SEPTEMBER 2026

Dignity at work in the age of AI

Rethinking work, meaning and human flourishing

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OP-639-E
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Diseño: IESE Business School: www.iese.edu

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Foreword

It is our pleasure to present this report, which gathers and elucidates the main insights that emerged during the Dignity at Work conference, held at IESE Business School on March 19 and 20, 2026. The conference was conceived as a space for interdisciplinary reflection on how work may remain worthy of the human person in a context marked by the acceleration of time, institutional change, social fragmentation, and technological transformation.

Throughout the two days, we asked what a workplace that respects the ontological dignity of the human person would look like, and we explored work as a place where people encounter one another and develop cognitive, affective, and operational habits. The reflections collected here invite us to consider how organizations can design and lead work in ways that foster developmental and relational dignity.

We are deeply grateful to all the speakers, participants, and contributors whose ideas, experiences, and generosity made this conversation possible. Because the conference unfolded as a genuine dialogue, this report often presents insights in integrated form rather than attributing each idea to a single speaker.

We also wish to acknowledge Maria Puig Nart, executive director of the IESE Dignity, Diversity and Belonging Office, for the initiative and the organization of the conference, and to recognize the support and commitment of the Business Leadership and the Future of Work Chair- Joaquim Molins Figueras Foundation.

We hope this report will serve as an invitation to further reflection and action.

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Executive summary

Every person possesses dignity unconditionally simply by virtue of being human. Work does not confer that dignity but is one of the principal arenas in which dignity is honored or obscured, and in which its developmental and relational dimensions are strengthened or diminished. The conference set out to ask how contemporary and future forms of work can sustain this development, shaping forms of work that cultivate judgment, recognition, contribution, and belonging rather than erode people's rationality, freedom and virtues.

As Mario Di Ciommo argued in the opening keynote, the dignity of work is inseparable from the wider moral and political order in which institutions operate. The fragmentation of the international order expressed in weakening multilateral institutions, the return of force as the grammar of international relations, the open contestation of postwar values such as human dignity and the rule of law, belongs to the same crisis as the erosion of dignified work. A civilization that sustains the dignity of work is more likely to sustain the dignity of its people. The future of work, in this sense, is even more of an anthropological question than an economic one because dimensions such as productivity, flexibility, technological adoption, and innovation will shape what work becomes, but a deeper test will lie in whether work enhances human dignity and serves the common good.

Across two days, the conversation moved through geopolitics, theological anthropology, public service, business leadership, care work, prison reintegration, classical accounts of the common good, and the challenges posed by artificial intelligence. A single conviction ran through all of it: work becomes dignified when it treats people not as mere producers of outputs but as free and responsible agents capable of judgment and of associating with others. Giulio Maspero offered the image that best framed this movement. Work may constitute a *limes*, a boundary delimiting stakes claimed, but it also may become a *limen*, a threshold opening onto desire, relation, creativity, and gift. In the end, the concepts and phenomena reviewed during the conference- most notably, vocation, practice, leisure, relational goods, care, reintegration, the common good, and AI- all turn on the same underlying question: under what conditions does work become worthy of the human person?

Five insights emerged

1 The first concerns the nature of dignity itself, which has three interconnected dimensions: ontological, developmental, and relational (developed in the Introduction below), of which work directly shapes the latter two. The remaining four insights in some way follow from this first one.

2 Work requires contemplation, and contemplation requires leisure. Work contributes to dignity when it makes room for deep attention, practical wisdom, and presence, and these in turn depend on leisure. The crisis of contemporary work is, in this sense, also a crisis of time and attention, as social acceleration erodes the decanting of judgment that dignified work requires.

3 Work is most human when lived as a human activity rather than the discharging of a set of functions. External goods such as efficiency, income, status, and measurable results do not express the nature of work. Rather, it is internal goods such as excellence, judgment, craft, attention, and practical wisdom that count as the worthiest results of work. In consequence, work is formative when it cultivates these internal goods, and deformative when the pursuit of external goods crowds out the worker's flourishing.

4 Dignity at work depends on a third kind of goods: relational ones, which exist in the relationship itself: identity-dependent, co-produced, fragile, and irreducible to contractual exchange. They require a logic of gift, that is, the willingness to seek the relationship as a good in itself rather than an instrument for performance or a means to achieve power. Ilaria Vigorelli's notion of a "relational dashboard" provides a perspective from which these goods may become visible without flattening them into conventional metrics. Difference and diversity belong here too because, approached relationally, they become generative, preserving difference without eroding it and allowing new shared realities to emerge between people.

5 The future of dignity at work will depend heavily on how institutions govern AI. Machines may, under some conditions and for certain tasks, calculate, classify, generate, and optimize better than humans, but they cannot desire, recognize, care, or enter into relationships as persons do. AI can promote dignified work by freeing people from routine tasks and enlarging their capacity for relations and contemplation; however, it can equally erode dignity through algorithmic control, surveillance, deskilling, automation bias, and the formal preservation of human responsibility once judgment has migrated to the machine. Hence, the decisive question is whether AI strengthens or hollows out human capability.

These insights sharpened when tested against concrete cases at the social margins. The discussion of reintegrating people leaving the prison system revealed inclusion both as a technical process and, more fundamentally, a relational achievement. The CIRE[1] model (training, employment, reintegration) demonstrated that reintegration requires trust extended before it has been fully earned by conventional indicators, sustained by an ecosystem of relationships strong enough to hold a fragile return to working life. Kirstie McAllum's research on care workers revealed the same structure from another angle: in care, dignity often appears in micro-gestures such as a pause, the use of a first name, the willingness to remain present once clinical duty has technically been fulfilled. Organizations depend on this surplus of generosity, but can also exploit it, consuming workers' goodwill without renewing the conditions that allow them to keep giving it. Both cases made the point that belonging cannot be manufactured because it is a relational phenomenon.

The broader institutional horizon for this relational vision was described in the discussions. Our panelists dispelled the common misunderstanding of this phenomenon as a shared goal, the sum of individual interests, or a public good in the economic sense. It is the order of social and institutional conditions that allows persons and communities to flourish, and it remains defined in reference to the human person. The image of the orchestra captured this precisely: rhythm, harmony, and melody belong to every musician yet are irreducible to any one of them and amount to more than the sum of the instruments. Through work, we participate in a shared human reality whose purpose both includes and transcends individual contributions.

In essence, the thread running through both days is this: dignity at work must be sustained by institutions that protect the human capacities it depends on: judgment, attention, trust, reciprocity, responsibility, contribution, and the possibility of giving what cannot be taken. Contracts, rights, structures, salaries, and protections remain indispensable; compliance constitutes a condition of justice but does not exhaust the fullness of dignity, which becomes manifest when the necessary boundary of exchange becomes a threshold of relation, when output becomes contribution, when function becomes practice, and when people are allowed to become more fully what they are called to be through what they do with and for one another. Here leadership is decisive, for it is the art of making contribution possible: power can secure compliance through control, or it can create the conditions under which people exercise judgment, take on responsibility, and discover that their work matters.

Both institutional and personal, the task ahead requires designing work that protects judgment rather than bypassing it, sustains internal and relational goods rather than consuming them, makes inclusion a pathway to belonging rather than a mere labor-market outcome, deploys AI to augment rather than erode human practice, and orients organizations toward common goods worthy of the people who serve them. A *limes* becomes *limen* when we honor the inherent relational character of work and design it so that it may foster human flourishing.

[1] Centre d'Iniciatives per a la Reinserció de la Generalitat de Catalunya (Generalitat of Catalonia's Reintegration Initiatives Center).

Introduction: Work as a primary site of human dignity

Organizations are among the places where a civilization either sustains or forgets what it claims to believe about the person. Yet the question is not confined to organizations. As Di Ciommo argued in the opening keynote, dignity at work belongs to a wider civilizational struggle over the meaning of human dignity, institutional trust, and the moral foundations of public life.

The conference did not produce a single doctrine. It staged a conversation among different vocabularies — philosophical, theological, sociological, managerial, political, experiential — each disclosing a different facet of the same question. Giulio Maspero's distinction between *limes* and *limen*, border and threshold, offered a framework that runs through the whole report. *Limes* names the boundary: necessity, finitude, contract, exchange, measurable output. *Limen* names the threshold: desire, creativity, giving, the possibility that work becomes something more than its formal specifications. The dignity of work depends, in large part, on whether the boundary can become a threshold.

The reflections that follow rest on three interconnected dimensions of dignity. Ontological dignity belongs to every person unconditionally, prior to function, role, achievement, or success; it can be neither granted nor revoked by an employer. Developmental dignity concerns the growth of the person through action, practice, and the formation of judgment. It is what working and social conditions, and one's own decisions, can either foster or diminish. Relational dignity concerns recognition, belonging, and the possibility of appearing to others as a person and worker. Work is one of the principal arenas where this last pair, developmental and relational dignity, are built up or worn down.

This report integrates the conference's contributions into a single framework for thinking about dignity at work. It does not claim to be a comprehensive study; its purpose is to anchor a conversation about what must be preserved and cultivated for work to remain valuable: a place where people develop as persons through recognition, personal and professional relationships, and contribution, rather than being used, over-measured, or replaced.

The report proceeds in seven movements: recovering the meaning of work as vocation; diagnosing its fracturing through acceleration, precarity, and the commodification of time; examining what makes work human through practice, attention, and excellence; considering work as a relational and institutional reality in which recognition and the goods between persons emerge; turning to belonging, participation, and the social stakes of inclusion; setting work within the common good and the place of gift; and addressing the transformation of work by AI, of which Human-AI cooperation is an emerging case. A concluding section translates the argument into an institutional agenda for sustaining dignity in the forms of work now emerging.

1. Reclaiming the meaning of work: From economic function to vocation

Understanding the transformation of work requires expanding the thin vocabulary that dominates public debate. Productivity, employability, flexibility, performance and disruption name real features of working life, but they do not tell us what work does to the person who performs it or to other parties affected by it. They do not tell us whether a worker is becoming more capable of judgment, more attentive to reality, more able to serve, more present to others, more fully responsible for a shared world. Vocation, craft, service, excellence, reciprocity, contribution, and responsibility, among others should come to the center of our language game.

The distinction between contract and vocation is central here. Contracts define obligations, protect rights, clarify responsibilities and guard against exploitation. A working world without contracts would expose persons to arbitrariness and abuse. Yet contracts do not sustain themselves. Durkheim sawthis clearly when he wrote that every contract rests on a non-contractual foundation, a prior fabric of trust, truthfulness and shared expectation without which the legal form would collapse[2]. A contract can specify what is owed. It cannot generate the care, loyalty, judgment or sense of purpose that make work more than an exchange.

Vocation names that surplus and provides the person with a quest, answering it and being changed by the answer. It draws a person beyond the capacities already possessed and calls forth powers that would have remained dormant in isolation. This is why the language of vocation belongs to nurses, doctors, teachers or public servants but also to the rest of us. Its possibility lies in every ethically ordered occupation in which the worker is entrusted with a mandate that matters.

The heroic structure helps clarify the point. A hero becomes a hero only after receiving a quest. The task comes from outside and addresses the person in their singularity. In working life, vocation begins when a person discovers the beneficial repercussion their work has on self and others. The person finds that their response matters. Purpose is invented in the Latin sense: it is both come across and developed based on a call.

Public service gives this structure a civic form. At its best, it is work ordered toward a common good. It asks the worker to act on behalf of a shared world: law, education, health, infrastructure, security, justice, civic trust. When public service is reduced to bureaucratic compliance or measurable output, its vocational core weakens. The worker may remain efficient, but the work loses the horizon that once made service intelligible as service.

To understand work as vocation is therefore to recover a demanding moral vocabulary that allows us to see the phenomena we name. The terms “craftsmanship,” “reciprocity,” “service,” “excellence,” “contribution” and “responsibility” constitute the conditions under which work forms the person rather than merely use their capacities.

Those conditions have become fragile. Vocation and practice require time, trust, continuity, attention and shared purpose. They require institutions capable of receiving more from persons than compliance and giving more in return than compensation. These are the conditions contemporary workplaces now consume most rapidly. The next question, then, is not simply how work has changed, but what has happened to the temporal and institutional soil in which meaningful work can still grow.

2. The fracturing of work: Acceleration, precarity, and loss of time

Modern work is increasingly organized by acceleration. Hartmut Rosa distinguishes three forms that reinforce one another: technological acceleration, which compresses the time required for production, communication and coordination; social acceleration, which renders institutions, identities and acquired competencies obsolete faster than they can be renewed; and the acceleration of the pace of life, which produces the subjective experience of permanent urgency. The paradox is severe: technologies designed to save time generate a chronic shortage thereof.[3]

[2] Émile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1984; original work published 1893).

[3] Hartmut Rosa, Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Hartmut Rosa, Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World, trans. James C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

This changes work from within. Treated chiefly as a resource for productivity, time tends to erode judgment. Though the worker may remain active and responsive, they may become less able to be present to the task or person that gives the activity its human weight. Activity replaces purpose. Motion replaces direction. Responsiveness replaces responsibility.

Under these conditions, work becomes less capable of producing what Rosa calls resonance: the experience of being touched, challenged and transformed by what one encounters. Resonance cannot be manufactured and requires time, receptivity and a relation to the world that withers under exhaustive control. Without it, work may remain efficient while becoming less formative. The person may adapt and performs, but the work no longer gives enough back for the person to flourish.

Acceleration is intensified by precarity. Precarity includes insecurity of employment or income, and it falls with particular severity on those already marked by economic insecurity, marginalization, migration, interrupted credentials, or social disadvantage. But it is also, and more deeply, the erosion of continuity, understood as the weakening of the temporal and institutional structures through which a person can understand work as part of their craft, biography, or community. If careers become sequences of projects, metrics, transitions and short-term obligations, a person may remain employable while losing the capacity to inhabit a practice. Under those conditions, persons may struggle to integrate work into a coherent life.

This gives flexibility its moral ambiguity. Flexible work can serve dignity when it allows people to care for others, recover agency over time or resist excessive control. It can also weaken dignity when it dissolves shared rhythms, thins informal relationships and converts autonomy into permanent availability. Work that can be done from anywhere can become work that follows the person everywhere. The boundary that once protected non-work becomes porous, and the individual is left to negotiate alone what institutions may no longer contain.

The commodification of time is the visible sign of this deeper shift. In an accelerated society, unproductive time appears wasted. Rest is tolerated when it restores performance. Leisure is justified when it increases creativity, health or resilience. Yet leisure is a condition for receptivity, not an instrument of productivity: an openness to reality, to contemplation, to beauty, to worship, to friendship, to play, and to the cultivation of forms of attention- including the arts- that are not governed by utility. Without such a surrounding world of non-work, work becomes total and the person's practical wisdom withers.

A totalizing conception of work may sharpen cunning while starving practical wisdom. Cunning consists of cleverness or technical skill, but practical wisdom is the ability to perceive what matters here and now, choosing fitting means toward a good end and acting accordingly. Practical wisdom forms through memory, comparison, hesitation, counsel, attention to particulars and the possibility of being corrected by reality. An accelerated organization may decide quickly and still judge poorly. When every process is compressed, every message urgent and every interval colonized, workers lose the temporal space in which agency matures, leading to both fatigue and, more importantly, the thinning of responsibility.

Recovering wholeness in work therefore requires a recovery of time, not in terms of nostalgia for the slower institutional change of the past, but in terms of protecting the rhythms without which work cannot remain human. We need to concentrate on the task at hand, be present to the person before us, be able to enjoy some modicum of continuity across a career, and feel as members of the diff a community.

Leisure is an anthropological necessity. Work requires a world beyond work in order not to consume the capacities on which it depends: judgment, presence, care, imagination and responsibility. When work becomes total, it destroys itself. The task is to restore the temporal and relational conditions under which work can become reflective practice, that is, contemplative.

3. What makes work human: Practice, attention, and the form of excellence

Work becomes human when it does more than produce external results. It must also form the person who performs it: developing capacities, deepening judgment, educating attention, and opening the worker to a reality that exceeds immediate utility.

Alasdair MacIntyre's distinction between external and internal goods is decisive.[4] External goods are rewards such as money, status, power, prestige or recognition. They may accompany a practice, but they are not proper to it; they can be pursued through many different activities. Internal goods are different. They are the forms of excellence, understanding and fulfillment that can be reached only by participating well in a particular practice and submitting oneself to its standards. External goods are what a practice may give to a person. Internal goods are what a practice forms in a person.[5]

This distinction clarifies the link between work and dignity. Work serves developmental dignity when it allows persons to acquire practice-specific skills and practical wisdom. It serves relational dignity when the excellence developed in the worker becomes a contribution to others. Work dignifies when it forms the worker and, through that formation, enables service.

The central question in every transformation of work is therefore whether the internal goods of the practice are strengthened or weakened. A job that leaves no room for judgment, attention or responsibility may still produce measurable output, but it ceases to form the person. A practice that demands discernment and allows the worker to serve others becomes a place where developmental and relational dignity can grow together.

At the center of every genuine practice lies attention. Simone Weil, in a manner that echoes Rosa's ideas on resonance, understood attention as a form of love: a disciplined receptivity to what is before us. Attention refuses to reduce reality immediately to our purposes. It receives before it acts. It allows the teacher to see the student, the physician to see the patient, the craftsperson to see the material, the leader to see the person behind the role. Attention is the beginning of the non-instrumental aspect of work.[6]

Sustained attention is one of the conditions under which practical wisdom can mature. As argued above, phronesis fails to develop in haste or abstraction. Rather, it grows through repeated contact with the realities of correction and failure. Work that bypasses judgment weakens agency. Work that requires judgment forms the person.

The conference also recovered the language of beauty, not so much in the sense of decoration or aesthetic refinement – which definitely have a place in work- in the sense of the form that appears when attention, skill, purpose and fitting action converge. We recognize it in a diagnosis that is accurate and humane, in a lesson that suddenly makes understanding possible, in a decision that is courageous and just, in a gesture of care whose rightness is visible before it is explained. Beauty is the perceptible sign that work has been done fittingly, not just adequately.

Again, this beauty will become manifest in any occupation carried out with excellence, right pace and good intention. It is one of the ways in which work crosses from function into meaning. A pediatrician who descends to the level of a sick child elevates medical assistance to a work of beauty. A craftsperson who gets something exactly right allows matter, skill and attention to converge. A leader who acts justly under pressure exercises authority as service rather than mere control.

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[4] This distinction can be read alongside Juan Antonio Pérez López's account of the effects of action: external results, learning within the agent, and effects on others. See Juan Antonio Pérez López, Fundamentos de la dirección de empresas (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 1993).

[5] Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

[6] Simone Weil, Waiting for God, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009; original work published 1951).

Joy follows from this experience of form. It is not excitement or vanity. It is the satisfaction of finding oneself adequate to a meaningful task. The silent pride of competence arises when a person participates in an excellence they did not invent but have learned to serve through discipline and attention. Such joy is modest, often hidden, and easily missed by systems that measure only output. Yet it is one of the clearest signs that work is still forming the person.

Work is not human merely because it is performed by human beings. It becomes human when it allows persons to inhabit a practice, attend to reality, develop judgment, pursue internal goods, and contribute to something worth doing. These goods do not arise in isolation. Practices require communities that transmit standards, institutions that protect time and attention, and relationships in which excellence is recognized and sustained. The human character of work is therefore already relational: it appears in the goods that emerge among persons who work well together.

4. Work as relational and institutional reality: Recognition, participation, and the goods that emerge between persons

Work is embedded in relationships, and relationships are shaped by institutions. Practice, attention and excellence are personal achievements, but never solitary ones. As MacIntyre reminds us, a physician learns within a medical tradition; a leader's judgment is formed in relation to those whom they lead; a worker's contribution becomes intelligible only when it is received by others.

Organizations shape the forms of work that become possible, and with them the kinds of trust, responsibility, recognition and participation that persons can learn. A workplace is an institutional ecology in which persons become visible or invisible, trusted or controlled, invited to contribute or reduced to function.

Trust, reciprocity, or recognition, to name a few, are relational goods that emerge in the space between persons and exceed social capital or collaboration understood as organizational assets, because they cannot be possessed by one person, stored for later use or produced by decree. They exist only in and through the relationship that gives rise to them.[7]

Such goods are bound to persons and histories and require a logic of gift because a relationship is not exhausted by its utility. This explains both the power and the fragility of relational goods. Organizations depend on trust, recognition, belonging and reciprocity, yet these goods arise only under conditions of freedom, attention and mutual regard. They cannot be manufactured without being distorted. The managerial challenge is therefore delicate: to make relational goods visible without turning them into instruments; to care for the conditions of trust without reducing trust to a metric.

A relational view of work also changes the meaning of difference. Tolerance leaves difference outside the creation of value. Inclusion often admits difference into a whole whose basic form remains unchanged. Relationality goes further: it treats difference as a possible source of emergence. In Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma's account of encounter, genuine inclusion is not the administrative incorporation of the different into a pre-existing center. It is the creation of a shared "in-between" in which each singularity can offer its gift without being reduced to a resource.

Organizations cannot produce relational goods at will, but they can make them more or less likely. They can act in ways that make trust reasonable, structure work so that people are known rather than anonymized, and respond to gift with reciprocity rather than extraction. They can ask what their work

[7] On relational goods, see Pierpaolo Donati, Relational Sociology: A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences (London: Routledge, 2011), and Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni, Civil Economy: Efficiency, Equity, Public Happiness (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).

design does to relationships: whether collaboration becomes reciprocal, whether difference is allowed to generate something new, whether persons experience themselves as contributors to a shared project.

Leadership makes this institutional reality concrete. To lead for dignity is to shape the conditions under which persons become visible to one another, judgment is trusted, contribution is received, and difference is allowed to bear fruit. Through ordinary decisions about time, authority, evaluation and recognition, leaders determine whether organizations become places of participation or systems of controlled performance.

Relational goods constitute the space for inclusion. To be excluded from meaningful work is often to be excluded from recognition, contribution and belonging. To be included is to enter a space where one's work can be received as a gift to a common world.

5. Work, belonging, and participation: The social stakes of inclusion

To be included in work is to enter a field of recognition in which one appears to others as capable of contribution. Employment may grant access, but dignified inclusion requires more: visibility, belonging, responsibility and participation in relational goods.

This becomes clearest where belonging is fragile. The conference examined two such places: the reintegration of people leaving prison and the work of care in contexts of illness, aging, emergency and dependency. In both, dignity depends on relationships that allow persons to be seen beyond their function.

For a person deprived of liberty, work provides rhythm, responsibility and a sense of future. It structures time, reconnects action with consequence, and allows the person to experience themselves as reliable and capable. Reintegration therefore implies rebuilding the capacity to inhabit a social role within a working world.

That rebuilding requires an ecology. Training and employment matter, and so do employers, mentors, families, social services, communities and institutions. A person returning to work crosses a threshold from social suspicion to possible belonging. Trust is decisive at that threshold. To trust after exclusion is to act as though a better future is still possible, and to recognize contribution where others see only risk or deficit.

The same structure appears beyond the prison system. Migrants with unrecognized credentials, workers returning after illness or failure, caregivers whose skills lack formal certification, and employees whose histories do not fit standard categories all depend on institutions capable of receiving them as participants rather than anomalies. The signs of meaningful inclusion therefore exceed employment rates and include autonomy, reliability, renewed purpose, restored relationships, and professional identity, among others.

Care work reveals the same truth from the side of vulnerability. The dignity of fragile and dependent people is often protected through small gestures: addressing a patient by name, noticing fear, remaining present when clinical action has ended. Such gestures transform professional obligation into human encounter. They show that the person always exceeds the role: patient, prisoner, worker, client and colleague name positions, not the whole of a human being.

Organizations depend on such gestures more than they admit. Much of what sustains dignified work cannot be commanded by contract: patience, tact, loyalty, encouragement, forgiveness, the willingness to remain attentive when no metric requires it. If institutions receive these gifts without reciprocity, they exploit the very goods on which they depend. If they sustain the persons who offer them, work becomes a place where belonging is enacted.

6. Care work, the work of care and the common good

The common good is not a shared goal, the sum of individual interests, or a public good in the economic sense. It is the order of social and institutional conditions that allows persons, individually and together, to flourish. It is always defined in reference to the human person. The order of things must remain subordinate to the order of persons.

A company produces goods and services and also provides a central set of the conditions under which persons flourish. Its common good concerns the human order created by its way of working: whether rights are respected, capacities are developed, trust is sustained, contribution is made possible, and authority serves rather than consumes the persons entrusted to it.

This horizon gives organizational conflict a criterion of judgment, as business and organizational decisions must be assessed according to what they do to persons-particularly the "littlest ones" - and to the community of work. The common good orders particular interests rather than erasing them. It requires prudence from all, especially from those who exercise authority and must arbitrate among legitimate claims without allowing the organization's external goals to override the dignity and development of the people through whom those goals are pursued.

The common good also clarifies the place of gift in organizational life. Rather than a testimony to sentimentality or a suspension of justice, "gift" names the gratuitous contribution without which no organization can live: noticing what needs to be done, sustaining relationships, extending trust, helping colleagues, upholding standards. Every organization depends on acts that cannot be fully commanded by contract.

Gift becomes sustainable when embedded in justice and ordered to the common good, without which it is easily exploited: the generous may carry the relational weight of the institution while receiving little in return. It is within the common good that gift becomes participation.

Leadership oriented toward the common good gathers persons under the primacy of the person. Seen in this light, authority is responsibility for the whole, for the rights that must not be violated, the development that must be enabled, the peace and stability of a just order, and the forms of participation through which people can fulfill their vocation. The leader's task is to ensure that organizational success strengthens rather than diminishes the persons through whom it is achieved.

An organization ordered toward the common good still measures output, obviously, but also asks what kind of persons it forms. Do workers become more capable of judgment, trust, competence, responsibility and participation? Do structures invite contribution? Does invisible work become visible? Do external goods strengthen the internal goods of practice, or crowd them out?

The common good gathers the central themes of the conference. Vocation is a response to a good worth serving. Practice forms persons capable of excellence. Relational goods emerge among people who work together. Inclusion extends belonging to those whom the world of work is tempted not to see. Care receives the person beyond function. In each case, dignity becomes concrete through participation in an order of work that is adequate to the human person.

This horizon is also necessary for judging technological transformation. AI should be assessed by whether it protects rights, strengthens practices, supports judgment, deepens participation and serves institutions ordered to persons.

Work becomes dignified when the organization of work allows persons to recognize that their contribution belongs to a good that does not absorb them, instrumentalize them or leave them isolated, but helps them and others flourish.

7. Work under transformation: AI and the future of human practice

Every technology reshapes work. AI does so with unusual depth because it enters domains once associated with human judgment and alters where agency and responsibility reside, such as interpretation, classification, recommendation, prediction and evaluation.

The framework of external, internal and relational goods is decisive here. AI excels at external gains: speed, scale, efficiency, standardization and measurable output. The question is what those gains do to the internal goods proper to a practice- clinical judgment, pedagogical understanding, legal reasoning, leadership responsibility, craftsmanship- and to the relational goods of trust, recognition, care, participation and contribution to the common good. AI serves dignified work when external gains strengthen internal excellence and enlarge the relational goods that work can generate.

AI enters work at different depths. It can automate tasks that are repetitive, computational or formally specifiable. It can mediate judgment by framing options, ranking risks or recommending action. It can also govern work by monitoring performance, allocating tasks, evaluating behavior and enforcing compliance. Each use redistributes agency between persons, systems and institutions.

The more dignified trajectory is clear. AI should assume what can be formalized so that persons may give more attention to judgment, creativity, care, deliberation, responsibility and encounter with others. Used in this way, AI can strengthen the internal goods of practice: revealing patterns, reducing errors, widening access to expertise and freeing workers from repetitive, dangerous or alienating tasks.

The opposite trajectory is algocracy: the expansion of algorithmic control into domains that require human judgment and relational presence. Replacement is indeed a danger in this regard, but so is- and perhaps more seriously- evacuation, as the person may remain formally in the role while the formative substance of that role is hollowed out. The worker signs, approves, monitors or corrects, yet judgment has migrated elsewhere. Automation bias intensifies this risk, as people defer to algorithmic outputs because they appear authoritative, neutral or statistically superior. Over time, the result is deskilling in the sense of both loss of competence and loss of practical responsibility.

AI will support a more dignified world of work only if it distributes understanding, develops capability, supports trust, and clarifies responsibility rather than concentrating opacity, atrophying workers' capabilities, increasing surveillance, and fostering irresponsibility. The litmus test for AI concerning human work is what it does to the person and to the community shaped by that work.

As simulated output becomes abundant, human presence may become more valuable. Judgment that someone can explain and stand behind, care that addresses a person rather than a case, responsibility that cannot be delegated to a system, and encounter that cannot be generated by prediction may acquire new weight.

The dignity of work in the age of AI depends on ordering technical power to human goods. AI can process information, generate options and optimize means. Human beings can receive a vocation, answer for a decision, recognize another person, participate in the common good and care for the shared world in which work becomes worthy of them.

Conclusion: The labor of dignity

Work produces goods and services. It also forms persons and generates relational goods: trust, reciprocity, recognition and belonging. Dignified work is work worthy of the person because it respects the worker's ontological dignity, cultivates developmental dignity, and makes relational dignity visible through contribution to others.

The conference's central image was the passage from *limes* to *limen*. The limits inherent in work - contracts, roles, hierarchies, metrics, technologies, procedures- protect it from arbitrariness; they become destructive when they close the person inside function, output or control, and they become thresholds when they open onto judgment, encounter, contribution and participation in a good that exceeds private interest.

The labor of dignity is therefore institutional. It requires organizations that protect judgment, measure without colonizing, include without absorbing, use technology without dissolving responsibility, receive gift without exploiting it, and orient work toward the common good. The workplace is one of the places where the moral order becomes concrete.

The following recommendations translate the conference's argument into an institutional agenda.

1 Design work as developmental

Work produces output and also shapes the person who performs it. It strengthens or weakens judgment, attention, initiative, patience, courage, trustworthiness and practical wisdom. To design work is therefore to design conditions for human formation. Productivity remains necessary, but it becomes incomplete when separated from the capacities work develops or destroys.

2 Protect internal and relational goods

External goods include revenue, reputation, efficiency and market share. Internal goods are the excellences proper to a practice: discernment, craftsmanship, care, professional judgment, and the satisfaction of doing something well. Relational goods arise between persons: trust, reciprocity, recognition, belonging, justice and collegial bonds.

Organizations should identify the internal and relational goods of their central practices and use them, alongside performance, as criteria for evaluating systems, technologies and metrics. A good work system improves performance while protecting the excellence of the practice and expanding its capacity to serve persons, communities and the common good.

A relational dashboard, rightly understood, would not reduce relationship to data. It would discipline attention. It would help organizations see whether difference generates novelty, whether invisible work is recognized, whether trust is growing or being consumed, and whether people experience themselves as contributors to a shared work.

3 Preserve time for attention and judgment

Dignified work requires inhabitable time. Mechanical time governs production; human time allows attention, counsel, reflection, recovery, learning and care. Practical wisdom matures through pace, memory and correction by reality.

Organizations should examine the temporal architecture of work: meetings, deadlines, communication norms, availability expectations, reporting requirements, promotion cycles and digital tools. Time saved by technology should renew attention, not only expand output.

4 Move from access to belonging

Inclusion means more than access to employment. It means entrance into a field of recognition where a person can become visible as capable of contribution. This is decisive for those returning from prison, migration, illness, interrupted careers, disability or social exclusion.

Every organization creates boundaries between insider and outsider, trusted and untrusted, visible and invisible. Dignified inclusion turns those boundaries into thresholds through which people can become responsible contributors. Belonging is enacted when contribution is received.

5 Extend trust with responsibility

Trust is the willingness to make room for another person's agency and future contribution. People become capable of responsibility partly by being entrusted with it. Organizations should examine where their systems withhold trust by default and where control has become a substitute for formation.

Dignified institutions create graduated forms of trust: real responsibility accompanied by feedback, support, limits and accountability. Trust without structure is naïve. Structure without trust is sterile.

6 Sustain gift without exploitation

Gift names the contribution that exceeds formal obligation: mentoring a colleague, repairing a relationship, protecting quality, noticing what needs doing, absorbing strain, sustaining the meaning of the whole. Every organization depends on such giving.

Dignified organizations recognize where gift appears and answer it with reciprocity. They do not allow the generous to carry the relational weight of the institution alone. Care, loyalty and discretionary effort must be renewed by justice, recognition and institutional support.

7 Govern AI through the goods of human practice

AI should be evaluated by its effect on human dignity. It can assume what is formalizable so that persons can attend to what requires human presence: deliberation, creativity, recognition, responsibility and practical judgment.

Organizations should ensure that practitioners understand, question and learn from AI outputs. AI governance should clarify responsibility, reduce meaningless burden, support learning, and protect human presence where presence matters. The test is not whether AI makes work faster, but whether it strengthens or hollows out the human practice it enters.

8 Measure what the organization forms in people

Organizations should continue to measure economic value. They should also examine what kind of people they help shape. Success includes the growth of judgment, attentiveness, reliability, responsibility, cooperation across difference, recognition and commitment to goods beyond private advancement.

Long-term vitality depends on performance and on the renewal of the human capacities through which performance remains meaningful.

9 Lead by inviting contribution

Leadership is the creation of conditions in which others can contribute. Leaders shape fields of visibility: who is noticed, who is trusted, whose judgment counts, whose work is received, whose difference becomes fruitful.

Dignified leadership joins moral imagination with institutional seriousness. It turns roles, metrics, hierarchies, technologies and contracts into conditions for judgment, relationship, contribution and participation in a common good.

10 Orient work toward the common good

The common good is not a shared corporate goal, the sum of individual interests, or a public good in the economic sense. It is the order of conditions that allows persons and communities to flourish. It respects the person, enables development, and sustains a just order.

An organization ordered toward the common good places economic discipline within a fuller account of human flourishing. Decisions about technology, incentives, flexibility, promotion, care, layoffs and performance should be judged by the human order they create: the rights they respect, the capacities they develop, the relationships they sustain, the participation they invite, and the goods they protect.

Work becomes dignified when persons can recognize that their contribution belongs to a good that does not absorb them, instrumentalize them or leave them isolated, but helps them and others flourish.

The institutional task is to create working environments in which effort, discipline, hierarchy, scarcity, evaluation and exchange are thresholds for human flourishing. Dignified work protects judgement, preserves attention, cultivates relational goods, fosters a sense of belonging, sustains generosity, governs technology for human benefit, and directs contribution towards the common good.

This is not an ethical layer added on top of strategy. It lies at the core of the work itself. Institutions that are worthy of human dignity are those whose structures, metrics, technologies and decisions enable people to flourish through what they do with and for one another.

Agenda

FOUNDATIONS AND FRACTURES **IESE Barcelona, March 19, 2026**

9:00 – 9:30 **Welcome Coffee & Registration**

9:30 – 9:15 **Opening Remarks**

- Mireia Las Heras, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE
- Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

9:45 – 10:30 **Keynote Session — Human Dignity in a Fragmented World: Europe in the Geopolitical Competition**

In an era of intensifying geopolitical competition, values lie at the core of an unprecedented reshuffling. This keynote examines Europe's positioning in the global arena through the lens of its founding constitutional principle: the protection of human dignity since the aftermath of the Second World War.

- Speaker: Mario di Ciommo, Head of Geopolitical Analyses and Scenarios, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti

10:30 – 11:00 **Coffee Break**

11:00 – 12:15 **Colloquium — "The Loss of Vocation: From Calling to Contract in Modern Workplaces"**

The economic and moral shift from vocation to employment:

– The transformation of calling in secular modernity
– How bureaucracy and specialization undermine purpose in work
– Restoring meaning: Can modern organizations reclaim the idea of vocation?

- Speaker: Sir Martin Donnelly, Former President Boeing Europe, Senior Independent Director, UK National Audit Office
- Speaker: Lord Stephen Green, Former UK Minister of State for Trade and Investment, Former HSBC Group Chairman
- Moderator: Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

12:15 – 13:30 **Panel — Meaning, Joy, and the Silent Pride of Competence**

An interdisciplinary conversation on the intrinsic satisfactions of doing something well:

– Craft, attention, and moral formation
– The quiet dignity of excellence without recognition
– Deep practice

- Speaker: Manuel Fontán del Junco, Director of Museums and Exhibitions, Juan March Foundation
- Speaker: Cristina Iglesias, Artist
- Moderator: Santiago Álvarez de Mon, Professor Emeritus, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

13:30 – 14:45 **Lunch**

14:45 – 16:00 **Panel — Work and leisure: Leisure, Rest, and the Right to Be Unproductive**

Debating the moral and political significance of rest:

– Leisure as the precondition for reflection and freedom
– The commodification of time and its ethical consequences
– Toward a post-productivist understanding of dignity

- Speaker: José María Álvarez-Pallete, Former Chair & CEO, Telefónica
- Speaker: R.J. Snell, Director of Academic Programs and Editor-in-chief of Public Discourse, Witherspoon Institute, Princeton
- Moderator: Santiago Álvarez de Mon, Professor Emeritus, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

16:00 – 16:30 **Break**

16:30 – 17:45 **Panel — Leading with and for Dignity**

– Architectures of voice and participation
– Respectful leadership practices
– Subsidiarity and solidarity

- Speaker: Ricard Casas, Head of People and Culture, ISS Spain
- Speaker: Xavier Costa, Co-founder, Krisos
- Moderator: Mireia Las Heras, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

17:45 – 18:30 **Keynote — The Dignity of Work: A Relational View**

Conceptual inquiry into the nature of work as human activity and the dignity of work in the face of the new technological era.

- Speaker: D. Giulio Maspero, Dean, Faculty of Theology, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome
- Speaker: Mireia Las Heras, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE
- Speaker: Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

18:30 **Day 1 Closing Remarks**

REIMAGINING WORK FOR A DIGNIFIED FUTURE **IESE Barcelona, March 20, 2026**

8:30 – 9:00 **Welcome Coffee**

9:00 – 10:15 **Colloquium — Community, Encounter and Belonging**

Revisiting work as the Foundation of Community and Belonging:

– Labor as participation in the civic order
– Unorthodox trajectories
– Rethinking economic value beyond productivity

- Speaker: Derek Byrne, Co-founder & CEO, Way 2 Work, Ireland

Public-Private collaboration:

– Successful pathways to social inclusion
– How to bring them to our organizations

- Speaker: Núria Danés, Director of Social Inclusion, la Caixa Foundation
- Speaker: Daniel Ortiz Llargués, Managing Director, CIRE, Generalitat de Catalunya
- Moderator: Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

10:15 – 11:15 **Panel — Gift, Care and the Common Good**

Envisioning alternative models of work grounded in reciprocity and education:

– Work as an act of care for others and the world

– The dignity of unseen work

- Speaker: Kirstie McAllum, Department of Media & Communication, Te Tari Mātai Pāpāho University of Canterbury, Te Whare Wananga o Waitaha Christchurch, Ōtautahi New Zealand, Aotearoa
- Speaker: Marta Lince-Faria, Associate Professor, Human Factor in Organization, AESE Business School
- Moderator: Mireia Las Heras, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

11:15 – 11:30 **Coffee Break**

11:30 – 12:45 **Panel — AI and Human Flourishing**

How dignity may be honored in the age of AI:

– Algorithmic management and meaningful work

– Surveillance and trust in the workplace

– AI and skill development

– The gig worker

- Speaker: Pablo García Ruiz, Professor, Sociology, University of Zaragoza
- Speaker: Melanie Calero, Director of Data and Artificial Intelligence, El Corte Inglés
- Moderator: Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

12:45 – 13:30 **Keynote session — Being and Thriving Together: Ontological Relations and the Future of Work**

- Speaker: Ilaria Vigorelli, Professor. Director of the Research Group on Relational Ontology, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross
- Speaker: Mireia Las Heras, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE
- Speaker: Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

13:30 – 13:45 Closing Remarks — Synthesis of Themes and Concluding Statement

From the dignity of labor to the labor of dignity — reimagining how societies work

- Speaker: Mireia Las Heras, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE
- Speaker: Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma, Professor, Managing People in Organizations, IESE

13: 45 **Appetizer**

Speakers



Santiago Álvarez de Mon

Professor Emeritus
Managing People in Organizations



José María Álvarez-Pallete

Former Chair & CEO, Telefónica



Derek Byrne

Co-founder & CEO
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Former President Boeing Europe.
Senior Independent Director UK National Audit Office



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