

Measuring Respect for Human Dignity in the Workplace

GUIDANCE ON USING THE HUMAN DIGNITY INDEX

WHY MEASURE RESPECT FOR DIGNITY IN THE WORKPLACE?

Promoting dignity in the workplace enhances employees' well-being and helps organizations to thrive. When employers and supervisors respect employees' inherent value as individuals, their job satisfaction, morale and engagement can improve. In addition to benefiting employees, workplace dignity can also lead to greater retention, motivation and productivity among employees, benefiting employers. Respecting employees' dignity is an important outcome in and of itself. It can also help create an organizational culture and environment for upholding the dignity of an organization's clients, patients, participants and partners.

Like many humanitarian and development organizations, dignity is central to the mission and values of Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Human dignity plays a critical role in the agency's strategy and its approach to development programming, Integral Human Development. It also stands at the center of CRS' effort to promote respect, equity, diversity and inclusion among its teams and employees (Figure 1). CRS developed the Human Dignity Index (HDI) to measure the degree to which the agency upholds the human dignity of its staff. The HDI enables organizations to



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understand, track and improve the extent to which human dignity is respected in the workplace.

WHAT DOES THE HUMAN DIGNITY INDEX MEASURE?

Based on its guiding principles, CRS defines human dignity as *the inherent value that every individual possesses equally by virtue of being human, independent of one's abilities, characteristics, or actions*. Since human dignity is inherent in every person, the HDI does not measure human dignity. Rather, it measures the extent to which employees' human dignity is respected in the workplace. We define respect for human dignity as *the acknowledgement by other individuals, institutions, and society of the inherent value individuals possess by virtue of being human*.

WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF THE HUMAN DIGNITY INDEX?

The HDI is comprised of 14 measurement items (Box 1). Ten items measure organizational respect for dignity and four items measure supervisor respect for dignity. Where CRS is mentioned in the items below, it can be replaced by the name of the organization using the index. Respondents use a 6-point Likert scale to express the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, and Strongly Agree.



Figure 1: Respect, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion at CRS

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPECT FOR DIGNITY

- 1 At CRS, I am treated in a way that respects my dignity.
- 2 My working conditions at CRS support my dignity.
- 3 Senior leaders are listening to the voices of staff.
- 4 If I was treated unfairly in the workplace, I am confident that the organization would take appropriate action.
- 5 CRS strives to include and fully use the talents and capabilities of all employees.
- 6 CRS promotes people with the skills, knowledge, and values needed to achieve agency goals.
- 7 I can report an instance of unethical conduct without fear of retribution.
- 8 We have a work environment that is accepting of diverse backgrounds.
- 9 CRS strongly supports the learning and development of its employees.
- 10 I see trust and mutual respect in our workplace.

SUPERVISOR RESPECT FOR DIGNITY

- 11 My supervisor recognizes my efforts and results.
- 12 My supervisor treats people fairly and with respect.
- 13 My supervisor cares about me as a person.
- 14 My supervisor and I have conversations that help me to develop and grow professionally.

Box 1: Measurement items in the Human Dignity Index

HOW WAS THE HUMAN DIGNITY INDEX DEVELOPED?

CRS carried out the following steps to develop the HDI:

- CRS established internal and external advisory groups to support the development of what would become the HDI.
- CRS carried out a review of the literature on existing measures focused on dignity in the workplace.
- Based on the review, CRS identified domains and survey questions from existing tools that align with the concept of human dignity defined above.
- The survey questions from the literature were mapped against the items measured in CRS' agency-wide staff engagement survey. Thirteen measurement items from the staff engagement survey were selected for further testing.
- Using data from the 2021 staff engagement survey, CRS tested the statistical reliability and construct validity of the original 13 items using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis.

¹ Staff engagement is comprised of six items, all of which are distinct from the items in the HDI. These six items measure how respondents talk about CRS to others ("say"), respondents' commitment to stay with CRS ("stay") and the effort respondents put into their work ("strive").

- Based on results of this analysis, 11 of the original items were kept and 4 new items were added to capture domains and aspects of human dignity not reflected in the original items.
- These 15 items were included in the 2022 staff engagement check-in survey, and analysis of the results led to the current 14-item HDI.
- The final 14-item HDI was included in the 2023 staff engagement survey.

WHAT ARE THE KEY FINDINGS FROM THE VALIDATION OF THE HDI?

Analysis of the 2021 and 2022 CRS all-staff engagement survey data (N= 5,788 and N=4,752 respectively) resulted in a final 14-item measure: 11 items from the original engagement survey and 3 new items. The exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses identified two factors or domains of the index: organizational respect for human dignity (10 items) and supervisor respect for human dignity (4 items). The measure had strong internal reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.92.

As part of the validation, CRS tested the association between HDI scores and staff engagement¹, which is a key outcome of the CRS staff engagement survey. The analysis found that after controlling for other characteristics, respondents with higher average HDI scores (from 1-6) were significantly more likely to have moderate or high staff engagement. This finding was confirmed when the final index was used in the 2023 staff engagement survey (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Average HDI score and probability of moderate or high staff engagement (2023) N=6,423

CRS also tested the association between HDI scores and the specific engagement items that reflect employees' intent to stay at the organization. Multivariate logistic regression found that the probability of higher levels of staff intention to stay also increased as HDI scores grew. These findings suggest the important role respect for human dignity plays in staff engagement and retention.

HOW ARE HDI SCORES CALCULATED?

Scoring for the HDI is summative. Likert scale numeric codes represent the score for each item (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Slightly Disagree = 3, Slightly Agree = 4, Agree = 5, and Strongly Agree = 6). These scores are added to yield a total score for each respondent. An average score for each respondent can be calculated for the complete HDI by dividing the respondent's total score by the number of items (14).

Average scores that are 5 or above are in the High category, scores that are between 4 and 5 are in the Moderate category, and scores that are under 4 are in the Low category. The cutoffs for these categories are based on the analysis described above between HDI scores and staff engagement. If 57% of a team have high HDI scores, that means that 57% of respondents had an average score of 5 or above on the 14 items.

Scores can also be calculated separately for the organizational and supervisor respect for dignity domains using a process like the one described above. To calculate the average score for the organizational domain, the responses for those ten items are summed and the total is divided by 10. To calculate the average score for the supervisor domain, the responses of those four items are summed and then divided by 4. As with the overall HDI, average scores will range from 1 to 6.

In cases where data are not captured for one or more items, one of two techniques can be adopted: 1) drop the individual respondent from the analysis or 2) calculate the average score of the other response items for that respondent to impute the missing value. The first approach is preferred unless there is a high number of missing values, which would require dropping many individuals from the analysis.

HOW CAN TEAMS INTERPRET AND USE THE HDI?

The Human Dignity Index is designed to be integrated into anonymous staff surveys to provide insight into colleagues' experience of respect for human dignity in the workplace. It can also be conducted as a short, stand-alone process – still maintaining anonymity of respondents – to collect data specifically on respect for dignity within a team or organization.

Leaders and teams can use HDI results to understand the extent to which dignity is being respected in their workplace and to identify steps to address gaps and improve respect for dignity.

Low, moderate and high scores. The proportions of employees who have high, moderate and low HDI scores give an overall picture of the state of respect for dignity in the team. Figure 3 summarizes how to interpret low, moderate and high HDI scores. By looking at average scores for specific groups of employees (e.g., by gender, type of position, tenure or office location)², one can understand differences across groups and identify which groups of employees may require specific interventions to address gaps in respect for dignity.

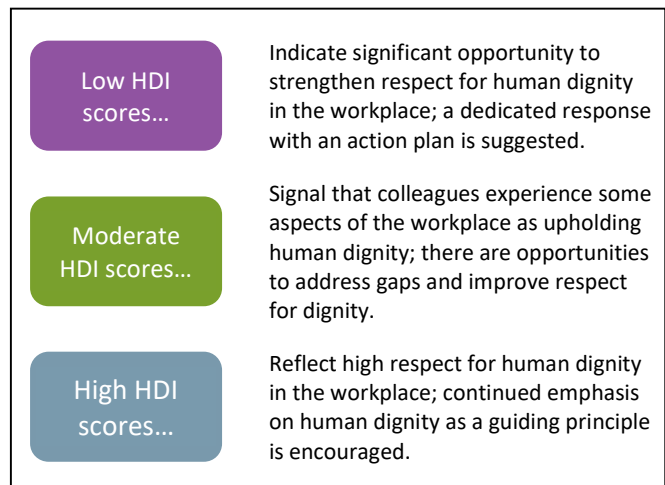


Figure 3: Interpretations and responses for HDI scores

Organizational and supervisor respect for dignity. In addition to overall scores, the organizational respect for dignity and supervisor respect for dignity results (using the method described above to calculate separate scores) can help guide teams and leaders as to which areas require more attention. For instance, in the CRS 2023 staff survey, certain employee groups had lower scores for organizational respect for dignity and others had lower scores for supervisor respect for dignity, which helped teams prioritize efforts accordingly.

Results from specific items. Beyond the HDI scores and the organizational and supervisor scores, results for individual measurement items from the index can also inform teams about specific areas of relative strength and weakness. For example, if the average response for *I can report an instance of unethical conduct without fear of retribution* is low, this indicates a need to address confidentiality and protection in fraud and safeguarding reporting.

² It is recommended that the survey be anonymous, but staff surveys often include information about respondents such as gender, tenure, location, etc.

Tracking changes. By measuring the HDI multiple times over time, teams can observe changes in respect for dignity and assess the extent to which efforts to improve respect for dignity have been effective. They can also identify decreases in HDI that need to be addressed. CRS includes the HDI in its all-staff engagement survey carried out every two years. If a team is interested in gauging progress more frequently or if a team faces a situation in which assessing respect for dignity would be helpful, it can use the HDI at other times.

Improving respect for dignity. Leaders and teams can take a range of approaches to strengthen respect for dignity following use of the HDI. Teams may hold workshops to review overall scores (maintaining anonymity) and jointly identify areas of strength and areas they want to work on improving. Discussion of HDI results can offer opportunities to share concerns and ideas to improve specific norms, processes and systems in the workplace that affect respect for dignity. Exercises using workplace scenarios, role plays, group discussions and brainstorming can help to generate ideas and inputs from team members. In some cases, facilitation by someone outside the team may enable greater and more balanced participation. Triangulating HDI scores with other information, such as gender audits or feedback mechanisms, can help to enrich understanding of results and point to areas requiring attention.

Action planning. Building on the ideas and understanding that emerge from these workshops and activities, leaders and teams

can plan concrete actions and initiatives to address identified priorities. Some actions may be based on low responses to specific questions in the HDI (e.g., steps to improve specific working conditions in response to low scores on *My working conditions support my dignity*). Other actions may be more general or based on ideas that emerge from workshops and discussion. As part of action planning, follow-up sessions can be scheduled to review progress, identify additional steps needed and possibly apply the HDI again to assess changes in respect for dignity among the team.



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