Title: Supervisor Disrespect of Human Dignity in High Motivating Jobs: Diminishing Personal Growth Experiences and Job Satisfaction

Keywords: ethics, human dignity, intrinsic motivating job, personal growth satisfaction, general job satisfaction

Abstract

In the last two decades, research on ethical leadership has irrupted abundantly, overcoming the numerous benefits this phenomenon usually brings to human relationships in organizations (Brown & Treviño, 2006). However, whereas research has focused on the positive effects of this phenomenon on job outcomes (Neubert, Wu, & Roberts, 2013; Brown & Treviño, 2006) relatively little attention has been paid to analysing these effects in working contexts designed to favour such positive job outcomes per se. Those favourable conditions, for example, that make the job highly motivating and employees obtain high levels of satisfaction, could be dramatically affected along with the presence or absence of the ethical element of leadership. For example, the Hawthorne studies suggested that employee response could be strongly influenced by the interpersonal interactions experienced with supervisors. Also, although most research has been focused on the ethics element in leadership, there are limited studies addressing specifically the role of respecting human dignity to attain the best of the supervisor-collaborators relationship. Because respecting others in their dignity as humans is essential to preserve the rights of any of the parts of the relation, a positive impact is expected in feelings of those individuals involved in the relation.

Generally, ethical leadership research has conceived this phenomenon to entail a series of traits such as integrity, honesty, altruism, fair, trustworthiness, caring, and principled (Brown & Treviño, 2006), all of them very linked to a behavioural style that when practiced means to be necessarily respecting others in their dignity as human beings. For example, insofar that, integrity, defined as one personal characteristic entailing to act in accordance with what one thinks, says and does, is habitually practiced, basis for practicing habitually a respectful behaviour and attitude preserving human dignity of others is established. Given that according to a Kantian philosophical work (1724-1804) dignity is considered the apex of all norms and values in human life (Eberle, 2012), assuring and preserving the dignity in every human relationship could become a valuable commodity for the organization, by attaining the best job response of employees. Thus, whereas some voices note that assuring human rights is mandatory in the business sphere (Muchlinski, 2012), others affirm that by doing that, and by preserving human dignity of workers, harmonious human relationships in organizations are successfully attained (Rucci, 2008). Also, recent findings reveal important improvements in employee positive job outcomes when companies adopt human rights related social responsibility policies (Kimeli & Chemgetich, 2014). However, there is still limited research focused on assessing the role and positive effects on human relationships management of preserving this specific essential aspect within the organization. Also, lesser is the research focused on analysing what happens in employee job response when human dignity is infringed in organizational contexts oriented per se to favour high levels of job satisfaction and motivation. For example, whereas highly motivating jobs are predicted to attain high levels of satisfaction with the personal growth experienced and with the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), any infringement of human dignity perceived could turn these positive effects around, making them come to be either null or seriously minored.

In order to understand and justify the above mentioned hypotheses, the authors base their arguments on the Kantian conception of human dignity (Sensen, 2011). Thus, it is conceived as an inherent element of human condition that must be respected and not infringed at all (Sensen, 2011). Otherwise, it is less probable they have
chances to act in accordance with the needed behavior to attain self-esteem and self-worth. If they are perceiving and observing behaviors in their supervisors that are disrespectful of human dignity, they will have more difficulties to behave in a manner leading to attain self-esteem and self-worth because of earning their particular eudaimonic good life. Virtue is needed for employees to become fully human (Plato, 2004; Aristotle, 2009), and fulfill their particular end in life, the eudaimonic good life (Aristotle, 2009). Thereof, under social circumstances where human dignity is infringed, the damaged individuals are probably expected to have less self-esteem and self-worth, having an adverse impact on earning human dignity. Based then on an Aristotelian line of thinking, the level of happiness of employees is expected to be reduced (Ciulla, 2004), and as a result, their positive job response might be also reduced. They would likely perceive themselves to be performing jobs that limit their interests in meeting expectations of personal growth, even when their jobs, technically, are highly motivating. Thus, the positive impact of employees experiencing such highly motivating jobs on their personal growth satisfaction is expected to be reduced in presence of supervisors who disrespect them, which in turn is expected to impact directly on reduced levels of their general job satisfaction perceptions.

Since no previous empirical research has been conducted to verify that hypotheses, and particularly by analyzing the role of supervisors disrespectfulness of human dignity of others, this paper tries to fill this void. Thus, the paper will present an exploratory statistical research on a sample of 151 Spanish employees working for a variety of industry sectors. Specifically, by utilizing structural equations modelling (Partial Least Squares), supervisor’s disrespect of human dignity is found to have a negative direct effect on employees’ personal growth satisfaction. Also, the perception of experiencing the presence of such type of unethical supervisors was found to moderate the positive impact of high motivating jobs on personal growth satisfaction, such that this effect was importantly minoried. As a result, general satisfaction with the job occupied was observed to be directly minoried. The study, thus, showed that human dignity needs to be preserved in human relationships within the organization. Specifically, preserving human dignity should be practiced by those people in charge of supervisory jobs. Otherwise, harmonious human relationships leading to human and organizational excellent performance could be disrupted as satisfaction levels with personal growth achieved with the job would be reduced. Discussion of such findings and managerial implications about the importance of not infringing human dignity in the treatment that supervisors exercise on their collaborators are finally derived.

References