

ORGANIZATIONAL DIGNITY THEORY: A PROPOSAL

MARIA LUISA MENDES TEIXEIRA
UNIVERSIDADE PRESBITERIANA MACKENZIE (MACKENZIE)
malluluisa@gmail.com

Introdução

Some could argue “What do we need the OD concept for? Aren’t Organizational Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility concepts strong enough to discuss the relationship between organizations and stakeholders?” Organizational Ethics has been translated as Corporate Social Responsibility (Davidson & Griffin, 2000). OD treats the consequences of the actions that are carried out by organizations for the dignity of their stakeholders that can only be evaluated by them.

Problema de Pesquisa e Objetivo

This work aims to present an Organizational Dignity (OD) theory. Dignity has been studied until today regarding the internal organizational environment. Nonetheless, all of the stakeholders can be affected by the organizations and they are able to evaluate them and act toward them. The main question that drove the construction of OD theory was “what do stakeholders analyze when they evaluate the consequences of the actions that are carried out by organizations for their dignity?”

Fundamentação Teórica

Considering the different dignity aspects, OD is the dignity of an organization which is reflected in their values and practices and it is more or less oriented for stakeholder’s interests, justified by deontological or teleological ethics and this ethics is evaluated in terms of moral, legal or pragmatic standards by the stakeholders that exert direct or indirect influence on it. This concept has four facets: cultural elements, focus on these elements, ethical justification and standards of OD

Metodologia

The OD theory was developed based on Facet Theory. Facet Theory claims that the concept needs to come before measurement. It comprises a set of tools that support theory development: mapping sentences, facets and variables relationships structure. Regional hypotheses based on the item profiles were tested by reanalyzing a comprehensive data set of 407 employees. Ordinal and interval MDS analyses were applied to the correlation matrix.

Análise dos Resultados

Two of the four OD facets could be clearly identified. Cultural elements – Facet A – were clearly separated with values in the center and practices around in a modular space partitions. Facet C – Ethics was also perfectly delineated in the space. Facet B – Focus has been partially identified. Some items related to social focus were misplaced together with personal focus. In the Facet D – Standards of OD items of legal standards and items of pragmatic standards were perfectly placed.

Conclusão

The four facets proposed for OD construct were found. The main question that drove this work could be answered: Stakeholders evaluate the consequences of the actions that are carried out by organizations for their dignity in terms of cultural elements (practices supported by values); ethics orientation (deontological or teleological); focus (more oriented for personal or social focus (stakeholders focus), and classifying the OD of an organization from high to low, as moral, legal or pragmatic

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ORGANIZATIONAL DIGNITY THEORY: A PROPOSAL

1. Introduction

This work aims to present an Organizational Dignity (OD) theory. Dignity has been studied until today regarding the work and the workers at the internal organizational environment. Other stakeholders, like clients or suppliers, have not been taken into account by scholars in the dignity studies. Nonetheless, all of the stakeholders can be affected by the organizations and they are able to evaluate them and act toward them.

Some could argue “What do we need the OD concept for? Hasn’t the relationship between organizations and their stakeholders been sufficiently discussed under the concept of organizational ethics and corporate social responsibility? Aren’t those concepts strong enough to discuss that relationship?” Ethics refers to the reasons of the intentionality of actions (Abgnamo, 1998). Organizational Ethics has been translated as Corporate Social Responsibility (Davidson & Griffin, 2000) and Corporate Social Responsibility has been conceived as a way to achieve better performance, or the counterpart of economic power that organizations exert over society, either as an important issue that business operations need to consider due to their legitimacy, or the morality of acting toward society (Okoye, 2009). OD doesn’t discuss the consequences of organizational actions for economic performance, or the intentions of their actions. OD treats the consequences of the actions that are carried by organizations for the dignity of their stakeholders that can only be evaluated by them.

The main question that drove the construction of OD theory was “what do stakeholders analyze when they evaluate the consequences of the actions that are carried out by organizations for their dignity?”

The OD theory was developed based on Facet Theory. Facet Theory claims that the concept needs to come before measurement. The concept needs to be defined in substantive terms in order to make clear what will, in fact, be studied. Facet theory provides a framework for hypothesizing structural relationships among substantive variables defined to integrate the concept (Guttman & Greenbaum, 1998)

In this work, the concept of OD is proposed by regarding its different facets. The possibility of attributing dignity to organizations is discussed. The different aspects of the OD construct are presented in connection to other related constructs such as ethics and social responsibility. An empirical study shows the first results of testing the facets proposed.

The OD theory has two folds: one practical and the other theoretical. The practical, to contribute to organizations in order to learn how they are evaluated by their stakeholders in terms

of the consequences of their actions for their dignity. The theoretical, to propose another theory, which would be better specified than Organizational Ethics or Corporate Social Responsibility approaches.

2. Theoretical approach

Defining Organizational Dignity, Organizational Dignity: facets and concept, and why to develop the Organizational Dignity concept are the issues discussed in this topic.

2.1 Defining Organizational Dignity

The first question to be answered when defining OD is whether it is appropriate to attribute dignity to organizations. Organizational scholars rarely discuss what makes an organization a social actor, i.e., an entity that is capable of intentional purpose and action (King & Whetten, 2010). Because of this lack of discussion, the possibility of attributing OD to organizations needs to be justified.

Organization as a social actor

The main reason why the conception of the organization as a social actor has not been widely discussed is that an organization is usually conceived as a collection of individuals that interact with each other (organizing). For scholars who advocate this conception, (i.e. that ‘an organization acts’ means that the individuals are in fact the ones who perform a role. Other than this, the organization is an abstraction that makes no sense. For them, to attribute dignity to organizations means to attribute dignity to a collection of individuals who are social entities and act performing roles as social actors (King & Whetten, 2010). To argue that the organizations have dignity implies another conception of organization: organization as a social entity, as a social actor.

To conceive organizations as social actors implies that they are [social entities] perceived by stakeholders as capable of making decisions and of assuming the responsibility for their decisions and practices. Thus, the organizational social actor conception is characterized by (1) external attributions made by the stakeholders and (2) legal responsibility taken by the organizations for the impact of their actions (King & Whetten, 2010). Stakeholders are publics that are able to perceive the organizations’ decisions and actions, to evaluate whether they are affected by them, and to decide whether or not to try to modify them (Freeman, 1984). OD relates to the relationship between organizations and their stakeholders.

Organizational Dignity can be characterized as social dignity which is “generated in the interaction between and among individuals, groups or collectivities” that can be promoted or violated (Jacobson, 1999, p. 589) in the relationship between organizations and their stakeholders.

Stakeholders' influence on organizations

The relationships between organizations and their stakeholders have been studied during the last five decades. During this period scholars have devoted a lot of attention to discussing the concept. Furthermore, they have discussed how these relations should be (normative), have been (descriptive), and could be (instrumental) (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Hendry, 2001; Friedman & Miles, 2006). The importance of these discussions is underlined by the influence that organizations exert or can exert on stakeholders and *vice versa* (Fassin, 2009).

One of the most classic categorizations of stakeholders with respect to influence postulates two types: those that exert direct influence on organizations and whose relationships are contractual (primary), and those that exert indirect influence without contractual connections (secondary) (Clarkson, 1995; Collier & Roberts 2001; Carroll 1991).

The distinction of direct *versus* indirect stakeholders' influence is still intensively used in [stakeholders] research. In the last six years (2010-2015), the primary *versus* secondary [stakeholders] classification could be found at EBSCO database in 148 articles (almost 50% of the academic publications on stakeholders since 1983). The use of this classification seems to more common be increasing in the studies regarding the relationships between organizations and stakeholders.

Regarding the three concepts – stakeholder concept, indirect and direct influence and concept of an organization as a social actor –

Regarding stakeholders concept (Freeman, 1984), the indirect or direct influence stakeholders have on organizations (Clarkson, 1995), and the concept of organization as social actor (King & Whetten, 2010), it is possible to say that stakeholders are able to perceive and evaluate the OD of organizations and act toward them in a direct or indirect way.

2.2 . Organizational Dignity: facets and concept

Cultural elements and focus of Organizational Dignity

Organizational Dignity is embedded in the organizational practices and values. As the OD is social, according to the concept of social dignity proposed by Jacobson (1999), it results from the interactions between organizations and their stakeholders. Those interactions are mediated by organizational practices and organizational values perceived by stakeholders (Guardani, Teixeira, Bido & Mazzon, 2013). Therefore it is possible to say that OD is reflected in organizational values and practices perceived by stakeholders. Organizational practices are “‘theories in use’ which represent the typical behaviors/procedures adopted by members of an organization” (Verbeke, 2000, p. 589). Those practices reflect how organizations interact with the market and are shaped by the core organizational values (Verbeke, 2000). Practices and values are elements of organizational culture (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv & Sanders, 1990).

Organizational values guide organizational members' behavior and represent what an organization considers important for achieving its goals (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013). Values can emphasize either self-expression and the achievement of one's own interests and dominance over others (personal focus) or the concern for interests of the others and for regulation of collective behavior (social focus) (Schwartz, 2006). As the structure of values is the same for individuals and organizations (Bilsky & Jehn, 2008), organizations can be self-oriented by their organizational values prioritizing the achievement of self-interests or can be social-oriented regarding the stakeholder's interests.

Organizational Dignity can be understood as a specific kind of organizational culture that can be perceived by stakeholders when they interact with the organization and evaluate whether the organization is more oriented to its own interests or more oriented to stakeholders' interests.

Ethical orientation

Because organizations are conceived as social actors (King & Whetten, 2010), intentions are embedded in organizational practices shaped by core organizational values. Ethics is related to the intentions that underlie human conduct (Abganamo, 1998) and ethics and business can't be treated as separate subjects (Allinson, 1998). Ethics is related to moral principles that guide organizations in relationships with stakeholders (Chakrabarty & Bass, 2015). There are several approaches to studying ethics; however the most common in business ethics are deontological and utilitarian ethics. Deontological ethics prescribes what is right or wrong in absolute terms while for utilitarian ethics or consequentialism (teleological ethics) the actions' consequences are what matters (Allinson, 1998). Thus, it means that organizations can have their values and practices oriented by deontological or utilitarian ethics. In this sense, ethics is embedded in OD.

Standards of Dignity

Spiegelber (1970) classified dignity in two categories: "dignity in general" and "human dignity". Based on this classification, Tadd, Vanlaere and Gastmans (2010) further classified dignity in four types: "dignity in general" comprises of three dignity types: merit, moral status and identity. The fourth one, the "human dignity", *Menschenwuerde*, is the only one that cannot be evaluated or alienated from human beings because it means the worth of every human being.

Tadd, Vanlaere & Gastmans (2010) identified four types of dignity which were classified following Spiegelber (1970) classification in two categories of dignity: "dignity in **general**" and "**human** dignity". The first one comprises three dignity types: **merit**, **moral status** and **identity**. The second one, *Menschenwuerde*, the only one that can't be evaluated or alienated from the human beings, because it means the worth of every human being has.

The Dignity of Merit is related to social status or position in society that can be gained or lost. This kind of dignity can be reached by social heritage e.g when a person is born, receives a title of a social position or strives for it. This kind of dignity has its roots in the Roman Empire and it was related to the position of senators (Abagnamo, 1991). Other authors named this kind of dignity "distinction" inside society (Gosdal, 2007, Jacobson, 2009). The Dignity of Moral

Status corresponds to moral autonomy guided by moral principles, which can be preserved by people or not. The Dignity of Identity is related to self-respect and identity. This type of dignity can be violated emotionally, psychologically or physically (Tadd, Vanlaere & Gastmans, 2010) or promoted in encounters between individuals or collectivities (Jacobson, 2009). This type of dignity comprises moral and legal aspects. The moral aspect means that people mustn't be violated emotionally, psychologically or physically. The legal aspect means that peoples legal rights mustn't be violated.

After the Second World War, dignity based on the defense of human rights has gained space in social and legal spheres (Sarlet, 2009). Since moral dignity cannot be considered separately as one specific type of dignity (for it is also related to the dignity of Identity) we suggest the redefinition of the three types proposed by Tadd, Vanlaere & Gastmans (2010) into: distinction, moral and legal dignity. With respect to OD we labeled distinction dignity as pragmatic dignity. Persons can have social, economic and political status; however organizations can only have economic status and this cannot be achieved by heritage but only by strategic plans and actions.

Organizational Dignity Concept

Considering the different dignity aspects, we propose that OD is the dignity of an organization which is reflected in their values and practices and it is more or less oriented for stakeholder's interests, justified by deontological or teleological ethics and this ethics is evaluated in terms of moral, legal or pragmatic standards by the stakeholders that exert direct or indirect influence on it. This concept has four facets: cultural elements, the focus on these elements, ethical justification and standards of OD (Fig. 1).

Mapping Sentence for Assessing Organizational Dignity

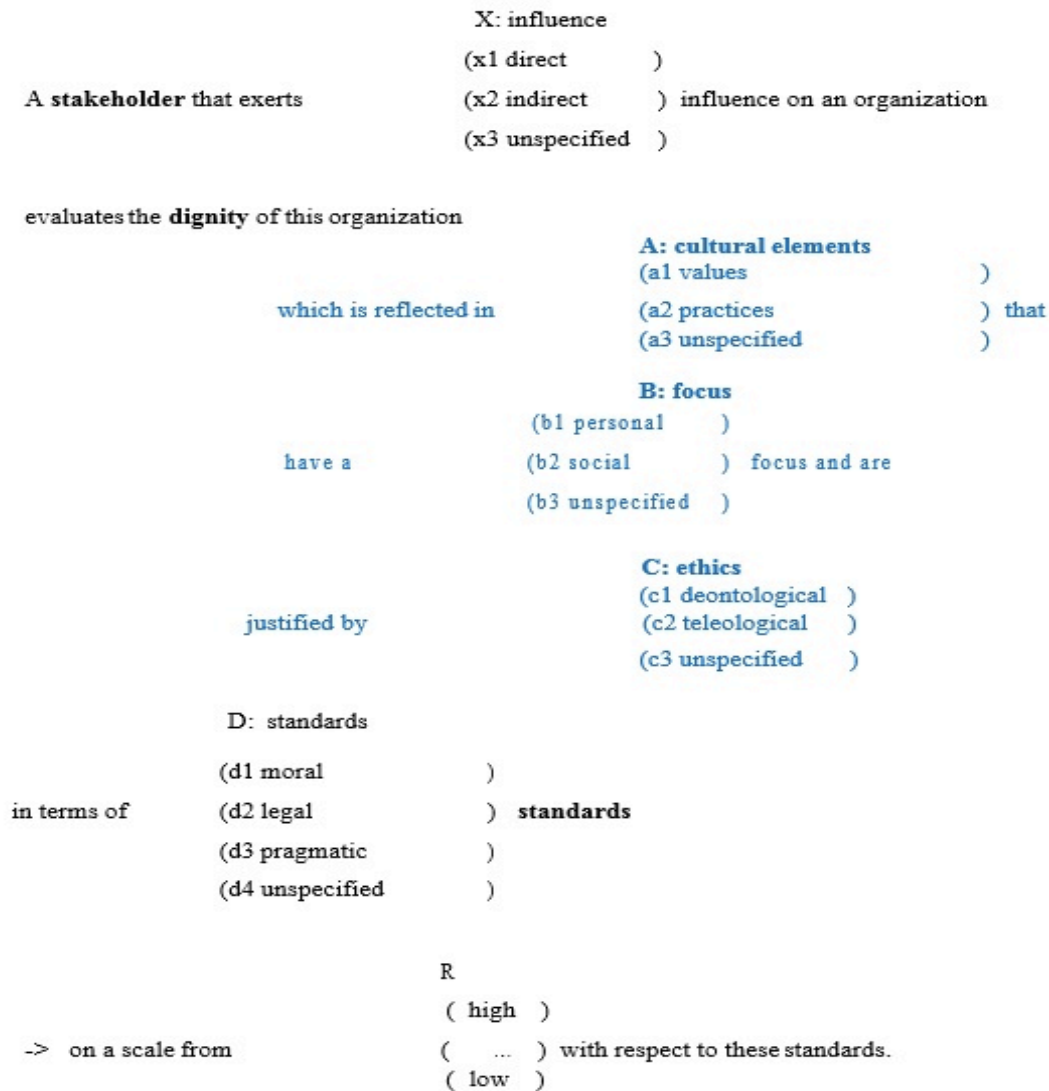


Figure 1 Mapping sentence for assessing OD

2.3 Why to develop the Organizational Dignity concept

The study of dignity associated with organizations is not new and has been improved in the last two decades. The focus of these studies has been the worker and the work environment inside organizations, regarding the worker dignity (Ross, 2013) and dignity at work (Hodson, 2004, Hodson & Roscino, 2004).

The OD concept was first used for organizations by Margolis (1997) who proposed this concept as the conditions offered by an organization in order to dignify employees. For Margolis (1997) dignity is the capacity of a person to shape his/her own actions and OD is the dignifying conditions that organizations offer to promote the workers' dignity. This concept has its roots in

Kantian approach to dignity. The dignifying conditions are autonomy, respect for workers' contributions and opportunity to learn and grow.

The first questions facing those approaches to dignity and organizations are: why study only the worker dignity? Why not the dignity of other stakeholders like clients, suppliers, government, society? Is it possible to attribute dignity to organizations? Who attributes and evaluates the dignity of organizations? What is the utility of this evaluation?

The importance of dignity practices for the competitiveness of organizations has been demonstrated at least since Hodson and Roscino (2004). Moreover, as the organizations practice dignity, they contribute to people's well-being (Mattson & Clark, 2011). We believe that developing a measurement instrument that enables stakeholders to access organizations may contribute to the improvement of their practices and act in an increasingly dignified manner, respecting the stakeholders as people.

Another issue that comes up when dealing with the importance of developing the concept of Organizational Dignity is related to the superposition of concepts such as ethics and social responsibility. As mentioned before ethics refers to the reasons of intentionality of actions (Abagmano, 1998), while dignity does not discuss neither the causes of intentions nor the intentions themselves. OD treats the consequences of actions for those who act and for the others (Jacobson, 1999). There is an interface between ethics and dignity, since ethics is one of the facets of dignity, but dignity is more than just ethics

Another superposition that could be evoked is related to OD and Corporate Social Responsibility. Corporate Social Responsibility in the business world has been conceived as Ethics exerted by organizations (Davidson & Griffin (2000). Despite more than 50 years of scientific research, the concept of social responsibility remains unclear. Four strands seem to bring together different approaches to Corporate Social Responsibility: a way to achieve better economic performance; responsibility towards society as counterpart of the economic power exerted over it; the importance of taking into account the social demands to the business operation due to their legitimacy; and the morality of acting before the society (Okoye, 2009).

The concept of OD distances itself from the first three strands by not taking into account any relation to the organizational performance, nor being the counterpart of the economic power of the organizations or meeting the different demands of society. The only social demand taken into account is the dignity of stakeholders as people that have to be respected when organizations interact with them by their practices. The concept of OD has a connection only with the latter strand of CSR, the morality before society, as one of the dignity's standards is moral dignity. It is important to notice that OD is not only moral dignity; it encompasses three different types of standards: moral, legal and pragmatic.

Another key question to be answered is whether it is possible or not to assign dignity to organizations. The answer was found in the concept of an organization as a social actor according to King & Whetten (2010).

To summarize, one can say that concept of OD should not be confused with the concepts of ethics or social responsibility, although it could have some affinity to them.

3. Method

Facet theory was first defined by Guttman in 1954 as “an outline of some new methodology for Social Research” (Guttman & Greenbaun, 1998, p.15). It comprises a set of tools that support theory development: mapping sentences, facets and variables relationships structure.

Mapping sentence is “a verbal statement of the domain and of the range of a mapping, including verbal connectives between facets as in ordinary language”(Shye, 1978, p.413). Mapping sentences consist of two parts: one part comprises the facets of the construct and the other the phrases that connect the facets (Shye, 1978). Three types of facets are necessary for one mapping sentence: respondents (population facet), stimuli (content facet), and responses (response facet). Mapping sentences help researchers to identify and explain at the same time the theoretical constructs and the types of observations that are necessary to test it (Guttman & Greenbaun, 1998).

In the OD theory, stakeholders that exert direct, indirect or unspecified influence on an organization represented the population facet. Content facets were represented by cultural elements, focus, ethics.. Response facet was represented by OD standards and a scale from high to low with respect to those standards.

Facet is a category of attributes that represent an aspect of the construct under research. The facets that explain the construct must be mutually exclusive. Facets represent conceptual unmatched elements of the construct. It is possible to attribute one and only one element of each facet to each variable) (Billky, 2003).

In social sciences, there are several methods to identify variables relationships structure. Facet Theory uses Smallest Space Analysis that is a non-metric method for multidimensional scaling analysis (MDS). Applying MDS to the data, a regional space is specified by a set of variables that represent an element of one facet (Bilsky, 2003). In this work MDS was applied to content facets and response facet in terms of OD standards.

The design of space regions corresponds to the variables relationship structure. Facets could be ordered or qualitative. An ordered facet is that which groups of elements are organized in a progressive way either in modular space partitions (circles) or axial organized side by side. It is possible to predict a hierarchal correlação between variable correlation pairs. The elements of qualitative facets are organized in cuneiform regions, which have a common origin in a circumplex design with no order between. The elements of a qualitative facet are disposal in angular regions so that elements that are in adjacent regions are more similar than in the others. (Bilsky, 2003)

To develop and test OD theory, a mapping sentence served as a frame of reference for categorizing the items of a provisional OD-Questionnaire. Those items were selected from a qualitative research about what dignity means for Brazilian employees (Teixeira, Dias, Araujo, Paz & Oliveira, 2010) and were classified by four specialists in each element of each facet. Item profiles (structuples) resulting from that independent categorizations were the basis for

composing a faceted 47-item OD-Questionnaire. Regional hypotheses based on the item profiles were tested by reanalyzing a comprehensive data set of 407 employees. Ordinal and interval MDS analyses were applied to the correlation matrix of OD items.

3. Results

Two of the four OD facets could be clearly identified in two-dimensional MDS plots. Cultural elements – Facet A – were clearly separated with values in the center (1) and practices around (2) in a modular space partitions (Fig. 2). Facet C – Ethics was also perfectly delineated in the space: Deontological (1) and Teleological (2) divided the space in two opposite diagonal parts (Fig. 3). Facet B – Focus has been partially identified. Some items related to social focus (2) were misplaced in the center together with personal focus (1) and one personal focus item was misplaced in the space of social focus (Fig. 4) Facet D – Standards of OD was not perfectly identified. Some items of moral standard (1) appeared deviated from its region, as legal standard (2) and pragmatic (3). However, items of legal standards and items of pragmatic standards were perfectly placed (Fig. 5)

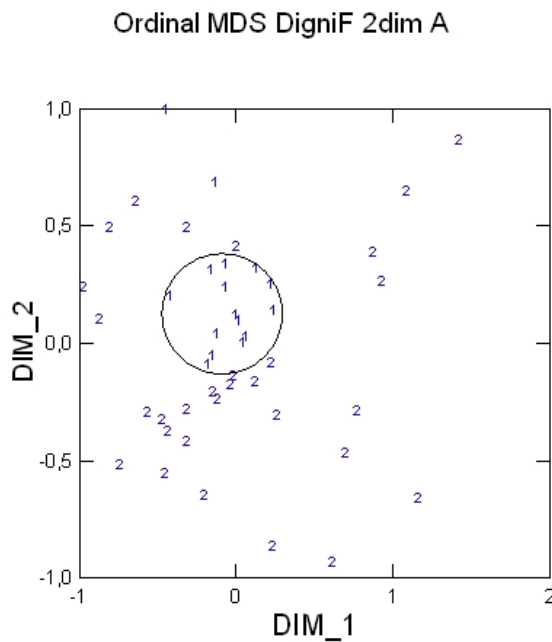


Figure 2 Facet A – Cultural elements

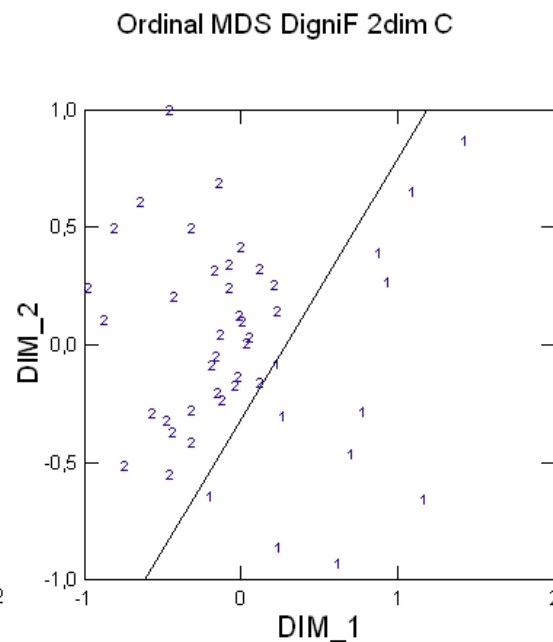


Figure 3 Facet C - Ethics

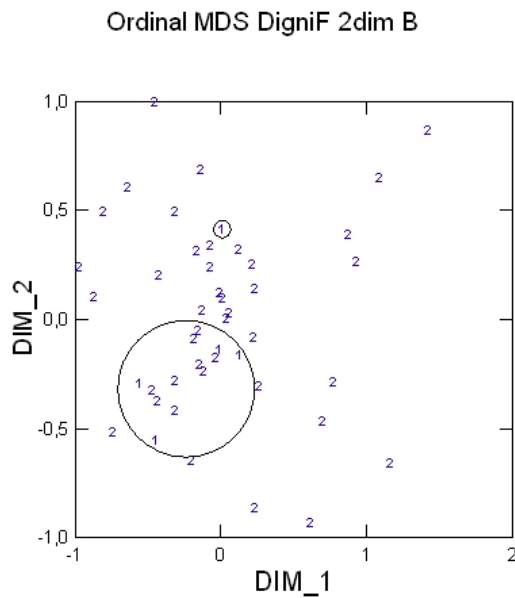


Figure 4 Facet B – Focus

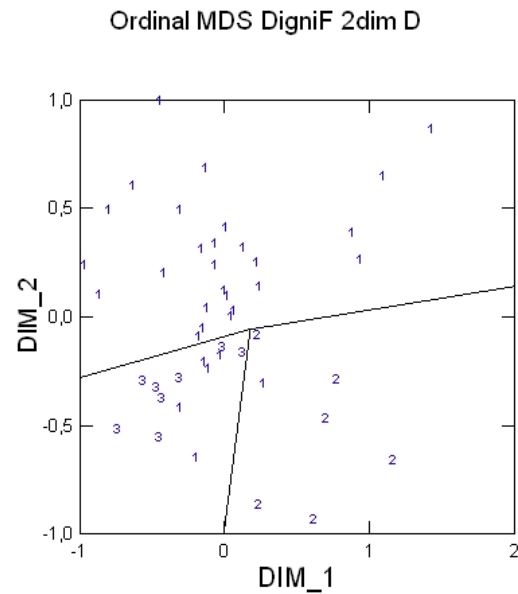


Figure 5 Facet D – Standards of OD

5. Discussion

The results indicated that the facet Cultural Elements was perfectly identified in modular space partitioning, with values in the center and practices around, what makes sense, as are values that support practices. Values are in the culture center (Hofstede, 2001).

Deontological ethics and teleological ethics divided the space in diagonal, what means that these elements of ethics facet are opposite. This result is in line with Allinson (1998): Deontological ethics prescribes what is right or wrong while from the teleological ethics the consequences of actions are what matters in a process decision.

Focus facet was not perfectly identified. Nevertheless two important results can be observed in the space partition: first, the design – modular; second, personal focus appeared in the center. This result means organizations prioritize the personal focus followed the social focus (Stakeholders focus). One possible reason for deviations found could be the items classification as it was done by four researchers.

OD Standards Facet was not perfectly identified either. In spite of, two important results were found for OD Theory development: legal standard and pragmatic standard were perfectly located in the space. Only a few moral standards items appeared misplaced mainly in the legal standard space. One reason could be a superposition of meaning: legal standard OD items that can be understood as moral standard items.

In spite of two partially identified facets, the results indicated that all four content facets proposed as facets of OD were found with the previewed elements.

6. Conclusion

This work aimed to present an Organizational Dignity (OD) theory. To accomplish that task a Facet Theory was used. Six OD facets were proposed: stakeholders (population facet); cultural elements, ethics, focus, (content facets); OD standards and measurement scale (response facet). In this work, the content facets and OD standard response facets were tested with 407 employees of several organizations.

The four facets proposed for OD construct were found. Then it is possible to answer the main question that drove this work: Stakeholders evaluate the consequences of the actions that are carried out by organizations for their dignity in terms of cultural elements (practices supported by values); ethics orientation (deontological or teleological); focus (more oriented for personal or social focus (stakeholders focus), and classifying the OD of an organization from high to low, as moral, legal or pragmatic.

One of the limits of this work was the number of researchers who did the items classification. In order to improve the OD scale, new researches are necessary. The classification of items regarding focus facet and OD standards facet need to be revised. One suggestion is to apply Delphi Technique with a group of at least twelve people. Another step can be to refine the item pool in order to have a number of items that could better represent the facets. OD theory needs to be tested with other stakeholders: clients, suppliers, and society in general.

OD theory allowed developing a scale that reflects the theory and all improves that will be necessary for a better measurement can be done under a theoretical umbrella. Facet Theory approach brought out not only OD facets but the variables relationship structure.

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