
DIGNITY & AGENCY AUDIT

Dignity & Agency

AUDIT

Intent versus reality: What your leadership actually promotes when the pressure is on.

Most leaders believe in their people. That is not the question. The question is what your behaviour says when the results dip and the timeline shortens, because your people cannot read your intent. They can only read what you do.

STEP ONE

SCORE YOURSELF TWICE

Score each of the eight statements below from 1 to 5, where 1 means rarely true of me and 5 means consistently true of me. Score every statement twice. First for an ordinary week. Then, honestly, for the last time you were under real pressure: a deadline slipping, a number missed, a board getting nervous. If you want the truth rather than the comfortable version, ask two people on your team to score you as well and compare.

STATEMENT (SCORE EACH 1 TO 5)	A CALM WEEK	UNDER PRESSURE
D1. When someone gets it wrong, I treat it as a problem to solve, not as evidence about the person.		
D2. People get my full attention when they speak. No phone, no drafting my reply while they talk.		
D3. Credit, challenge and opportunity are distributed on merit, not on status or similarity to me.		
D4. My planning respects people's time and their lives outside work. Notice is given, last minute changes are rare.		
DIGNITY TOTAL (add D1 to D4, out of 20)		

STATEMENT (SCORE EACH 1 TO 5)	A CALM WEEK	UNDER PRESSURE
A1. People know which decisions are genuinely theirs to make, without seeking ritual permission.		
A2. When I delegate something, the person has the information, resources and capability to actually own it.		
A3. People can disagree with me openly without paying a price in status or standing.		
A4. Accountability in my team attaches to commitments and outcomes, not to obedience or visible busyness.		
AGENCY TOTAL (add A1 to A4, out of 20)		

STEP TWO

FIND YOUR QUADRANT

Add your four Dignity statements for a total out of 20, and your four Agency statements for a total out of 20. Do it for each column, so you finish with four totals: Dignity and Agency on a calm week, Dignity and Agency under pressure.

Then apply one simple line. A total of 13 or more is HIGH. A total of 12 or below is LOW. Your two totals give you your quadrant:

DIGNITY TOOL	AGENCY TOOL	YOUR QUADRANT
HIGH (13 to 20)	HIGH (13 to 20)	Adult to adult
HIGH (13 to 20)	LOW (4 to 12)	Benevolent paternalism
LOW (4 to 12)	HIGH (13 to 20)	Abandonment
LOW (4 to 12)	LOW (4 to 12)	Instrumental control

Worked example: your calm week totals are Dignity 16 and Agency 11. That is high dignity with low agency, so your calm week mark goes in Benevolent paternalism. Your under pressure totals are Dignity 12 and Agency 9. Both low, so your pressure mark goes in Instrumental control. The move between those two boxes is your finding.

If a total lands on 12 or 13, you are sitting right on the line, and the honest reading is that pressure decides which side of it your people experience.

STEP THREE

MARK YOURSELF ON THE GRID

Find the quadrant your calm week totals put you in and mark the Calm week box. Then find the quadrant your under pressure totals put you in and mark the Under pressure box. Many leaders land in different quadrants, and that movement is the most important thing this audit will show you.

BENEVOLENT PATERNALISM (DIGNITY HIGH, AGENCY LOW)	ADULT TO ADULT (DIGNITY HIGH, AGENCY HIGH)
<i>People are cared for but never trusted with a decision that matters. Warm, and it keeps people small.</i> ☐ CALM WEEK ☐ UNDER PRESSURE	<i>Worth is never in question. Real room to contribute inside clear purpose and honest accountability. This is where performance compounds.</i> ☐ CALM WEEK ☐ UNDER PRESSURE
INSTRUMENTAL CONTROL (DIGNITY LOW, AGENCY LOW)	ABANDONMENT (DIGNITY LOW, AGENCY HIGH)
<i>People as units of output. Low respect, low voice, narrow compliance. Performance here must be extracted, and the extracting never stops.</i> ☐ CALM WEEK ☐ UNDER PRESSURE	<i>Responsibility handed down without protection, resources or support. 'You own it' turns out to mean 'you are on your own.'</i> ☐ CALM WEEK ☐ UNDER PRESSURE

STEP FOUR

READ THE HINTS FOR WHERE YOU LANDED

Go to the quadrant where your under pressure mark sits. That is the version of you your people plan around, so that is where the work starts.

If you landed in Adult to adult (Dignity high, Agency high)

- Your job now is protection, not improvement. Decide in advance which decisions stay delegated even in a crisis, and tell your team you have decided.
- Keep one voice channel that never closes: the meeting that never gets cancelled, the question that always gets asked. Pressure will come for it first.
- Watch for drift rather than collapse. High performers rarely fall off this quadrant in one move. They slide, one reclaimed decision at a time.

If you landed in Benevolent paternalism (Dignity high, Agency low)

- Hand over one real decision this month, with clear boundaries, and then do not take it back when it wobbles. Rescue feels like care. It teaches people they cannot be trusted.
- Give people the information that goes with the responsibility: the numbers, the constraints, the context. Delegation without information is ceremonial.
- Replace answers with questions. When someone brings you a problem, ask what they would do before you tell them what you would do. Then, wherever you can, back their call.

If you landed in Abandonment (Dignity low, Agency high)

- Check the scaffolding before you check the person. Does everyone who owns something have the capability, resources and time to actually own it? If not, the gap is yours to close.
- Make asking for help free. If requesting support costs people status in your team, they will drown politely rather than raise a hand.
- Reconnect contribution to worth. Notice effort and judgement out loud, not just outcomes. 'You own it' should feel like trust, never like distance.

If you landed in Instrumental control (Dignity low, Agency low)

- Start with owed respect, this week: full attention when people speak, no last minute changes you could have avoided, and no result treated as a verdict on a person.
- In your next review conversation, deliberately separate the problem from the person. Solve the problem hard. Leave their worth out of it entirely. Watch what it does to the room.
- Open one genuine voice channel and protect whoever uses it first. The first person to bring you bad news early is testing whether the change is real. Do not fail the test.

Find the single statement with the biggest gap between your calm week and under pressure scores. Decide now, before the next pressure arrives, what you will protect when it does. Write it down in one sentence. Then tell your team, because a commitment they have heard is far harder to abandon than one you made privately.