity. The critique, however, may entail the notion that people may be reluctant to experience duties and to act upon it, while enforcement of duties may be even more complex than the enforcement of rights, such as the knowledge on corporate responsibility shows (Devinney 2009). In the absence of experienced duty, the theory has little practical value beyond providing an aspirational framework for those who mean best, or those who envision some alternative organizing framework beyond existing ones, but which remain to be textbook ideas rather than having real meaning for people. Yet, there are at least two observations that should be made here. Duty as being central to the notion of workplace dignity deviates from dominant theoretical notions concerning the contemporary workplace, which more strongly emphasize the role of rights (for workers), and rationality and meritocracy as underpinning the dynamics in the workplace. However, with the current workplace creating more and more inequalities (Cobb 2016), there is an urgent need for more radical alternatives.

Moreover, the 1980s in Europe were symbolically dictated by the Wall in Berlin, which was thought of as everlasting, as a symbol of that which would never go. The sudden fall of the Wall represented a moment where people realized that what they were dreaming of could actually happen. Put differently, the idea of the workplace being organized in a radical different way may seem to be too strongly deviating from current hypernormalized practice, but at the same time, is another

way to materialize the desire for a fairer, more decent, and sustainable world. The second argument for duty is that its importance is currently neglected in the workplace, as dominant thinking emphasizes human beings as not interested in duty without direct benefit, as it does not fit with economic thinking. This neglect of duty ignores the existence of duty itself, and the inability of researchers and practitioners to theorize appropriately the role of duty at work. People do experience strong duties, such as the duty to care for their family and loved ones, the duty to contribute to a better world through working, the duty to help others in need, the duty to finish their work when others are waiting for their input, the duty to go the extra mile for their organization, and the duty to be a proactive worker and citizen. While these felt duties may be the product of various processes, the crucial issue here is that it is not alien to postulate duties as being central to experience at work, as duties may serve as important indicators of how one feels about 'the ought' at work, or that what defines behavior resulting not merely from desire but from the need to contribute. Hence, duty is by far absent in the workplace, and in order to enhance dignity, it is needed to lift its importance to its proper place to understand how duty informs motivation and behavior. In sum, a critique of duty does not suffice, but merely indicates the need to explain further the reversed logic that is used to present the proper place of workplace dignity in contemporary management research.

### 10.1.2 Working with Dignity

This book has introduced workplace dignity as a key term to understand how workplaces may contribute to fairer and more decent societies. Dignity manifests through the interactions between people, and therefore meaning is created in the interactions between people. One of the reasons why dignity, although it has been existing as a concept for more than 2000 years, has not yet been integrated fully in everyday speech and understanding, is that it is a rather complex term. While one of the seminal books on dignity consists of more than 740 pages (and still does not include a discussion of dignity at work; McCrudden [2013](#)),



it is understandable that dignity does not have a central place in common language, and is largely absent from managerial discourses. For both academic and the layman, dignity has a rather complex meaning. One solution is taking into account the various cultural manifestations of the term itself. In the Dutch language, dignity encapsulates various existing terms which offer the opportunity to enrich and simplify the meaning of dignity. As stated previously, the term *waardigheid* (dignity) includes four submeanings: *waar* (true), *waarde* (value), *aard/aarde* (nature, earth), and *aardigheid* (kindness). It is through these meanings that dignity may be more easily understood for those working with dignity. It means that one should be focused on telling the truth, that one is able to discern what has value and not, that one respects the earth and all that is on the earth, and that kindness is the way in which people coexist. None of these are sufficient descriptions of what dignity is, as for instance merely focusing on kindness does not resolve the more critical issues concerning the role of truth and the importance of the earth, through which one may be forced to reduce his/her kindness in order to protect what is important. In other words, compromising the truth as one desires for kindness does not lead to more dignity, as withholding the truth out of kindness is short-termism. The result of various terms being part of what dignity is, demand a balance between those to contribute to dignity. Nonetheless, in working with dignity, the complexity of the term itself for people to work with may be translated into its various meanings that it holds in its Dutch equivalent, through which people may have more concrete tools to implement, discuss and decide on the precise meaning of dignity in the workplace, contextualized to fit within the demands and needs of a particular situation.

## 10.2 New Terms

This book has introduced various terms into management studies which have not been discussed before, and may be developed in future theoretical and empirical work. Following the axiom that new terms should only be introduced where existing ones are unable to capture the meaning of a phenomenon that the new term describes, the book has

refrained from introducing a wide variety of terms, but in conceptualizing the theory, it was necessary to discuss a number of critical concepts in relation to workplace dignity. To aid further understanding, these concepts will be briefly discussed here and suggestions are made for further conceptualization and investigation. The term workplace dignity will not be discussed here, as the whole book has been developed around this notion, and based on the various chapters developing the concept, further empirical work may reveal the true nature of workplace dignity.

### 10.2.1 A Stage Model of Workplace Dignity

One of the key arguments made in relation to workplace dignity, is that there are different stages of dignity in the workplace. While previous work has primarily focused on whether dignity is respected or not (extended to include a legal perspective on dignity), the current theory includes a stage-model of dignity. The aim of introducing these different stages is to acknowledge that organizations and individuals may operate at different levels of dignity enhancement, and that there is no static endpoint at which organizations or individuals can aim for, as a utopian idea to strive for, and having achieved this, may rest and enjoy a dignity paradise. The specific aim of differentiating stages is to identify the specific needs and duties from which individuals need to start acting. For instance, in organizations where actual dignity violations are present, it is important first to strive for the abolishment of these violations, such that a minimal level of dignity is guaranteed for workers, the land and all resources involved. The establishment of this threshold for people in the workplace to rely on informs the understanding of what organizations should do at the minimum level. However, in contrast to literature on corporate responsibility, it is not just a matter of adhering to rules about minimal standards in the workplace, but there are actually multiple stages through which we can differentiate the actions that are undertaken in the workplace to respect, protect and promote dignity. The advantages of this approach include the realization that it is not sufficient to rely on prevention of violation alone, and that there are always more ways in which dignity can obtain its proper place at work.

Moving across the stages may help both academics and practitioners to identify the steps that need to be taken in order to become more dignified. For instance, a soy producer may arrange that for every tree cut to create soy plantations, another tree is planted elsewhere, but to move to greater dignity, the soy producer has to be engaged in the protection and development of communities, the protection of forests, the promotion of biodiversity, etc. Hence, it does not suffice for organizations to state that they have engaged in prevention of violation, as it immediately raises the question of what else can be done. The answer aligns with the stages of dignity, as the contribution to one stage may open the possibility to contribute to other stages as well. Thinking about the various steps in the stage model may raise awareness that dignity is not a static concept which is merely dichotomous in its nature as being respected or not. The understanding of the stages may create the possibility to differentiate on the basis of what can be done, when it can be done, and how it could be done in relation to moving across the stages.

Empirically, the stages have not been validated, and as such there is no concrete empirical evidence of the existence and relevance of the different stages. Hence, it is needed to formulate more precisely and to test empirically, whether these stages can be differentiated and whether they have a different impact on dignity in the workplace. It may for instance be, that organizations simultaneously contribute to prevention, protection and promotion, and that in reality, the activities performed in the dignified organization are highly integrated through which it is difficult to separate the meanings of the stages. However, in the absence of conclusive data, the stages remain an empirical question of validity and reliability. The unique study of Lucas (2015) showed that workers have perceptions of different levels of dignity in the workplace, and as such presents some indication of the existence of the stages of dignity.

### 10.2.2 States of Poverty

Chapter 5 discussed states of poverty as the tendency of people to focus on short term decision making, which may counteract long term benefits. For instance, ample research has shown that in periods of monetary

poverty, people are deprived of resources to make the best decisions through which they may be unable to plan for the long term and overly focus on the short term (Mani et al. 2013). These states of poverty can be regarded as a metaphorical state, in which people, due to whatever circumstances, are unable to make decisions that benefit them in the long term, while a strong focus on what is beneficial at this very moment, may take away all attention for the long-term consequences. A conscious ignorance of the long-term consequences concerns the maltreatment of the environment and natural landscapes and resources, which are used while at the same time destroying the earth in the long-run. Beyond the obvious financial reasons (i.e., greed) to engage in exploitation of the earth, it also denotes a state of poverty in the people engaging in these activities. In other words, while anger towards those people directly responsible for further exploitation (such as the people working for Shell aiming for extraction of oil from the melting North Pole) may define the first reaction, it is also needed to understand the cognitive limitations that prohibit their thinking. The state of poverty is influenced by an individual suspension of critical thinking, but also by group dynamics that determine the behavior of individuals in organizations (Schneider 1987), and exert pressure on individuals to conform to group norms that may not even exist. The crucial point of states of poverty in relation to dignity is that it is needed to understand the reasons why individuals are not contributing to dignity. While some of the reasons may result directly from dominant economic thinking, such as greed and self-interest, other reasons may also result from the inability to reason otherwise. Populist support, for example, can easily be exposed as short-termism resulting from states of poverty, in which people express their support for politicians who, almost by definition, will harm their interests in the long run. Understanding of why people vote against their own interests, involves the notion of state of poverty, as it explains why people make suboptimal decisions. Understanding this also provides the opportunity to formulate an alternative, and therefore the concept may prove to be useful in further developing workplace dignity.

### 10.2.3 Reversed Logic of Hypernormalization

The final term actually consists of two elements, and has been discussed in the last chapters of the book in more detail. The striking similarities between the late Soviet era and the current era in Western countries reveal the importance of hypernormalization; all the practices, cultural manifestations, and discourses have become hypernormalized from a situation where societal and organizational practices were deemed to be normal, that is shared and understood by the people. In other words, the knowledge of the world has been spread among academics, politicians, policy-makers, and the public, and the reasons why neoliberalism has contributed to many of the problems in the world, including individualism, climate change, inequality, poverty and so on, have become available and accessible to all (in theory). Hence, the truth behind reality is available, yet unknown to many in the hypernormalized state where so many is regarded as normal, as a logical consequence or negative side-effect of progress and advancement. It is only through the idea among the public that progress has stopped and has vanished that the general public has become more aware of its predicament. Yet, dominant structures have not ceased their propaganda to hypernormalize the status-quo, by using the threat of social exclusion for those who challenge the status-quo. It is therefore needed to use the means to reveal the hypernormalized reality, as workplace dignity, in its truly inclusive aim, can be developed when reality is exposed in its undignifying form and consequences.

Reversed logic serves to guide the ways in which hypernormalization can be confronted and counteracted. Dignity does not necessarily coalesce with the outcomes of reversed logic per se, as some of the things that dominate current society may be needed to be preserved, such as the freedom of speech, with the necessary additions in legal frameworks (such as in the Netherlands) of prohibiting hate speech and calling for violent action. However, *using* the reversed logic method allows one to become aware and to establish a decision on what is dignified, and what does not contribute to more dignity. The ultimate consequence for instance may be that an analysis on the basis of reversed

logic may reveal that certain jobs do not contribute to more dignity in the workplace. This may be the case among some administrative jobs (e.g., monitoring procedures or people), or jobs of security guards, and the question following this is how their work, or how their jobs may be reconceptualized such that either their jobs are redefined to make that contribution, or they are supported in obtaining a job where they can find possibilities to contribute to dignity. Alvesson and Spicer (2016) discuss how more than half of the UK universities have more administrative staff than academics, which means that there are fewer people for the core tasks of the university (teaching and research), and an increasing amount of people in administrative jobs, and while not devaluing the importance of bureaucracy, a discussion on a more dignified way of managing universities is desperately needed. Hence, reversed logic may support this process and create more dignity at work. However, there are both theoretical and empirical concerns, which need to be addressed in the future, such as the meaning of reversed logic in decision making processes, and the actual use of reversed logic by people in creating fairer, more decent, and more dignified workplaces.

### 10.3 Practical Recommendations for Academics

Workplace dignity does not just offer a theory on how the workplace can be organized in a different way through which workplaces become more inclusive. Workplace dignity also offers the opportunity to redefine existing theory, models, terminology and concepts in the field of management. While management is primarily something that is related to the work of people, throughout the book the focus has been on the aspects most closely related to the domains of organization studies and organizational behavior. While there is a critical stream with the field of management, such as the Critical Management Scholars group, it is apparent that these more critical fields have been existing quite separated from the more mainstream disciplines, with their own conferences, journals (such as *Organization*) and discourses. For instance, the term neoliberalism, while being used widely in the more critical

literatures in sociology, geography and political-economic writings, is largely absent from the mainstream management literature. Especially in my home discipline (work and organizational psychology), it is notable how neoliberalism is completely ignored, but more importantly, how all of the basic assumptions are strongly based in instrumentalism and rational actor models. Furthermore, it is particularly striking how little self-reflective academics generally are in terms of ideological assumptions of research, and how they defend their positions when being attacked on their assumptions (see e.g., the responses to my Dutch article on neoliberalism in work and organizational psychology; Bal 2015, 2016). Hence, there are also recommendations for academics.

The most crucial aspect pertains to the need for academics to much more explicitly acknowledge the basic assumptions of their research. While it is not claimed that workplace dignity theory offers the *only* theory on organizing, it does in detail discuss the underlying assumptions (i.e., Daoist, Kantian), and research based on other assumptions, should at least discuss on which assumptions theories, models and variables are chosen and selected (see Greenwood and Van Buren III 2016). For instance, the choice of organizational performance as an outcome of a particular model is inherently ideological, and the definition and measurement of performance are crucially important in terms of its ideological meaning, not only as just another variable, but also more generally in terms of defining research interests within a particular domain. The more straightforward explanation of the lack of assumption-acknowledgement is that many academics are unaware of their assumptions, and by being fully engaged in the contemporary debates around a particular phenomenon, neglect the duty to critically reflect on their own topics of investigation, even to the point of defending against any critique from outside.

The next step for academics is not only to acknowledge, but also to formulate their own assumptions. When for instance neoliberalism is rejected, it is needed to design theories and principles beyond neoliberal ones, such as the notion of instrumentality above all. While workplace dignity may prove to be a starting point, the essential task for the management scholar is to design the principles on which future-oriented organizations can function. Too often, academics have positioned

themselves as describing social realities, without taking into account the very influence they exert on social reality.

Furthermore, dignity does not just operate at the level of fundamental assumptions, but also at the visible surface of phenomena of interest in management. Proactivity and engagement have been discussed to some extent throughout the book, in order to provide examples of concepts which have been used in line with neoliberal principles, but which can be redefined in more dignified ways. The task therefore for academics, is not merely to conform to or refrain from dignity principles, but to actively search for integration of existing and relevant research themes with dignity at work. As presented in this book, dignity has the potential to inform and enrich debates, and without enforcing the need to use dignity, the concern for researchers is to understand how existing concepts can become multi-interpretable and therefore risk to become meaningless. A more specific integration of a term with the intended meaning is important; as the original work on employee engagement was meant to indicate how employees could derive joy and meaning from their work, over the years, it resulted in a stream of research on engagement instrumentalizing the concept and reducing it to the state of arousal as it currently denotes.

## 10.4 Untouched Domains and Cautionary Words

The current book needs a disclaimer, as throughout the book, it has used means of overgeneralization to make an argument of why dignity is needed. With a strongly developed critical management and business ethics literature, it seems as if all should have been said in relation to the optimal operation of organizations to serve humanity. However, despite all the available research and theories in the management field, it was needed to formulate an alternative theory, in order to freely theorize without burdens of thousands of papers on business ethics, some of which employ purely instrumental reasoning, while others use Kantian ethics which closely aligns with the current book. However, the combination of dignity, the workplace as a whole rather than a focus on humans only, the importance of duties, and a critique



of instrumentality and individualism, is something not seen before in the literature, and it is this combination that best explains not only a critique of the contemporary workplace but also an alternative which may be future-proof.

The theory is conceptual although based on findings from research over the last 100 years, but nonetheless only obtains validity when tested empirically. To do so, many other aspects need to be discussed, developed, and designed. For instance, theoretical and practical limitations may apply in terms of the governance structures, legal aspects, financial matters, supply chain dynamics, and operational side of organizations and the workplace. In contrast to economic thinking which has come to dominate the complete workplace, it is necessary to integrate knowledge and understanding from many different disciplines. Only through integration of these disciplines in line with principles of dignity, further explicit knowledge can be generated on how the future workplace can be designed. For instance, the possibility within the workplace to become more focused on respecting the individuality of a person is often counteracted by the legal structures emphasizing the collective equality of treatment. Notwithstanding the possibility of institutionalized discrimination (even on the basis of unintended policy), there is often a clash between what is good in a particular situation and what the collective needs represent, or how collective representation interacts with the dynamics of a particular situation. As legal structures are only designed around the 'average' person, or the average person representing a specific group of people, it does not readily adjust to the needs of a real existing individual. The resolution of such a clash can only be achieved when cross-disciplinary work is undertaken, with the aim to align the interests and needs of the different parties.

Moreover, the current book is not a philosophical work. While drawing upon various philosophical streams and traditions, it is not meant to enrich a literature of dignity from a philosophical perspective, as it lacks the extended underpinnings in the philosophical tradition and literatures. Hence, more work could be conducted here, as it may aid to understanding of how workplace dignity could operate practically. The analysis of how it should be able to present an alternative framework of understanding, on the basis of which people can act and change

their behavior, can be further deepened through challenging the core assumptions in the theory. Following the Popperian notion of falsification, the theory also needs to be falsified rather than merely supported, in order to develop a theory that does not become an institutionalized entity which has to be defended, but a living idea that is in constant development and improvement. It is therefore needed that academics and others criticize the work in order to be able to postulate an alternative that is truly able to change the world in a way it addresses all the things discussed in the first chapter. It is clear that it is no longer possible to regard the status-quo as something to accept and tolerate, as the hypernormalized status of the globalized economy and society is cracking in every aspect, in inequality, poverty and climate change manifesting widely across the globe. If there is a time of action, it is today rather than tomorrow. If there is one idea that could be developed, it is that of workplace dignity.

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