

Quality in human treatment: A five-level framework

IESE's Domènec Melé proposes a framework for organizations to analyze their "human quality treatment" according to five dimensions.

July 1, 2014

Treating workers poorly, as in the case of sweatshops, is considered "inhuman." What treatment might we call the opposite: "human"?

Writing in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, IESE's [Domènec Melé](#) presents a framework for "human quality treatment" (HQT) based on a recognition and respect for our shared human characteristics as well as our uniqueness.

He ranks the quality of treatment in an organization according to five levels:

1. Maltreatment
2. Indifference
3. Justice
4. Care
5. Development

Managers can use this framework to reflect on how to improve their leadership and humanize their businesses.

Treating people well: An end, not just a means

Melé builds on the fundamental idea that ethics is an intrinsic aspect of good management, not merely an add-on.

In addition to treating people with dignity and respect, Melé believes that ethical management should look to Aristotle's concept of "eudaimonia," which roughly translates as "human flourishing" or "human development."

"It is like an interior call to be a better person and, primarily, not to degrade one's condition as a human being," Melé writes.

While some theories of management suggest that people should be treated well because this will boost economic performance, HQT incorporates the idea that striving to succeed as a human being is valuable per se, although more than likely this could lead to better performance. The author suggests that the notion of HQT and the five-level framework open horizons to further research on the outcomes of HQT.

Five levels of HQT

For each of the five levels of HQT, Melé elaborates on its features and the behavior that should characterize people management and interactions.

1. *Maltreatment* includes exploitation, harassment, coercion, bullying, manipulation, unfair discrimination and corruption. This is ethically unacceptable.

2. *Indifference* is marked by not caring how decisions affect people and seeing people exclusively as means to an economic end. This is also ethically unacceptable.

3. *Justice* is characterized by transparency, fair remuneration, keeping one's word and protecting rights, with employees acting in good faith. This meets the minimal ethical requirements for HQT.

4. *Care* goes beyond minimal ethical requirements by also showing concern for coworkers' legitimate interests and supporting them to resolve problems. Care means helping people with their health, family or relationship issues, for example. It is not sentimentalism, but a real concern about people's rights and dignity.

5. *Development* goes beyond justice and care because it also enables people to flourish, fostering the acquisition of professional competencies. Managers are aware of people's talents and try to maximize them, creating a "virtuous circle of human flourishing, mutual esteem and a willingness to serve and cooperate," in the words of the author.

Managers should aim for Level 5, acting as role models to encourage a corporate culture

where development becomes the norm. Just as corrupt actions can create corrupt cultures, actions that promote flourishing can create environments where people flourish.

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