

# Human thriving through decent work: a multitheoretical framework

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This conceptual study aims to advance the understanding of human thriving in business and service contexts by integrating Needs Theories (NT), Humanistic Management (HM) and Transformative Service Research (TSR). It addresses a critical unresolved issue of how services and service ecosystems can be reconfigured to support just, inclusive and transformative outcomes that promote human development.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper conducts systematic literature reviews, complemented by bibliometric and thematic content analyses, to explore the multiple intersections among NT, HM and TSR. The main insights are systematized into a novel, integrated multitheoretical framework.

**Findings** – The intersections among the selected theoretical domains reveal varying degrees of development and give rise to three core constructs: Business Ethics (NT–HM nexus), Holistic Service Management (NT–TSR nexus) and People-Centered Management (HM–TSR nexus). The framework integrates these conceptual linkages and fosters a nuanced, multilevel understanding of human thriving. Central to this integration is the recognition of human dignity as a common, emergent theme connecting all three streams and positions decent work as a vital, but partial, mediating construct. From these linkages, a set of testable propositions is derived to guide future empirical research.

**Practical implications** – The framework provides decision-makers with actionable insights to cultivate ethical organizational practices, design services that genuinely empower and include diverse stakeholders and foster equitable service environments. It underscores that prioritizing decent work is not only an ethical imperative but also a strategic driver for sustainable organizational success and broader societal well-being, directly contributing to Sustainable Development Goals related to well-being, employment and equality.

**Originality/value** – This study offers a novel interdisciplinary integration of distinct yet still emerging theories, relative to dominant service paradigms, to address human thriving from a human-centered, values-based perspective. By synthesizing their conceptual linkages, it provides an original multitheoretical and multilevel framework, highlighting the pivotal, mediating role of human dignity and decent work. The resulting propositions offer fertile ground for future empirical investigation, enhancing theoretical development in both service and business ethics research.

**Keywords** Needs theory, Humanistic management, Transformative service research, Systematic literature review, Multitheoretical framework, Decent work

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## 1. Introduction

The global transition toward a service-based economy underscores the growing importance of service ecosystems – dynamic configurations of actors, resources and institutional arrangements designed to enable sustainable value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). Dominant service paradigms – including Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2016) and service ecosystems theory (Akaka *et al.*, 2013) – offer critical insight into designing services for sustainable and equitable production and consumption. Emphasizing actor interdependence, institutional co-evolution and systemic value co-creation, these paradigms advance circularity, stewardship and equality in service systems.

However, periods of crises and global challenges, such as climate change, inequality and pandemics, expose systemic vulnerabilities and failures to meet basic needs and rights (André *et al.*, 2021; Toufaily and Zalan, 2023). A key unresolved issue is how services and service ecosystems can be reconfigured to

support just, inclusive and transformative outcomes that advance human development and flourishing (Field *et al.*, 2021; Fisk *et al.*, 2018). Addressing this gap enhances current frameworks' ability to account for inequalities, advance inclusion and human flourishing (Raciti *et al.*, 2023) and guide meaningful societal

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transitions to sustainable and equitable futures (André *et al.*, 2021; Zainuddin and Gordon, 2020). In this debate, scholars increasingly call for more human-centered and interdisciplinary approaches to service research. Transformative Service Research (TSR), for instance, has gained momentum by explicitly centering human well-being (Anderson *et al.*, 2013) and advocating for innovations that enhance quality of life and reduce vulnerability (Carlini, 2024; Fisk *et al.*, 2018). When guided by transformative and inclusive logics, especially for underserved or marginalized populations, Caridà *et al.* (2024) argued that service platforms can drive both service and social innovation. Similarly, the call for integrating contextual and phenomenological perspectives (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2014) to better understand service environments, and combining knowledge from psychology, sociology and systems thinking (Ostrom *et al.*, 2015) highlight the need to “examine how service can contribute to well-being, social change and quality of life, not just for customers but for all stakeholders” (*ibidem*, p. 129). However, while Kabadayi *et al.* (2019) advocated for a holistic perspective to address the complex, interdependent challenges faced by individuals within service ecosystems, the potential of truly integrated approaches remains largely underexplored. Exploring alternative yet increasingly relevant human-centered and values-based perspectives that explicitly address psychological, ethical and societal well-being may complement and enrich more established service research paradigms (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015).

This conceptual article responds to these polyvocal calls by exploring how three distinct streams of research – Needs Theories (NT), Humanistic Management (HM) and TSR – together enhance the understanding of human thriving in business and service contexts. While some of these streams are still emerging relative to the dominant service paradigms, their growing influence and theoretical potential justify scholarly attention for the future of service research (Keating *et al.*, 2024; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2017). Modern NT (Deci and Ryan, 2000) remains foundational in motivational psychology and is notably relevant in service literature for human-centric design, meaningful customer experiences and well-being (Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014; Zainuddin *et al.*, 2013). TSR is widely recognized for reorienting services toward individual and societal well-being (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). HM may not be a mainstream service marketing paradigm, but it provides a valuable normative and philosophical foundation grounded in dignity, human development and flourishing, aligning with calls for a more values-based service paradigm (Pirson and Lawrence, 2010; Spitzbeck, 2011).

Specifically, this paper aims to identify conceptual linkages among these three streams to contribute to theoretically generative outcomes (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), advancing conceptual development (Snyder, 2019) on human thriving. The research is driven by the following questions:

- RQ1. What is the current state of research at the intersections of these selected streams?
- RQ2. How do the conceptual linkages between these theories promote the understanding of human thriving in the business and service contexts?

To address these questions, this paper conducts systematic literature reviews and bibliometric and thematic content

analyses to examine multiple intersections among NT, HM and TSR. Based on these insights, this paper develops a multitheoretical framework. Depicting conceptual linkages among these three streams, it explicitly emphasizes the pivotal role of human dignity as an emergent pattern connecting them at different levels through decent work. The theoretically grounded propositions derived directly from this framework serve as a foundation for future empirical testing, enriching the understanding of human thriving dynamics in service and business management. The conclusions outline managerial implications and suggest directions for future research.

## 2. The research frame

### 2.1 Needs theories: evolving toward dynamic frameworks

NT offer a valuable framework for understanding human development and thriving by addressing human needs holistically (Deci and Ryan, 2000). While originating in psychological research (e.g. Murray, 1938), their study expanded across managerial, organizational and economic disciplines. Numerous theories have since emerged, emphasizing core dimensions such as physiological requirements, interpersonal relationships and personal growth (Alderfer, 1969; Deci and Ryan, 2000). These theories differ in their hierarchical structures and need interactions, recognizing that some needs are innate while others arise from dynamic individual-environment interactions (Fisk *et al.*, 2019).

Maslow’s seminal work (Maslow, 1943) – categorizing needs as physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization – suggests a rigid progression. Higher-level needs are met only after lower-level ones are secured, placing self-actualization at the top. This Western, individualistic framework has been widely criticized for its rigidity and limited applicability. Empirical evidence largely does not support strict hierarchical progression (Wahba and Bridwell, 1976). Instead, needs are often interdependent and can be pursued simultaneously, influenced by context and culture. For example, in collectivist societies, social belonging can precede basic physiological needs. Even in individualistic contexts, the pursuit of upward social mobility can lead individuals to prioritize higher-level needs like achievement and recognition, sometimes deferring or compromising on lower-level needs like stable social connection, especially if basic safety is not directly at risk (Wahba and Bridwell, 1976). For instance, individuals from marginalized or economically disadvantaged backgrounds may pursue ambitious entrepreneurial or educational aspirations (linked to self-actualization) despite experiencing insecurity in basic physiological or safety needs (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). These insights demonstrate a far more dynamic and adaptable reality than Maslow’s original framework suggests (Rojas *et al.*, 2023; Sheikh and van Ameijde, 2022).

Later theories depart from Maslow’s rigid hierarchy. Alderfer’s ERG theory (1969) allows for the simultaneous satisfaction of Existence, Relatedness and Growth needs and accounts for cultural differences. *Existence*, covering basic survival requirements (e.g. food, water, shelter and financial stability), is similar to Maslow’s physiological and safety needs. *Relatedness*, involving social connections, relationships and belonging, mirrors Maslow’s love and belonging. *Growth* focuses on personal development, self-actualization and achieving one’s potential. Critically, ERG theory was

empirically developed for organizational settings, shifting its focus to workplace implications (Alderfer, 1969). Its distinctive feature is the frustration-regression hypothesis. If higher-level needs are unmet, individuals may revert to focusing on lower-level needs for satisfaction (Alderfer, 1969). ERG underlines that addressing all three categories of needs promotes decent work conditions and enhances employee well-being, creating opportunities for both personal growth and professional development (Che et al., 2022). Conversely, neglecting these needs leads to frustration and undermines overall well-being.

Similarly, Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT) (2000) is a flexible, adaptable model centered on intrinsic motivation, driven by the satisfaction of three core psychological needs. *Autonomy* refers to self-governance, control over one's actions and responsibility. *Competence* involves developing skills and knowledge for effective performance. *Relatedness* reflects meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging through care and connection with others. Extensively applied in organizational contexts, SDT offers strategies for fostering motivating and supportive workplaces (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Leaders supporting employees' psychological needs can enhance engagement, performance and well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2017). These environments promote dignity, decent work and self-actualization, benefiting individuals while enhancing organizational and societal outcomes (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

In conclusion, evolved needs theories redefine intrinsic human needs as dynamic, interrelated factors that promote integral human development, well-being and the common good (Alderfer, 1969; Deci and Ryan, 2000). Extending beyond individuals to organizations, NT may serve as a foundation for addressing broader societal challenges, such as those outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through governance forms that account for individual and collective needs satisfaction (Sacchetti and Tortia, 2024).

## 2.2 Humanistic management: a dignity-centered business management approach

HM, as articulated by Pirson (2017), emphasizes managing organizations to respect and promote human dignity, foster personal growth and contribute to societal well-being (Colbert et al., 2018; Dierksmeier, 2015). While rooted in organizational theory, HM fundamentally connects individual human dignity to organizational practices and broader societal outcomes (Spitzeck, 2011; Winchenbach et al., 2019). This stream emerged from cross-sectional studies, including conscious capitalism and business ethics (Pirson, 2017), aligning with transformative approaches focused on human life value, human dignity protection and well-being promotion.

HM's transformative proposal is built on three pillars demonstrating its inherent multilevel perspective. *Dignity* is at its core and recalls the unconditional values, virtues and rights of human beings, treating them as ends in themselves, not merely as means to economic ends (Melé, 2016). Their social, emotional and mental intelligence transcends self-interest and nurtures care for others (Pirson, 2017). *Ethics* is based on mutual respect, reciprocity and the common good. It forms the basis for responsible decisions and actions, fostering trust-based, diverse and inclusive work environments (Melé, 2016; Spitzeck, 2011). *Legitimacy* underpins shared governance models (Pirson and Turnbull, 2011) and transformational leadership (Colbert et al.,

2018), promoting meaningful participation, supporting individual capabilities (Pirson and Lawrence, 2010) and fostering shared value creation (Dillon, 2021).

Over time, HM has evolved to explicitly encompass broader spheres of action and influence, acknowledging its multilevel nature through the humanization of business, economies and society (Melé, 2016; Spitzeck, 2009; Winchenbach et al., 2019). A humanized business culture has a stakeholder-centered approach (Pirson and Turnbull, 2011) that upholds employee dignity, promotes personal growth, supports work-life balance and integrates social/ethical considerations into decisions (Laszlo, 2019). Extending this humanistic culture to the societal level, organizations foster purpose and ethical behavior in their relationships with the environment and other stakeholders through their offerings (Dyck, 2020), ultimately promoting multiscale exchange and societal flourishing (Dillon, 2021; Melé, 2016; Shrivastava and Zsolnai, 2022).

While HM has been linked with drive theories (Pirson and Lawrence, 2010), i.e. the Four-Drive Model, its connection to NT remains largely underexplored. The literature lacks insights into how humanistic principles contribute to need satisfaction. A rare exploration by Pirson et al. (2019) established a direct connection with TSR, arguing that leveraging dignity in service design enables social innovation organizations to create transformative services that address inequalities and enhance well-being. Such services can restore, protect and promote dignity, fostering empowerment, co-creation and inclusivity (Pirson et al., 2019). This foundational work opens avenues for further research on HM's relationship with human needs, particularly through ERG or SDT, given their extensive organizational applications.

## 2.3 Transformative service research: a well-being-centered service approach

TSR is a critical multidisciplinary field within service studies that bridges theoretical frameworks with practical applications to focus on well-being-centered services (Anderson et al., 2013; Colurcio et al., 2022; Previte and Robertson, 2019). *Transformation* refers to the services' ability to bring about meaningful change at individual, community and societal levels. Unlike traditional service research focusing on efficiency or customer satisfaction, its central outcome is *well-being* encompassing subjective (perceived life quality) and objective dimensions (measurable factors), as well as meaning-oriented (eudemonic flourishing, e.g. realizing potential, virtues; Sen, 1999) and pleasure-oriented approaches (hedonic flourishing, e.g. happiness, reduced pain; Diener et al., 1999). Compared to well-being which identifies a state, thriving emphasizes the dynamic process of achieving one's full potential and overall flourishing across different life areas and scales.

As a multilevel, well-being-centered approach, TSR emphasizes the "social dimension of value creation" within a service ecosystem (Blocker and Barrios, 2015, p. 265). It recognizes that multiactor participation and interactions at micro (individual), meso (organizational/community) and macro (society) levels (Alexander et al., 2018; Rosenbaum et al., 2011) are crucial for effective service design and delivery. The social dimension of value creation also highlights the importance of people's empowerment in value co-creation (Andreassen et al., 2016), providing equal opportunities to

access, participate in and benefit from service design, delivery and experience. Addressing barriers to participation across different social groups, statuses and abilities is essential for fostering inclusivity and ensuring services contribute to the well-being of all, particularly for vulnerable groups (Gnusowski and Fisk, 2024).

The founding framework by Anderson *et al.* (2013) captures TSR's scope, identifying interactions between service entities (e.g. such as service employees, service processes, offerings, organizations and sectors) and consumer entities (from individuals to collectives and broader society) in shaping well-being outcomes. However, this framework does not sufficiently address critical aspects of people's empowerment and active participation in value co-creation. Specifically, it lacks focus on how structural barriers, power dynamics and social inequalities influence individuals' ability to engage meaningfully in transformative services, underscoring calls for more intentional actions to bring about change at meso- and macrolevel (Keränen and Olkkonen, 2022). Indeed, TSR has predominantly focused on the microlevel, particularly within sectors like finance, health care and social services (Galeone and Sebastiani, 2021). This narrow scope highlights an untapped opportunity for TSR principles to be applied at meso- and macrolevels, driving systemic changes for sustainable well-being outcomes across diverse sectors.

### 3. Research design

This conceptual paper used systematic literature reviews (SLRs) (Ungaro *et al.*, 2024) to examine conceptual linkages and emergent patterns among the three distinct streams of research, and contribute to theoretically generative outcomes (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), advancing conceptual development (Snyder, 2019) on human thriving. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses protocol (Moher *et al.*, 2009) was adopted to ensure transparency, replicability and minimize bias in literature selection. A multidisciplinary team of experts in marketing, management, tourism and services research participated in the study, strengthening methodological rigor through diverse perspectives and logical reasoning. The final multitheory samples (Figure 1a in Web appendix) were then analyzed using bibliometric and thematic content analysis.

#### 3.1 Research protocol

A multistage search strategy was adopted for a rigorous and systematic approach (Booth, 2016). First, SLR combining the three theories confirmed a research gap in business and service approaches holistically targeting fundamental needs, yielding a limited number of articles. Second, three separate SLRs were performed to examine the interplay between pairs of these theories: Needs Theory and Humanistic Management (NT-HM), Needs Theory and Transformative Service Research (NT-TSR) and Humanistic Management and Transformative Service Research (HM-TSR) (Moher *et al.*, 2009). Distinct search strings (Table 1a in Web appendix) (Moher *et al.*, 2009; Palmaccio *et al.*, 2020) were used to identify articles published in English up to February 2025 (search date: February 10, 2025) in the Scopus database, selected for its balance between research quality and coverage

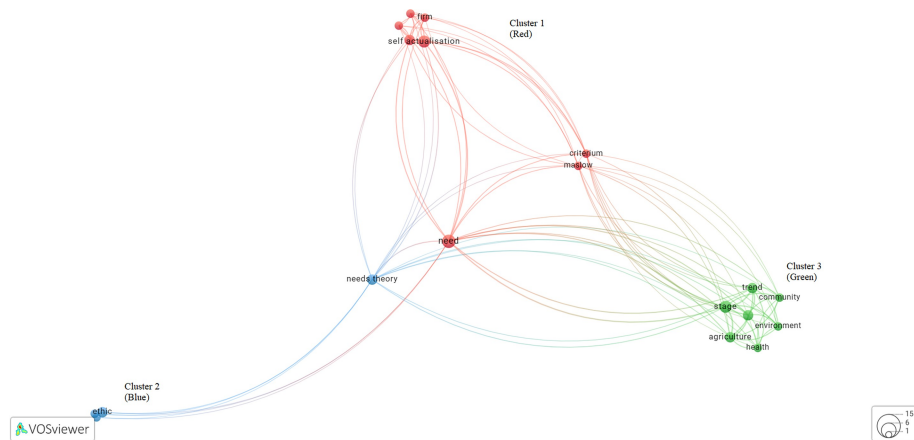
(Palmaccio *et al.*, 2020). The search yielded 141 articles in total – NT and HM (10 articles), NT and TSR (32) and HM and TSR (99).

These articles were screened against predetermined criteria, focused on peer-reviewed articles and book chapters in Business, Management and allied subjects. Manual screening of titles, keywords and abstracts further excluded irrelevant studies, reducing the final eligible sample to 68 articles. These formed three multitheory samples: NT and HM (3 articles), NT and TSR (17 articles) and HM and TSR (48 articles). Table 2a, available in the Web appendix, provides the list of studies included in each final sample. While this number is considerably limited for a systematic literature review, it reflects both a constraint and an opportunity. On the one hand, such a small pool directly reflects the emergent and interdisciplinary nature of the conceptual intersections we explore (Snyder, 2019). On the other hand, the scarcity of contributions indicates a highly significant interdisciplinary space not yet widely integrated in mainstream service scholarship, which calls for further theorization and empirical validation. In line with our purpose of contributing to theoretically generative outcomes (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), a focused set of relevant papers can be more effective than simply maximizing quantity or an exhaustive collection (Watson and Webster, 2020). These 68 articles were therefore considered appropriate for subsequent bibliometric and thematic content analyses (Cruz-Cárdenas *et al.*, 2021; Mariani *et al.*, 2023).

#### 3.2 Bibliometric analysis of the multitheory streams

Data extracted from the final multitheory samples were organized for descriptive (Siemieniako *et al.*, 2021) and co-occurrence analysis (Mariani *et al.*, 2023). Descriptive analysis assessed literature evolution (publication year), journal outlets and research categories (Cruz-Cárdenas *et al.*, 2021). Co-occurrence analysis, conducted using VOSviewer 1.6.20 (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010), identified key topics and their interconnections. This widely used software uses an optimization algorithm for normalization, mapping and clustering. The strength of interconnections is determined by the number and thickness of linkages, ensuring each keyword appears in only one cluster.

The co-occurrence analysis was applied to each sample separately and, as a cross-check, to the three samples collectively. To enhance result reliability, the analysis focused on titles and abstracts (Cruz-Cárdenas *et al.*, 2021), as keyword-based analysis did not yield meaningful clusters across all three samples (Singh *et al.*, 2020). The co-occurrence threshold was adjusted based on sample size: default five occurrences (Turatto *et al.*, 2021) for the larger data set (HM and TSR) and two or three for the smaller ones (NT and HM; NT and TSR, respectively) (Cruz-Cárdenas *et al.*, 2021; Nalbant and Aydin, 2025). A lower threshold better captures emerging concepts and trends in manageable data sets. To further improve coherence (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010), the data set was refined by removing generic/irrelevant terms and grouping synonymous or similar terms. We selectively retained a minimum of 60% of the most frequently co-occurring words across all intersections, based on their thematic relevance (Turatto *et al.*, 2021), recognizing that the topic extraction effectiveness highly depends on the quality of anchor words.

**Figure 1** Clusters of needs theory and humanistic management keywords based on titles and abstracts

Source: Authors' work; <https://tinyurl.com/29sqdfy>

**Table 1** Clusters of co-occurring keywords in the needs theory and humanistic management sample

Cluster	Anchor word	Size	Other clustered keywords
Cluster 1 (Red)	Need	8 keywords	Transaction cost theory, firm, governance, Maslow, opportunity, self-actualization, Criterium
Cluster 2 (Blue)	Needs theory	4 keywords	Ethic, motivation, business, educator
Cluster 3 (Green)	Maslow's hierarchy	7 keywords	Community, environment, trend, health, stage, agriculture

Source(s): Authors' work

**Table 2** Clusters of co-occurring keywords in the needs theory and transformative service research sample

Cluster	Anchor word	Size	Other clustered keywords
Cluster 1 (Blue)	Work	6 keywords	Social need, role, hospitality employee, job, turnover intention
Cluster 2 (Green)	Job satisfaction	6 keywords	Employee satisfaction, employee retention, ERG theory, social environment, team cohesion
Cluster 3 (Red)	Hierarchy	7 keywords	Service type, service sector, psychological need, exciting need, travel motivation, customer loyalty

Source(s): Authors' work

These terms uniquely exhibit a non-zero probability within a topic, making them essential for identifying and distinguishing that topic from other keyword groups (He *et al.*, 2019).

The co-occurrence analyses identified three thematic clusters for the NT and HM stream, three for NT and TSR and five for HM and TSR. These clusters are visually represented by VOSviewer using different colors (Figures 1–3). Complementary to these figures, Tables 1–3 provide a systematic overview of each cluster's textual data, summarizing key descriptive metrics including cluster size (i.e. the number of co-occurring keywords), anchor word and other interconnected keywords. A detailed commentary on each sample and its corresponding clusters is provided in the results sections.

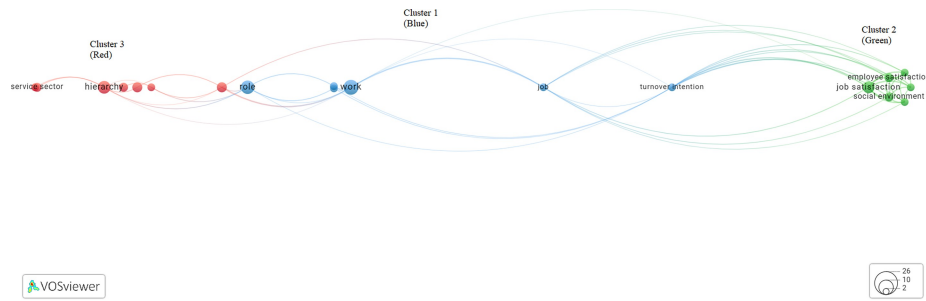
### 3.3 Content analysis and systematization of multitheory streams

Leveraging the multidisciplinary expertise of the team, we conducted a thematic content analysis (Cruz-Cárdenas *et al.*, 2021) manually on the articles within each stream (Table Ia) using Atlas.ti (version 20). This software (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009) facilitated an inductive coding, using open

codes to capture exploratory insights directly from the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; O'Dwyer, 2004). The process also built on thematic categories derived from the co-occurrence analysis, aligned with scholarly inquiry areas identified within the corpus.

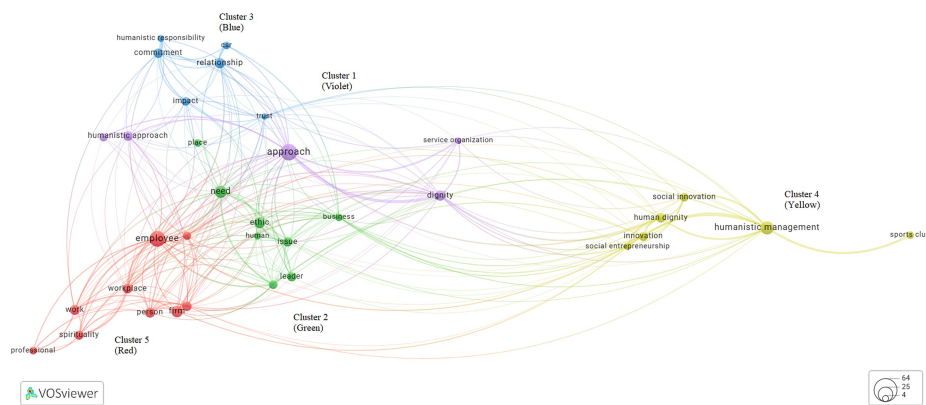
The coding process unfolded in *three rounds*, summarized in Table 4. This process was designed to embed our multilevel exploration – individual, organizational and societal – across disciplinary boundaries. In the *first round*, the team identified first-order codes, serving as granular conceptual labels for significant data aspects. These codes provide insights at both the individual and organizational levels, reflecting the application of NT in business contexts. This primary analysis formed the foundation for subsequent, systematized multitheory analysis. In the *second round*, axial coding identified higher-level (i.e. second-order) categories, capturing connections between first-order codes across the research streams (Locke, 2001; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Through iterative refinement and collaborative discussion, preliminary categories were refined into well-defined second-order categories. These categories primarily

**Figure 2** Clusters of needs theory and transformative service research keywords based on titles and abstracts



Source: Authors' work; <https://tinyurl.com/22jo6pb5>

**Figure 3** Clusters of humanistic management and transformative service research keywords based on titles and abstracts



Source: Authors' work; <https://tinyurl.com/27tsu68g>

**Table 3** Clusters of co-occurring keywords in the humanistic management and transformative service research sample

Cluster	Anchor word	Size	Other clustered keywords
Cluster 1 (Violet)	Approach	5 keywords	Humanistic approach, service organization, service delivery, dignity
Cluster 2 (Green)	Need	8 keywords	Business; leader, ethics, human, society, place, issue
Cluster 3 (Blue)	Relationship	6 keywords	Humanistic responsibility, CSR, impact, trust, commitment
Cluster 4 (Yellow)	Humanistic management	6 keywords	Human dignity, innovation, social innovation, social entrepreneurship, sports club
Cluster 5 (Red)	Employee	9 keywords	Firm, work, workplace, community, professional, individual, person, spirituality

Source(s): Authors' work

emerged at the organizational level, reflecting broader patterns of interaction and structure. These categories were consolidated into three overarching theoretical constructs emerging across the research streams (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In the final round, a subsequent axial coding synthesized these overarching constructs into a single higher-order theoretical construct, representing the intersection of the research streams (Locke, 2001; Miles and Huberman, 1994). This final synthesis effectively connected the organizational-level constructs to the societal one, illustrating broader implications. To increase robustness, the axial coding results were compared with cluster configurations from the collective co-occurrence analysis to verify consistency and alignment. Our resulting multitheoretical framework (Figure 4), bridging the three streams of research, provides an exploratory multilevel

understanding of key constructs promoting human thriving in business and service management.

#### 4. Findings: a multitheoretical literature review presentation and systematization

The analysis of the multitheory samples revealed key insights into the development of discourses at the intersection of NT, HM and TSR (Tables 1–3). These insights allow us to identify critical conceptual linkages and emergent patterns among them (Table 4). Based on these linkages, we have outlined an integrated multitheoretical framework along with theoretically grounded propositions which serve as a foundation for future empirical testing of human thriving dynamics in service and business management (Figure 4).

Table 4 Thematic content analysis of the research streams

Streams	Overarching topic	Second-order categories	First-order codes
NT–HM <sup>a</sup>	Business ethics	Ethical strategic decision-making	Inclusive governance Dignity in the workplace Human flourishing and the common good Organizations as open communities
		Ethical societal decision-making	
<b>Purpose-driven human needs Human flourishing through needs satisfaction</b>			
NT–TSR <sup>b</sup>	Holistic service management	Fulfilling workplace dynamics	Employee empowerment and self-actualization Work–life balance and personal growth relatedness in the workplace Employee–customer interactions in service contexts
HM–TSR <sup>c</sup>	People-centric management	Needs satisfaction through service delivery	Complexity of human needs in service encounter and delivery
		Humanistic service organizations	Transformational leadership for human flourishing through services Values-driven business models Ethical relatedness in a social context Firm as a human community Dignified treatment in the workplace Transformational learning for increasing competencies
		Humanistic management and innovation in social entrepreneurship	Ethically driven social innovation Humanistic education for social progress

Note(s): <sup>a</sup>NT and HM: Needs Theory and Humanistic Management; <sup>b</sup>NT and TSR: Needs Theory and Transformative Service Research; <sup>c</sup>HM and TSR: Humanistic Management and Transformative Service Research

Source(s): Authors' work

#### 4.1 Needs theory and humanistic management: an emerging discourse

The NT and HM research stream is an emerging discourse showing limited studies, characterized by a limited number of studies, with two out of three papers published recently (2024), reflecting a growing interdisciplinary interest in economics and business management (e.g. *Journal of Business Ethics* and the *Journal of Institutional Economics*). As visualized by the three clusters of co-occurring keywords (Figure 1 and Table 1), centered around the anchor words “Need,” “Needs Theory” and “Maslow hierarchy,” this literature fundamentally challenges mainstream economic, business management and education theories. It advocates for a shift toward a holistic, ethics-based approach to fulfilling needs, with applications across various sectors.

*Cluster 1 (Red)* blends economic and psychological drivers in strategic management. This cluster connects economic terms such as “Transaction Cost Theory,” “firm” and “governance” with psychological terms such as “Maslow,” “self-actualization” and “opportunity.” It highlights a tension between market efficiency in addressing needs and the broader humanistic imperative to incorporate individual fulfillment and motivation into strategic decision-making (Sacchetti and Tortia, 2024). This perspective highlights potential connections between organizational success and individual fulfillment, development and motivation. In *Cluster 2 (Blue)*, NT is linked to ethical and motivational foundations in business and education. The link to moral considerations and both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggests a focus on business education, fostering ethical

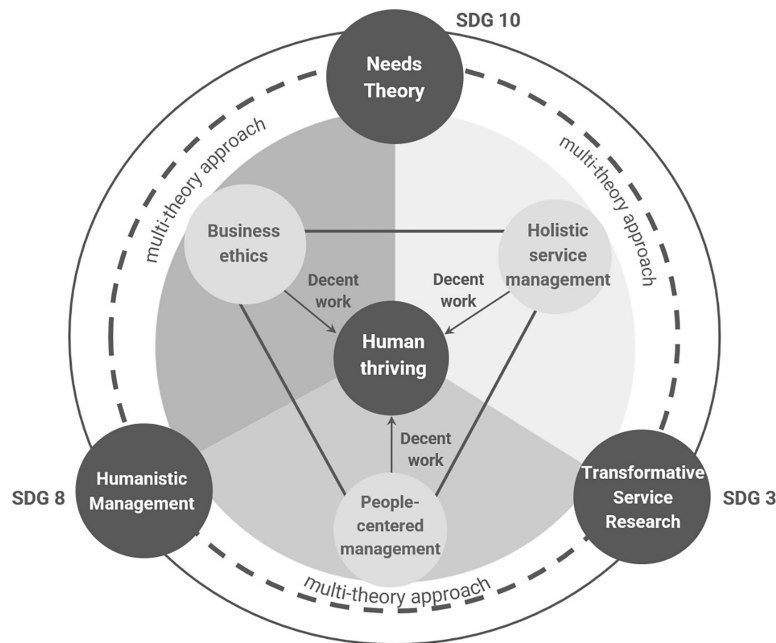
managerial and leadership training programs that enhance engagement and drive individual and organizational learning and development. Finally, *Cluster 3 (Green)* highlights Maslow’s hierarchy in socio-environmental contexts. This cluster connects Maslow’s framework to broader societal concerns and sustainable development, where environmental changes and societal trends directly influence need fulfillment and well-being. Prominent themes include health and agriculture, reflecting concerns about sustainability, food security and public well-being (Tian et al., 2024).

#### 4.2 Needs theory and transformative service research: a niche discourse

The NT and TSR research stream remains niche, showing gradual growth over the past 25 years (2000–2025) and reflecting fluctuating academic interest primarily from service research. The co-occurrence clusters (Figure 2 and Table 2) indicate limited integration between NT and TSR in existing literature. The prevailing perspective emphasizes a supply-side view, linking workplace social environment, job satisfaction and employee retention and well-being. However, emerging discussions on a hierarchy of needs in relation to service experience and loyalty present opportunities for exploring the connection between service delivery methods and consumer behavior from an ecosystem perspective.

*Cluster 1 (Blue)* focuses on work and social needs in service professions, particularly in the hospitality sector (Chan et al., 2025). Work-related themes such as “social need,” “role” and “turnover intention” suggest a strong link between employment

**Figure 4** Multitheoretical framework for human thriving



Source: Authors' work

conditions, social well-being and job retention. Providing a sense of purpose and belonging, job roles and work environments that fulfill social needs can reduce turnover, particularly in high-turnover industries like hospitality. *Cluster 2 (Green)* centers employee job satisfaction and retention strategies (Pantouvakis et al., 2024). Framing strategies through ERG theory, this cluster underscores the importance of workplace environments that accommodate diverse employee needs and respect cultural differences to support well-being and retention (Pantouvakis et al., 2024). Terms like “social environment” and “team cohesion” emphasize the prominent role of relatedness in fostering motivating workplaces. Finally, *Cluster 3 (Red)* connects Maslow’s hierarchy of Needs to customer loyalty in the service sector (Nakamura and Kameoka, 2007). It suggests that aligning “service types” with higher-order “psychological needs” (e.g. self-actualization and belonging) can influence service preferences and customer loyalty. “Travel motivation” highlights tourism as a sector deeply engaged in fulfilling fundamental human needs (Huang and Hsu, 2009).

#### 4.3 Humanistic management and transformative service research: a growing discourse

The HM and TSR research exhibits greater maturity, with publications starting from 1981 and growing steadily to 48 articles by 2025, though with some annual irregularity. Contributions blend business management and service research across diverse themes. The co-occurrence clusters (Figure 3 and Table 3) indicate a growing recognition of human-centered perspectives in service and business management. This discourse introduces fundamental pillars such as dignity, respect, ethics and leadership to foster multiscale effects, from decent work

conditions and business innovation to societal well-being through the provision of goods and services (Figure 3 and Table 3).

*Cluster 1 (Violet)* captures the growing prominence of humanistic principles in service organizations, where the strong connection between “approach” and “dignity” suggests services extend beyond mere transactions (Kabadayi et al., 2023). “Service organizations” prioritizing dignity foster meaningful relationships with both employees and customers, enhancing individual and collective well-being and driving transformative shifts, particularly in dignity-sensitive industries like healthcare, education and tourism (Balakrishnan, 1999). *Cluster 2 (Green)* focuses on the ethical and societal dimensions of need fulfillment. Business practices and leadership must account for ethical responsibilities when addressing societal needs (Douglas, 2004), encompassing issues like exclusion, discrimination and environmental harm (Nicolaidis, 2018), thus impacting broader sustainable development.

*Cluster 3 (Blue)* highlights CSR’s role in building trust and commitment in business and social environments (Melé, 2011). The strong link between “relationships” and “CSR” underscores how social and ethical norms build trust with both internal and external stakeholders (Rivera, 2023), positioning businesses as social changemakers, deeply integrated with - rather than separate from - the community they serve. *Cluster 4 (Yellow)* links HM principles with innovation and social entrepreneurship, highlighting their role in addressing social challenges and driving positive change (Lovins, 2016; Pirson et al., 2019). Terms like “social entrepreneurship” and “sports club” signal innovative business models that generate both economic and social value, fostering community engagement and inclusive practices promoting sustainability (Kabadayi et al., 2019; Zhang, 2015). Finally, *Cluster 5 (Red)* examines how workplace environments affect employee well-being, where employees seek purpose, community and ethical alignment

(Dierksmeier, 2016). “Spirituality” in the workplace indicates a deeper exploration of individual well-being affecting employee engagement and overall job satisfaction (Haldorai et al., 2019), highlighting the inseparable relationship between organizational progress and employee well-being.

#### 4.4 The multitheory discourse

The thematic content analysis identified crucial conceptual linkages and emergent patterns among these three distinct streams in the context of business and service management (Table 4). The NT–HM stream highlights the need for ethics-based frameworks in business management. The first thematic category, “ethical strategic decision-making,” highlights the importance of aligning organizational goals with ethical principles. Establishing inclusive governance mechanisms integrates diverse voices into collective decision-making, recognizing employees’ value and respecting their autonomy (Sacchetti and Tortia, 2024). Treating employees with respect and protecting their dignity promotes fairness, enhances psychological safety and strengthens social relatedness. Such ethical premises contribute to individual well-being, reduce opportunistic behavior and foster the common good, supporting human flourishing across organizational scales. Furthermore, the category of “ethical societal decision-making” reflects how organizations can extend ethical frameworks beyond the firm to affect broader societal outcomes, acting as open communities that build interpersonal connections and cultivate belonging. This values-driven approach prioritizes human goals over solely financial assets, strengthening the link between humanistic strategies and organizational effectiveness by recognizing individuals as purpose-driven beings with multiple dimensions (Acevedo, 2015).

The NT–TSR stream emphasizes *holistic service management* principles, focusing on workplace dynamics and customer relationships (Table 4). The first thematic category, “fulfilling workplace dynamics”, highlights key factors for creating a supportive workplace environment fostering self-actualization. Empowerment (Schepers and Streukens, 2022) nurtures a sense of purpose and value, driving employee motivation and commitment to excellence. Work–life balance (Smith, 2010) promotes ethical job outcomes and long-term engagement. In addition, a sense of relatedness, fostered through belonging and collaboration, is essential for positive work environments, extending to employee interactions with customers (Hoang et al., 2022). Authentic, trust-based customer engagement enhances service experiences while shaping employee perceptions of their workplace (Guo and Ayoun, 2023). Strictly connected, the thematic category of “needs satisfaction through service delivery” reflects the complexity of human needs in service encounters, emphasizing that aligning service provision with employee and customer expectations is crucial (Zainuddin and Gordon, 2020). This shift from transactional to relational models drives both individual growth and organizational success (Chan et al., 2025; Pantouvakis et al., 2024).

Finally, the HM–TSR stream focuses on *people-centered management*, integrating humanistic principles within the service relationship framework. The category of “humanistic service organizations” highlights the defining traits. Transformational leadership upholds employee dignity and intrinsic value, aligning strategies with ethical values and social

responsibility. These organizations prioritize people over profit, promoting diverse, forward-thinking practices (Colbert et al., 2018). Beyond delivering high-quality services, they foster relatedness and belonging through ethical and meaningful interpersonal connections within the organization and the broader community. These enterprises emphasize conscious social value creation, addressing societal needs through responsible entrepreneurial activities. As a result, these organizations are seen as communities creating ethical, values-based and meaningful environments that strengthen social bonds with employees and customers. A workplace upholding fairness and dignity – including diversity, equity, health, safety, equality and personal growth – promotes appreciation for contributions (Nicolaidis, 2018), enhances self-worth, expands skills and supports personal growth. This shapes a human-centered business culture prioritizing well-being and positive interpersonal relationships. The second category, “humanistic management and innovation in social entrepreneurship,” illustrates how values-based approaches promote social innovation (Lovins, 2016). Social entrepreneurship, as a business solution, upholds ethical standards while addressing social challenges. It addresses employees’ social needs (Guo and Ayoun, 2023), work environment and social fit (Pantouvakis et al., 2024). Achieving these requires a strong foundation in humanistic education, enhancing critical thinking and ethical leadership (Waddock, 2016) to make socially conscious decisions and encourage human and social development across service organizations and ecosystems.

## 5. A multitheoretical framework for human thriving in business and service contexts

The key conceptual linkages among NT, HM and TSR (Table 4) – business ethics, holistic service management and people-centered management – are integrated into a novel multitheoretical framework for human thriving (Figure 4). This framework achieves interdisciplinary and multilevel integration by explicitly considering each stream’s distinct domain and inherent primary and extended analytical focus. It synergizes modern NT’s psychological perspectives on human motivation and behavior (Deci and Ryan, 2000), HM’s ethical organizational practices and policies (Pirson, 2017) and TSR’s well-being and social change concerns (Anderson et al., 2013). These synergies contribute to transformative outcomes and the advancement of primary SDGs (3, 8 and 10). Based on the framework’s conceptual linkages, we have formulated specific, testable propositions (Frow et al., 2019) designed to generate theoretically generative outcomes (Tranfield et al., 2003) and advance conceptual development (Snyder, 2019) on human thriving.

The core premise of our framework posits that human thriving is fostered by organizations and service ecosystems designed with human-centered and values-based principles that actively support fundamental human needs and societal well-being. Business ethics emerges as the central construct from the intersection of NT and HM. This linkage primarily connects human motivation and behavior (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Gagné and Deci, 2005) with ethical organizational practices and policies (Pirson, 2017). While modern needs theories like SDT are widely applied in organizational contexts

(Gagné and Deci, 2005; Ryan and Deci, 2017), HM explicitly prioritizes human dignity as foundational to business ethics and leadership, guiding goals, decisions and practices (Dierksmeier, 2015; Mea and Sims, 2019). This ethical foundation supports psychological need fulfillment (e.g. autonomy, competence and relatedness, as per SDT; Deci and Ryan, 2000), central to NT. Here, *decent work* becomes crucial for personal thriving, intrinsically linking individuals' intrinsic value and potential to organizational practices that foster supportive work environments, thereby satisfying different needs and enhancing employee well-being (Che et al., 2022).

This business ethics perspective directly addresses sustainability issues stemming from global crises, strongly connecting to SDG 8 (inclusive and sustainable economic development, employment and decent work) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) (Hackl, 2018). The dominant neoliberal capitalist paradigm, driven by profit, has exposed exploitative labor practices (e.g. low wages and precarious employment), inequitable power dynamics (e.g. limited career advancement opportunities and work-life imbalances) and systemic injustices (e.g. prejudice, discrimination, insufficient inclusion mechanisms and inadequate equality). Across global value chains, social and environmental discrimination disproportionately harms low-income and marginalized groups (e.g. by class, gender or ethnicity), undermining human dignity and fueling broader societal harm (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). By advocating a values-based perspective, organizations can counteract these trends, upholding human dignity and meeting fundamental needs:

P1. Organizations that institutionalize humanistic values in managerial practice are more likely to foster environments conducive to decent work, thereby positively influencing the fulfillment of employees' fundamental needs and contributing to overall inclusion and equality.

*Holistic service management* emerges as a pivotal construct from the intersection of NT and TSR. This linkage critically emphasizes meaningful, multiscale and multipurpose engagement of individuals and groups in service design and implementation to enhance well-being (Anderson et al., 2013) and alleviate vulnerability (Fisk et al., 2018). While well-being is TSR's key desired outcome, this integrated construct highlights the need for people's empowerment and active participation in value co-creation – a crucial, yet still developing, area within TSR scholarship (Keränen and Olkkonen, 2022), particularly for vulnerable individuals and groups. The transformative aspect of TSR relies on genuine improvements in people's self-actualization and inclusion (Fisk et al., 2018), achieved by reducing structural barriers, power dynamics and social inequalities in transformative services participation. If interactions within the service ecosystem are undermined or neglected, services' transformative potential diminishes.

Service interventions within this holistic approach proactively promote access and participation in both service provision and delivery (supply and demand sides) (Blocker and Barrios, 2015). Reducing social barriers and individual constraints (Garrod and Fennell, 2021) effectively addresses deficits in human need fulfillment (Deci and Ryan, 2000). This is mirrored in positive emotional states, empowered decision-

making and meaningful social interaction, fostering fairness and inclusion. Enabling open interaction and collaboration within transformative service ecosystems facilitates co-creation for collective benefits and ensures services support human purpose and happiness (Diener et al., 1999; Sen, 1999). In service organizations, such conditions, valuing individual contribution and equitable participation in all organization-related processes, are reflected in *decent work*, a manifestation of an environment where individuals find purpose and thrive in their engagement within the service system (Che et al., 2022), translating into enhanced service quality and delivery.

Ultimately, holistic service management yields more equitable and inclusive outcomes (Andreassen et al., 2016), leading to a broader distribution of need satisfaction (Deci and Ryan, 2000) across diverse populations. This closely aligns with SDG 3 (well-being for all) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), ensuring no individual or group is marginalized in the pursuit of well-being and shared prosperity through active service ecosystem participation (Caridà et al., 2024; Winchenbach et al., 2019):

P2. Holistic transformative service design and implementation are more likely to enhance direct engagement in value co-creation, e.g. through decent work, thereby achieving greater reductions in social disparities and improving overall well-being for diverse user groups.

Finally, *people-centered management* is the overarching construct emerging from the intersection of HM and TSR. This conceptual linkage integrates humanistic, values-based principles (Pirson, 2017) within interactive and inclusive transformative service ecosystems (Anderson et al., 2013). HM's ethical foundations ground TSR's efforts for societal well-being in people-centered management, ensuring that service businesses and ecosystems make individuals active participants in their own thriving by prioritizing human dignity, empowerment, development and full and meaningful engagement (Che et al., 2022; Dyck, 2020; Melé, 2016). This link makes interventions more effective and sustainable in terms of equity and inclusion (Pirson and Lawrence, 2010; Spitzack, 2011), actively addressing injustice, inequalities and exclusion. Ultimately, people-centric management underscores the direct connection between achieving full and productive employment and ensuring decent work (SDG 8) and actively promoting well-being (SDG 3) across diverse social and economic contexts:

P3. The integration of human-centered and values-based principles into service businesses and ecosystems is more likely to effectively promote human dignity, empowerment and inclusion, thereby mitigating inequalities and fostering holistic well-being among all stakeholders.

In conclusion, our multitheoretical framework enhances understanding of the complex dynamics fostering human thriving, highlighting the critical role of human dignity as a common, emergent pattern connecting individual, organizational and societal dynamics, with decent work as a key conduit (Pirson, 2017). Decent work functions as a vital mediating construct linking the fulfillment of intrinsic human

needs (Alderfer, 1969; Deci and Ryan, 2000), the protection of dignity in organizations (Melé, 2016) and improvements in well-being (Anderson et al., 2013). Crucially, this mediation is partial rather than full – additional individual and organizational factors, as well as social mechanisms and norms, also channel (or block) the positive effects of decent work on human thriving at different levels (Anderson et al., 2013; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016).

At the individual level, later NT (Alderfer, 1969; Deci and Ryan, 2000) recognize the workplace as a critical environment for individual well-being, with decent work creating opportunities for personal growth, competence, autonomy and relatedness (Alderfer, 1969; Deci and Ryan, 2000; Che et al., 2022). However, the pathway to full thriving remains constrained when basic physiological or safety needs are insecure, or when essential relational needs, such as stable social connections and a sense of belonging, are unmet (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Wahba and Bridwell, 1976). These constraints are particularly evident in service contexts and among marginalized or economically disadvantaged groups, where employment precarity (e.g. variable hours, low control and income volatility), demanding customer-facing roles (e.g. emotional labor and conflict exposure) and pressures tied to self-actualization simultaneously undermine safety and erode social connection (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Zientara et al., 2024).

At the organizational level, decent work provides dignity-protecting conditions (respect, participation, rights), autonomy support and meaningful activity that energize intrinsic motivation, thereby mediating the link between organizational practices and employee thriving (Melé, 2016; Pirson, 2017). However, thriving in the workplace is co-constructed through additional organizational and institutional factors. Enduring leadership quality, a prosocial and just culture and opportunities for high-quality connections (Dutton and Ragins, 2007; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016; Pirson, 2017; Pirson and Turnbull, 2011) help shaping institutional trust, mutual respect and psychological safety. Still, institutionalized care can clash with individual autonomy. When regulative (e.g. rules and monitoring), normative (e.g. duty-of-care expectations) and cognitive (e.g. taken-for-granted beliefs about organizational care) elements lean paternalistic norms, employees may interpret care as control, crowding out autonomy, dampening motivation and reducing discretion and voice. In such cases, decent work mediates partially because leadership, culture, relational quality and cognitive alignment condition whether its practices are internalized as legitimate and self-affirming (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Palthe, 2014).

Finally, at the societal level, decent work protects dignity, builds capabilities and supplies secure income and voice, mechanisms through which organizational practices indirectly contribute to societal thriving. Yet, this translation depends on service-ecosystem institutions that structure resource integration at scale (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016). Where norms and rules are marked by unfairness and inequality, dignity signals are discounted, opportunities are uneven and discrimination and frustration trigger needs regression, eroding gains that decent work would otherwise deliver (Che et al., 2022; McCrudden, 2014). Accordingly, decent work is necessary but insufficient at the societal level. Inclusive institutions and norms, such as equal access to public goods and antidiscrimination enforcement, are required for its effects

to generalize into societal thriving (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016):

- P4. Within service businesses and ecosystems, decent work is a multilevel integrating construct and a necessary, but insufficient, mediator of holistic human thriving at the individual, organizational and societal levels.

## 6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the urgent discourse on how reconfiguring service businesses and ecosystems can foster just, inclusive and transformative outcomes that genuinely promote human development and thriving (Fisk et al., 2018; Raciti et al., 2023). It offers a novel interdisciplinary understanding of human thriving from a human-centered and values-based perspective (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015; Rosenbaum et al., 2017). By explicitly addressing psychological, ethical and societal well-being, the original combination of NT (Deci and Ryan, 2000), HM (Pirson, 2017) and TSR (Anderson et al., 2013) represents an underdeveloped research area in service literature. Despite their relative isolation and emerging nature compared to dominant service paradigms, their growing influence and theoretical potential justify scholarly attention for the future of service and business ethics research (Keating et al., 2024).

Building upon a systematic review and bibliometric and thematic content analyses, our multitheory analysis showed varying degrees of development across streams' intersections. The NT–HM stream is an emerging discourse challenging mainstream theories, advocating for a shift toward business ethics when pursuing both business and social goals. The NT–TSR stream remains relatively niche, emphasizing holistic service management and positive work environments. The HM–TSR stream shows greater maturity, focusing on people-centered management within the service ecosystem.

The study's primary theoretical contribution is the unique interdisciplinary synthesis of these three streams. Our novel multitheoretical framework spanning their diverse disciplinary boundaries and multilevel *foci*, offers an exploratory, nuanced understanding of human thriving in business and service contexts across individual, organizational and societal analytical tiers. A key novelty is the proposal of decent work (Pirson, 2017) as a multilevel, partial mediator. It prioritizes human dignity as a fundamental need (Alderfer, 1969; Deci and Ryan, 2000), is nurtured by ethical, inclusive and people-centered environments (Melé, 2016) and fosters diversity, inclusion and care, promoting growth and social well-being (Anderson et al., 2013). Its effects on human thriving depend on complementary enablers at individual, organizational and societal levels (Dutton and Ragins, 2007; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016; Palthe, 2014). At the individual level, decent work's effect strengthens when basic needs are secured and relational needs are fulfilled and, at the organizational level, when leadership, culture and high-quality connections create psychological safety and mutual respect along with institutional dimensions that legitimate dignity and autonomy. Inclusive institutions and norms are required for these effects to generalize into societal thriving. The formulated, testable propositions (Frow et al., 2019), directly derived from the framework's conceptual linkages, provide a robust basis for

future theoretical development and empirical testing (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003) in service and business ethics. Through the mediating pathway of decent work, these propositions connect human motivation, ethical organizational practices and well-being concerns, contributing to transformative outcomes and the advancement of primary SDGs.

The proposed framework and propositions offer preliminary actionable insights for managers and policymakers striving to lead purpose-driven organizations and implement processes impacting human thriving (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2017). *First*, the framework urges a strategic imperative to adopt a human-centered, values-based paradigm in business management and service ecosystem, recognizing human dignity as a strategic asset. Transformational leadership must guide managers to institutionalize humanistic values (Proposition 1), translating them into concrete practices that foster dignified and decent work environments. This includes ensuring rights and fair wages, realizing their full potential across personal and professional life and proactively dismantling inequalities within the workplace. *Second*, by advocating for holistic transformative service design and implementation (Proposition 2), the framework emphasizes active stakeholder empowerment and engagement in service management. Reducing structural barriers and promoting equitable access and participation are key to enhancing well-being and alleviating vulnerability. *Third*, the integration of human-centered and values-based principles into service businesses and ecosystems (Proposition 3) can positively mediate between individual thriving and broader societal impact. By combining humanistic principles with transformative service goals, managers can cultivate service environments that prioritize respect and inclusion, contributing directly to sustainable organizational success and global goals. Finally, the framework emphasizes investment in decent work (Proposition 4) as a comprehensive, but partial, pathway for human thriving that yields returns in employee well-being, service quality and societal impact. Managers and policymakers should monitor boundary conditions that strengthen or weaken this mediation. Accordingly, evaluations of human thriving in service contexts should integrate indicators of psychological need satisfaction, adherence to dignity and tangible quality of life outcomes.

Our framework is preliminary and requires future development. Our results build on a limited sample of 68 contributions reflecting the emerging and still unexplored nature of this research stream. This small evidence base poses a clear limitation, thus future research is required to extend and validate the conclusions of the current study. Theoretically, further work should delve deeper into the interactions between NT, HM and TSR; their mutual influence; and the potential to integrate diverse conceptual and paradigmatic constructions into a coherent whole. Empirically, priority should be given to testing our propositions across diverse service contexts and industries, especially concerning decent work as a partial mediating construct. This includes quantitative studies to assess proposed relationships and qualitative research to unpack mechanisms through which dignity (disrespect) and decent (indecent) work enable (hinder) human thriving. Particular attention is warranted to tensions between autonomy (NT) and institutionalized care (TSR) and to cross-level

dynamics linking organizational practices and changes to individual need satisfaction and societal well-being. Cross-cultural studies and longitudinal studies, particularly in polarized settings (e.g. developing vs developed countries, capitalistic vs noncapitalistic societies, top-down vs bottom-up governance and pyramidal vs horizontal organizational structures), are encouraged to enrich understanding of human thriving in a globalized world and track long-term effects. Shedding light on these aspects will not only validate and refine the framework but also advance scholarship on human thriving, contributing to creating livable futures, supporting SDGs and enhancing their interconnections across multiple levels.

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### Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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