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'Dignity and Leadership: Implications of Leaders' Language and Their Assumptions of Human Nature

Greg Latemore

Introduction

Echoing the initiative to reconnect management theory with social welfare (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014), this chapter focusses on human dignity as it applies to leadership theory and practice. Leaders' assumptions of human nature underpin their behaviour (Fahrenberg and Cheetham 2008; Heslin and Vande Walle 2008) and influence the extent to which they respect the dignity of their employees.

In particular, it is proposed that the language which managers employ may either reinforce dignity in the workplace or not, and that the language of dignity transcends the inspirational language which might, at times, be needed. With an eye to investigating this phenomenon further, the chapter reports on exploratory field research testing assumptions of

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human nature by eliciting the descriptors used by practising managers for people in the workplace. We investigate the language of dignity among managers and the relative impacts of that language through two small empirical studies. As will be seen, one recognises mutual respect at work via workplaces which foster cultures of diversity (Strachan et al. 2010), as well as by those which use dignity-affirming language, which transcends any relative value among people (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014).

In another contribution to this volume, it is argued that current trends towards human capital, organizational citizenship behaviour, and high-performance human resource management (HRM) practices might in fact be working against a respectful approach to employees, and therefore may diminish dignity in the workplace. The chapter begins by addressing an apparent gap in the literature between dignity and leadership, and it concludes by inviting further research into the theoretical bedrock of dignity beneath the language employed by leaders in the workplace.

Dignity and Leadership: An Under-Explored Link

Understandably, there is a need tor respect the privacy, individuality and dignity of older patients (Cass 2008; Elaswarapu 2011) and respect for the dying (Parse 2010) in health-related organisational contexts (Cook 2014; Stone 2011). However, what of the role of leaders in fostering dignity in organizations beyond a healthcare setting?

The language of leaders occasionally needs to be inspirational (Conger 1991; Molenbergs et al. 2015) and motivational (Sarros et al. 2014). This might suggest there is a visionary-based, inspirationally oriented pathway to leadership effectiveness. However, to date there is little attention given to the impact of managerial language upon the dignity of employees in the workplace in general. Accordingly, this might suggest there is also a values-based, dignity-oriented pathway to leadership effectiveness. In both pathways, it is through language that managers develop visions with employees, and respect their dignity. Combining these two elements builds and portrays strong leadership.

Being ethical is a pre-requisite for leadership credibility (Northouse 2013), and a leader can still be ethical without being particularly dignified, or respectful of the dignity of others. Dignity in the workplace is reflected in the relationships between leaders and followers, and, in particular, in the language employed by leaders and managers. All employees have intrinsic worth as human beings, and their status and stature—*dignitas* (Waldron 2009)—should be recognised. Both leaders and followers have legitimate, mutual expectations of each other, and ideally, display reciprocal respect for the dignity of themselves and for each other. In addition, the labels of 'leader' and 'follower' do not imply less intrinsic worth, but they often do in practice. If not in descriptive meaning at least in connotative meaning, 'leader' implies activity if not superiority; 'follower' implies passivity if not dependence.

Dignity and Leadership

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), asserted that human beings can be described in terms of dignity, precisely because they are capable of morality and agency. Persons are ends in themselves, not just a means of producing value. He famously wrote:

> Everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity. (Kant 1785, p. 435)

Although dignity is a contested concept (Rodriguez 2015), scholars agree that dignity is intrinsic to what it means to be human, and that humans are equal as humans (Kipper 2015) and distinct from animals (Adler 1993). It is well argued (Gewirth 1978; Wertheimer 1974) that dignity is a moral obligation for humans as agents with free will to choose social opportunity (Sen 2001, 2002), and assist each other in achieving a state of well-being. Further, dignity is developed throughout life and earned through actions (Pirson 2014), which is especially salient for leaders whose behaviour is witnessed over time by employees, for whom the

dignity of labour becomes the issue in how they are treated in the workplace (Adler 1997).

Indeed, employees do produce relative value; but as human beings, they already possess a stature and a status (Kateb 2011, pp. 9 & 18). Despite the views of Jensen (2002, p. 17), they do not 'have a price'. Employees have intrinsic worth, apart from the work which they perform as 'workers'. Even if people have diminished capacity through physical or mental impairment, or if they are children, nor this does not reduce their inherent merit as human beings (Waldron 2009), an approach which is thankfully, well-reflected at least in not-for-profit organizations. Merit and intrinsic worth are important constructs when we talk about the dignity of employees.

As Waldron (2009) reminds us, once the prerogative of exalted or royal persons, all human beings now have, or should have, *dignitas,* status and stature (Kateb 2011), simply in being human beings. Similarly, Rosen (2012) distinguishes three types of dignity: dignity as inherent value, as social status, and as a mode of behaviour. Not long ago, even among the so-called elite and the educated, it was assumed that there were levels or degrees of human beings such as slaves and serfs, while Nazi racial ideology targeted Jews, homosexuals, people with disabilities, gypsies, and others (The Holocaust Dictionary). It is important to remember that people in the workplace, are not merely *homo economicus* (Dierksmeier 2011), or economic units of production, or sources of human capital (Kiel 2015, pp. 24 & 118) but are intrinsically worthwhile. Perhaps we have forgotten Kant's (1785) insistence that people are ends in themselves. As Hicks (2011, p. 33) notes, it is helpful to remember that people are neither inferior nor superior but are 'equals with integrity'.

In the workforce, employees contract their time and energy, but their autonomy and self-ownership as human beings should still be respected (Stokes 2015). The current fascination with human capital in HRM (Crook et al. 2011) is also—and possibly ironically—betraying an instrumental, utilitarian view of human nature. The irony is that HRM practitioners might actually be portraying a reductionist, utilitarian approach (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014) towards the very people whom they are supposed to represent. Brown et al. (2009)

have criticized Ulrich's (1987) respected model of HRM where being a business partner or a change agent adds more strategic value than does, say, the role of the employee champion. Some HRM scholars are insistent that the HRM profession needs to remember its origins as the organization's conscience, and be more concerned with employee welfare and well-being (Kramar 2014; Kramar and Parry 2014). Indeed, the paradigm of human well-being should underpin contemporary, sustainable HRM (Hartel 2010). If relativist (Dierksmeier 2011), reductionist, or utilitarian (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014) approaches to humanity do not serve us well, then perhaps we need an unconditional approach (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014), even a radical humanism (Aktouf 1992).

The current attraction for employers to regard their employees as organizational 'citizens' (Podsakoff et al. 2000; Walumbwa et al. 2010) sounds respectful of employees, and appears to elevate their significance to the enterprise. Indeed, organizational citizenship behaviour is praised as discretionary behaviour because it is evidenced as generalized compliance, altruism, courtesy, and conscientiousness (Landy and Conte 2010; Wan 2011). However, there is evidence that organizational citizenship behaviour actually advantages the organization more than the citizen, as higher levels of employee engagement and performance are expected, especially in difficult times. Employees still need to have their dignity recognised and their well-being protected, even if they are indeed valuable 'citizens'.

Further, we need to take care when asserting the legitimate value of intangible assets such as human knowledge and intellectual capital (Sveiby 2001). There is a risk that we instrumentalize employees or betray a 'physicalist or a reductionist' approach (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014, p. 37) in the quest for wealth and value creation (Carroll 2012). There is increasing recognition that dignity is the missing link in organizational science (Pirson 2014) and that management needs to be reconceptualised in a more humanistic manner (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014). In the quest for sustained competitive advantage and organizational effectiveness (Cameron 2010), leaders harness human wisdom (Rooney et al. 2010).

A discussion of dignity is aided by a reminder about what leaders actually do. There is an abundance of literature on leadership, but, as Burns (1978, pp. 1–2) commented:

> If we know all too much about our leaders, we know far too little about leadership. Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.

His sobering observation still applies nearly forty years later. The vast literature on this elusive subject will not be summarised here. Suffice to say that while the romance of leadership should be avoided (Meindl et al. 1985), and there may well be substitutes for leadership (Kerr and Jermier 1978), scholars (Keller 2006; Podsakoff et al. 1996) agree that leadership does matter in producing value for organizations, even if the results are mixed.

Definitions of leadership agree that it is a process of influencing others to achieve common objectives or goals (Northouse 2013; Yukl 2013). Leadership deals with both tasks and relationships. It is noteworthy that there are leadership theories more amenable to and more closely linked with the concept of dignity. These theories include transformational leadership, servant leadership, and authentic leadership (see Northouse 2013). Transformational theory, in particular, elicits extra effort from employees by engaging in individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, idealised influence, and inspirational motivation (Bass and Avolio 1994). These theories echo an ethical perspective and state, or at least imply that people add value, that people are the source of value, and that people are whom leaders must relate well to in order to produce such value for organizations. Effective leaders challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, model the way, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes and Posner 2012), in ways that build trust and respect the dignity of employees. Authentic servant and transformational leaders recognise the humanity and the aspirations of employees, and avoid using employees merely for an organization's purposes. Such theories are in contrast to transactional leadership (Vera and Crossan 2004) which assumes a more instrumental and efficiency-oriented approach towards employees. Transactional leaders adhere to traditional path-goal theory (House 1996) where they motivate employees by focussing on rules, standardisation, explicit agreements, and rewards for compliance.

It must now be asked:

- Do leaders behave in a dignified manner?
- Does leader discourse demonstrate respect for the dignity of others?

Sarros (2002) contends that the soul of leadership has been regarded as values articulation and building credibility. The most effective, 'virtuoso' leaders are positive role models to their employees, developing a character which portrays the human virtues of integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness (Kiel 2015). Leaders are best known in their engagement with employees and other stakeholders, for leadership by necessity implies relationship. Most of the respected studies in leadership theory and practice (see Northouse 2013; Yukl 2013 for reviews) address the nature and the style of such relationships.

The language of leadership-followership itself implies something about the dyadic and the apparently dependent relationship of employees upon their managers: it seems that employees must 'follow' their managers. In leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau et al. 1975), there is a conceptual leanness that can be perceived as highly transactional and emotionless. Northouse (2013) outlines criticisms of this vertical and dyadic theory as running counter to the basic human value of fairness, even though it is questionable if this theory was actually intended to create inequalities (Harter and Evanecky 2002). With Hopfl (1994), it is evident that management theory needs to be reconnected with human experience. While recognising that, at best, there is a compromise rather than a genuine balance of power in the employment relationship (Strachan et al. 2010), one hopes that the employment relationship would be underpinned by principles of mutuality and reciprocity (Bromberg and Irving 2007).

Leaders and leadership scholars need to be aware that leaders are people relating to people. Managerialist assumptions do not sit well with the new sustainability paradigm: we need new archetypes to describe and encourage a humanistic perspective on leadership (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014). It is imperative, especially among those who work in the HRM profession, that employees and their dignity must be respected, just as much as we should care 'about polar bears' (Pfeffer 2010, p. 43).

Leaders' Respect Dignity through Culture and Language

Leaders should foster respectful cultures, not toxic ones, and so ensure that human dignity is protected and acknowledged (Hartel 2008). Leaders have a responsibility to acquire and apply capabilities that include: provide vision and strategic direction, operate consistently with organizational values, communicate constantly and meaningfully; create an environment for success; function as team players, persist to achieve good outcomes (see APSC 2009, pp. 14–15).

Strategies can be enacted to help ensure that the dignity and the rights of people at work are being recognised (APSC 2009; Kramar 2014). Such strategies include: ensure open communication, manage workloads and priorities, develop policies on appropriate behaviour, employ objective selection criteria, reinforce desirable behaviour through induction, and raise awareness through training.

Leaders demonstrate dignity towards employees when they encourage a diverse culture (Strachan et al. 2010), especially when working against bullying and other forms of harassment (Caponecchia and Wyatt 2011). Workplace roles which produce meaningful work and engage employees in decision-making, for example, demonstrate dignity towards employees and foster fulfilling organizational cultures (Burke and Cooper 2013).

It is also recognised that high-performance work systems, such as flex-time, home-based work, tele-working and a compressed working week, can actually produce employee harm (Mariappanadar and Kramar 2014). Leaders, including HRM directors, need to ensure that organisational outcomes are achieved, but not at the expense of employee well-being.

Beneath such managerial behaviour are their assumptions of human nature. A philosophy of the person is rarely explicit (Reichmann 1985) and is often only glimpsed and implied. Attitudes towards the person at work are perhaps best evidenced in the attitudes and language used by managers. There are assumptions about human nature embedded in one's leadership style (Goleman 2000) and in one's ethical perspective (Gardner 2007; Rosen 2004). These various assumptions are important, as they underpin professional practice (Fahrenberg and Cheetham 2008)

and they have a significant effect upon the manifestation of dignity in the workplace towards others, or not. Do managers just tend to regard people in the workplace as merely 'workers', people who 'do'? Where is human dignity in such an approach towards leadership?

Our approaches to human metrics at work (Fitz-Enz 2010) might themselves be betraying a calculating and instrumental approach to human value. For example, is the inherent worth of the person really understood and accepted in the workplace when people are being appraised and assessed? There is also an individualistic assumption in much management literature. Maybe individualism is a special characteristic of a Western approach to the person (Obioha-Olabishi 2014)? The assumptions of human nature behind 'theory X versus theory Y' management theory by Douglas McGregor (1960) seem to be one of the first efforts to relate management science to philosophy (Collins and Latemore 2002). Have we really progressed that much beyond this approach towards the person, and towards understanding and fostering human dignity in the workplace?

It is in their discourse that leaders' attitudes are perhaps best known and experienced. Leaders are communicators, and if they do not communicate effectively, they cannot lead (Bennis and Nanus 1985). Rudeness and incivility in the workplace is costly and does not foster respect (Porath and Pearson 2013). Conversing with others and not merely presenting to them is needed for influence in the workplace (Barry and Fulmer 2004; Brink and Costigan 2015). For example, effective leaders in an educational context employ the language of *logos, ethos* and *pathos*, that is, rational knowledge, moral legitimacy and emotional appeal (Lowenhaupt 2014). The appropriate use of humorous language is also an important tool for transformational leaders (Hughes and Avey 2009), especially when affiliative and non-aggressive humour is positively related to leader-member exchange (Pundt and Hermann 2015). Supportive leader behaviour fosters creativity (Amabile et al. 2004), while leaders who communicate with affect encourage both follower performance and leader-follower interaction (Tee 2015; Wang and Seibert 2015 Griffith et al. 2015). Authentic leaders know that helping employees find meaning can only occur in intersubjective space (Berkovich 2014). To communicate effectively between persons requires genuineness, empathetic

understanding, unconditional positive regard, being present, a spirit of mutual equality, and a supportive psychological climate (Johannesen 1990). Indeed, words matter.

In public discourse, we note the dehumanisation of asylum seekers as 'illegal immigrants' or as a 'swarm'. In a similar way, the words used by leaders for their employees similarly reflect their attitudes towards them. The language used by leaders for the people with whom they work ideally signals that people are equals as human beings (Hicks 2011) even if there is obviously a reporting relationship on the organizational chart. To the Internal Revenue Service, we are 'taxpayers', to a doctor, we are 'patients', to a taxi driver we are 'fares', and to an electricity provider, we are merely 'consumers'. What do the words 'direct reports', or 'staff', variously describe or imply about a dignified attitude to people in the workplace? To politicians, people are regarded as 'voters' or 'constituents', although it is interesting that the Honourable Gough Whitlam (1916–2014), a previous Australian Prime Minister, challenged these attributions, and instead, he was among the first political leader to address the voting public as 'my fellow Australians'.

Like the Inuit who have many words for snow and ice, institutions which are people-oriented have many words to describe the way people ought to treat one another. 'Crew member' (*McDonald's*) and 'cast member' (*Disney*) are words which 'upgrade the status of the individual employee' (Peters and Waterman 1982, p. 261). In sum, maybe we need a richer vocabulary to describe employees, words which signify and imply a more respectful attitude to the dignity of the person at work. In policies on bullying, for example, it is noted that it is often the tone and body language that some people find as offensive as the meaning of words (Strachan et al. 2010). Leaders, therefore, need to be careful <u>what</u> they say towards others, as well as <u>how</u> they express themselves in the workplace (APSC 2009; CCH Australia 2011).

Female managers are more likely to remove such status assumptions by using words like 'colleagues' or 'associates' instead of words like 'direct reports'. Without succumbing to stereotypes on feminine leadership (Eicher-Catt 2005), there is evidence that female leaders transcend the language of power and precision (Henry 1987) and instead, display more variety and ambiguity in their language than do men. Women also lead

and communicate in ways that are more participatory, non-hierarchical, flexible and group-oriented (Billing and Alvesson 2000). Women tend to connect, give superior attention to others and engage in real conversation (Stephens 2003). As interactional socio-linguistics shows, whether in meetings or in emails (Mullany 2011), women communicate differently from men and are, generally, more relational.

The problematic issue of managing diminished performance and of disciplining employees needs to be mentioned as well. This is of course part of a manager's role; but, it must be conducted in ways that are still respectful. Current research on performance management (Atwater and Elkins 2009; Cokins 2009) asserts the importance of leaders' tone and language in such situations. When coaching employees to high performance outcomes, managers and external coaches need to be particularly respectful, not manipulative (Latemore 2015a). Flaherty agrees (2005), p. 10), asserting, 'techniques don't work [as they] manipulate, undermine the dignity of people, and foster resistance and resentment'. Leaders should indeed attract and communicate well with talented employees (Cantrell and Smith 2010) but it is in dealing with diminished performance that managerial respect for the dignity of employees becomes crucial.

Studies of Leaders' Language in the Workplace

Research was conducted into the language which managers use in the workplace among two discrete groups of practicing managers to test their assumptions of human nature, and the degree of respect for human dignity being represented. Two recent samples were accessed:

- ***Sample One***: A post-graduate cohort of managers (*N* = 33) from across the African continent who were attending a program on 'Employee and Organization Development' at The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, in August–September, 2014;
- ***Sample Two***: A group of management attendees (*N* = 50) on the 'Mentor Connect' orientation program from the Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Brisbane, Australia, on 29th April, 2015.

Participants were asked to respond to this question: “What words do you use when describing the human person in the workplace?” The descriptors in the 75 answers to this question from Sample One are represented in Table 8.1 below, with tabular sorting assumptions being made about their relative positivity, neutrality or negativity.

The most frequently occurring descriptions among this African cohort in Sample One were that human beings in the workplace were: social, good, individuals, spiritual, and created in God’s image. Some (17 %) of all descriptors demonstrate a religious nuance which might be char-

Table 8.1 Selected African descriptors for the person at work (Latemore 2015b)

Negative descriptors	Neutral/mixed descriptors	Positive descriptors
Imperfect x2	Social x5	Created in God’s image x3
Naïve	Individuals x3	Innately/inherently good x3
Lack freedom	Decision-maker x2	Spiritual x3
Tax machine	Resource x2	To be/do good x2
Slave	Complex system x2	Loving x2
Unpredictable	Emotional x2	Resourceful x2
Selfish	Family-oriented	Religious x2
	Animals	Honest x2
	Conscious	Hearts & minds
	Part of a community	God’s glory
	Thinkers	Godly
	Risk taker	Hopeful
	Inquisitive	Purposeful
	Intelligent resource	Flexible
	Listener	Kind
	Communicator	Daring
	Protective of community & offspring	Unleashed potential
	Person	Striving for perfection
	Hopeless without God	Born equal
		Searching for meaning
		Lovable
		Son or daughter of God
		Benefit to society
		Enjoys life
		Most intelligent creature
		Creator
		Supernatural powers
Total = 8 (11 %)	**Total = 29 (39 %)**	**Total = 38 (51 %)**

acteristic of African respondents. It is also noted that most descriptors among this African cohort were predominantly either positive (51 %), or neutral/mixed (39 %), with only 11 % of descriptors assumed to be more negative.

The 159 answers from Sample Two are now summarised in Table 8.2, again with tabular sorting assumptions:

Among this Australian cohort in Sample Two, the most frequently appearing descriptors of the person in the workplace were as follows: individuals, vulnerable, emotional, compassionate, unique, intelligent, and complex. The role orientations of respondents in Sample Two, from a human services organization, might explain certain descriptors like vulnerable, fragile, and needy. Indeed, the tabular sorting of these particular descriptors as 'negative' is problematic.

While almost exclusively secular, there was more balance between positive (32 %), neutral/mixed (40 %), and negative (28 %) descriptors among the Australian cohort in Sample Two when compared with the African cohort in Sample One. Additional research and analysis might determine whether the proportionately more negative descriptors from Sample Two (28 %) compared with Sample One (11 %) were due to cultural differences, work-role differences, or other moderating or causal variables.

There were some colourful descriptors across both Samples such as 'tax machine' and 'destructive little monkey'. In both samples, there was a mixture of dignity-discounting descriptors (such as 'selfish') and dignity-declaring descriptors (such as 'inherently good'). Additional field research might confirm the effect cross-cultural, gender (Holms and Marra 2011), role, or age-related issues have upon the employment of leadership discourse.

This selected field research raises the questions: how dignified is the language which managers typically use for employees, and indeed, what is the quality of managerial language in general? Anecdotal evidence might suggest that managers do not always demonstrate respectful language in the workplace (Latemore 2015d; Porath and Pearson 2013). Leaders should be virtuous and positive role models of exemplary behaviour, not the exception (Kiel 2015). Leaders need to respect the dignity of others, and dignify their own relationships in the workplace with appropriate

Table 8.2 Selected Australian descriptors for the person at work (Latemore 2015c)

Negative descriptors	Neutral/mixed descriptors	Positive descriptors
Vulnerable x6	Individuals x7	Compassionate x5
Fragile x3	Emotional x6	Person x3
Conformist x2	Unique x5	Caring x2
Needy x2	Complex x4	Inquisitive x2
Difficult	Intelligent x4	Funny x2
War, power, greed	Social x2	Resilient x2
Damaged	Diverse x2	Adaptable
Destructive little monkey	Different x2	Joyful
Child	Alive x2	Self-aware
Disconnected	Thoughtful	Concerned for others
Programmable	Has history	Learn
Imperfect	Mortal	Perfect
Flawed	Like me	Everyone brings something
Impressionable	Bipedal carbon-based life form	Energy
Make mistakes	Elderly	Spiritual
Defiant	World-wide	Love
Rebellious	Introverted	Giving
Tired	Feeling	Something to offer
Judgmental	Top of the food chain	Expressive
Racist	Connected	Interesting
Biased	Has a history	Genuine
Feral	Complex	Learning
Imperfect	Different	Determined
Arse-holes	Family	Clever
Contradictory	Cultural	Reflective
Cruel	Community	Resilient
Hateful	Living	Loving
Miserable	Personalities	Kind
Dangerous	Body	Giving
Destructive	Followers	Empathetic
Selfish	Evolved	Strong
Self-centred	Employee	Protective
Rude	Surprising	Creative
Difficult	Situational	Resourceful
Fearful	Competitive	Motivated
Selfish	Challenging	Survivors
	Multi-layered	Strategic
	Needs to be loved	Respectful
		Story-tellers

Table 8.2 (continued)

Negative descriptors	Neutral/mixed descriptors	Positive descriptors
		Purposeful
		Empathetic
Total = 45 (28 %)	**Total = 63 (40 %)**	**Total = 51 (32 %)**

communication and tone. If not, diminished performance, heightened levels of conflict, and employee disengagement typically occur (Burke and Cooper 2013).

Conclusion

There is a gap in the management literature on the theoretical repertoire and the conceptual underpinning for managerial attitudes, managerial language, and the assumptions of human nature that underpin leadership theory and practice. The exploratory data presented here reveals that there is a mixture of dignity-declaring and dignity-discounting language when describing the person in the workplace. Further research in this regard needs to be conducted by dignity scholars within the humanistic network. For instance, more research is needed to explore the assumptions of human nature that lie behind managerial attitudes and language (Fahrenberg and Cheetham 2008).

Turning more to practice, as Hartel (2008) emphasises, leaders need to build healthy cultures and provide a sense of direction to employees to achieve common goals (Northouse 2013). Effective transformational leaders, in particular, respect other persons as they challenge, inspire, model, enable, and encourage (Kouzes and Posner 2012).

Leaders' attitudes to employees hinge upon their assumptions of human nature (McGregor 1960); this is often demonstrated in their communication and their choice of language (Bennis and Nanus 1985). Leaders should ensure that their language is respectful and protects the human dignity of their employees. Suitable policies ideally promote such managerial practices (APSC 2009; CCH Australia 2011). Creating and maintaining healthy organizational cultures which respect employees is

the responsibility of managers. While they may not adopt a religious view of dignity (Kateb 2011), leaders do need to transcend a purely utilitarian or reductionist approach to understanding human nature (Pirson 2014).

Managers and HRM practitioners especially, need to guard against instrumentalizing employees, or taking a purely utilitarian approach towards human nature in the workplace (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014) under the guise of humanizing human capital, encouraging citizenship behaviour, and employing high-performance work systems (Kramar 2014). Leaders should not reduce the dignity of employees while understandably expecting high-performance from them in the workplace and when dealing with diminished performance. We conclude with the exhortation of the management guru, Peter Drucker (2002, p. 70), 'they're not employees, they're people'.

Chapter Summary

This chapter demonstrates that one's philosophy of the person undergirds one's respect for the dignity of others in the workplace (Heslin and Vande Walle 2008). That philosophy is particularly marked in the language which leaders employ. Indeed, our understanding of the person in the workplace has perhaps not progressed much beyond McGregor's (1960) 'theory X-theory Y' leadership theory, and that more research is needed on the assumptions of human nature that lie behind managerial attitudes and language (Fahrenberg and Cheetham 2008).

Recent field research shows a mixture of dignity-declaring and dignity-discounting language when describing the person in the workplace. This illustrates that the language one uses as a leader is the tangible expression of our assumptions of human nature, and this language needs to reflect the dignity of others in the workplace. How respectfully leaders communicate is vital in fostering a healthy and diverse culture (Hartel 2008; Strachan et al. 2010), and in ensuring that the dignity of employees is acknowledged.

Managers and HRM practitioners especially, need to avoid either instrumentalizing employees, or adopting a purely utilitarian approach towards human nature at work (Pirson and Dierksmeier 2014). While

expecting high commitment from employees, leaders should not disrespect them.

The chapter concludes with an invitation for dignity scholars to enrich the theoretical underpinnings of the managerial assumptions of human nature, as well as their language with employees.

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