

## Preserving Dignity in the Face of Dismissal: How Outplacement Services Shape Affective Experiences

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand whether offering an outplacement service at the time of dismissal influences the perception of dignity in dismissal, considering dimensions such as respect, empathy, anger, complaints, and legal actions, as well as how it influences the affects (positive and negative) felt by dismissed employees. In addition, possible differences were studied considering demographic characteristics. To analyze these hypotheses, this study used a quasi-experimental design through an online questionnaire where participants had to watch a video simulating a dismissal process (with or without the offer of outplacement) and answer to the PANAS-VRP Scale to assess positive and negative affect, and the Dignity in Dismissal Scale, where they were placed in the role of the dismissed employee. The sample consisted of 448 participants. The results suggest significant differences in all dimensions, with dismissal experiences with the offer of outplacement services showing higher scores of respect, anger, and legal action, as well as positive affect. The results contradict the existing limited literature, and it is therefore recommended that future research explore in greater detail the impact of offering outplacement services on all stakeholders, particularly in the emotional and behavioral dimensions of the dismissed employees.

**Keywords:** Outplacement, Dignity in Dismissal, Positive and Negative Affects; Dismissal

### INTRODUCTION

The life cycle of employees in the labor market begins with the attraction process and ends with the offboarding (Gladka et al., 2022; Verive & DeLay, 2006). This offboarding process can be voluntary—termination of the employment contract by the employee—or involuntary—dismissal by the employer (Diário da República, 2024a). Involuntary offboarding can be individual or collective. If it is individual, it can occur in different ways: dismissal for reasons attributable to the employee; dismissal due to job termination; and dismissal due to unsuitability. (DataLABOR, 2022; Diário da República, 2024b). On the other hand, if it is collective, it is called collective dismissal, and an example of this type of dismissal is well known downsizing (DataLABOR, 2022; Diário da República, 2024b).

In the work setting, dismissal processes and other human resource management practices are regular occurrences. For example, in 2023, approximately 3,600 workers were dismissed in Portugal in a collective dismissal process (Dgert, 2024). Although dismissal is quite common in the labor market, little is known about its effects on workers, as few studies have explored the topic of dismissal in depth, including dismissal management (Boselie et al., 2005).

Despite the lack of theoretical and empirical knowledge on this topic, there seems to be a consensus that the dismissal process leads to psychological, emotional, and physical problems in dismissed employees (e.g., Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Little, 1976; Vinokur et al., 1987; Yasar & Turgut, 2020). To combat the incidence of these problems, organizations can use strategies that aim to minimize the psychological distress of employees and maximize the possibility of effective reemployment in the labor market, using outplacement services (Feldman, 1994). Outplacement services consist of offering reemployment services that include individual counseling and job search activities, with the main goal of helping laid-off employees find a new job (Doherty et al., 1993).

This study aims to understand whether offering an outplacement service during the dismissal process influences the perception of dignity in the face of dismissal, which includes respect, empathy, anger, complaints, and legal action. Additionally, it also aims to assess the positive and negative affects after the dismissal process, and whether these vary depending on the provision of outplacement services. Furthermore, we also aim to understand, in an exploratory manner, whether the perception of dignity in dismissal and positive and negative affects vary according to a set of demographic variables, namely gender, educational qualifications, and age.

To address these goals, this study presents a quasi-experimental design in which participants are invited to watch a video simulating a dismissal process (with or without the offer of outplacement), after which they must put themselves in the shoes of the employee being dismissed in order to answer a set of questions aimed at analyzing their perception of dignity in dismissal and their positive and negative affects.

This study allows us to assess the pivotal role of outplacement services during the dismissal process, as well as contributing to the literature on the relationship between perceptions of dignity, affects, and outplacement in contexts of involuntary dismissal.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Dismissal Process and Legal Issues

When the offboarding process is involuntary, it can occur individually or collectively. There are already some studies on the consequences of dismissal processes which concluded that it leads to an increased risk of mental health problems, such as increased depression and anxiety (e.g., Little, 1976; Vinokur et al., 1987; Yasar & Turgut, 2020), problems with self-esteem, self-care, concentration, procrastination, insomnia, loss of appetite, and well-being, and can even lead to problems with alcoholism, illicit substance abuse, and suicide (e.g. Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

Although there are already studies about dismissal, there is still a scarcity of literature, making this area neglected within human resources management topics. One reason that may explain this fact is that the dismissal process is considered the dark side of human resources management practices, since leaders must make difficult decisions during this process and must know how to act to avoid embarrassment for the dismissed employee (Boselie et al., 2005; Bunker & Wakefield, 2010; Wilkinson, 2005). On the other hand, it may also be due to the idea that the dismissal process is an isolated and unpleasant element, and as such should be carried out quickly and then forgotten (Wilkinson, 2005). However, in recent years, the dismissal process has been a central piece of human resource management practice, and as such, there must be effective management of dismissal, and it may be useful to offer outplacement services (Wilkinson, 2005).

### Best Practices in the Dismissal Process

To safeguard the dignity of employees during dismissal processes, there are strategies that can be adopted, divided into two dimensions: protective strategies, which are policies and processes that protect employees against threats to their dignity; and proactive strategies, which concern practices and behaviors that promote and cultivate dignity at work (Groves et al., 2024).

The protective strategies that leaders and organizations should adopt in the dismissal process are as follows: 1) treat employees as human beings, actively involving them in the process to create the idea that their opinions are valued; 2) organizations should offer training programs to individuals who lay off employees so that they can develop a caring and supportive discourse towards laid-off employees, allowing them to recognize the emotions felt by employees (e.g., guilt, anger, anxiety), using, for example, role-plays and simulations; 3) give laid-off employees time and space to process the situation; 4) Provide resources that promote re-employment in the labor market (e.g. outplacement); 5) Communicate the situation in person to prevent employees from feeling disposable and ensure that they feel valued and respected, using authentic language and sharing feedback (Groves et al., 2024).

According to Feldman (1994), other important strategies during the dismissal process include honest, direct, and empathetic communication from the individual doing the dismissing to the dismissed employee, the offer of financial assistance programs that include benefits, and the offer of outplacement programs to help with re-entry into the job market.

## Outplacement

The outplacement process consists of providing support for professional transition after dismissal. This service is provided by a company specializing in this area and is financially supported by the company that dismissed the employee (Alewell, & Hauff, 2013; Parente & Rocha, 2017). Thus, outplacement is a process involving three parties: the company that dismisses, the dismissed employee, and the company that provides the service. (Parente & Rocha, 2017).

Outplacement aims to facilitate the professional transition of dismissed employees, and this goal is achieved by providing practical and psychological support (Doherty, 1998). It is not restricted to re-employment in the labor market but also includes components of preparation for retirement and entrepreneurship for individuals who wish to start their own business. (e.g., Broderick, 1996; Donnelly, 1983; Fedenia, 2001; Tani et al., 2016).

Over the years, outplacement has gained credibility, leading to its increased implementation and becoming an integral part of human resource management strategy, more specifically in the management of dismissals (Doherty, 1998). In this line Mercer (2024) found that 44% of organizations in Canada and the United States offer outplacement services to employees who are dismissed from their organizations. (Butz, 2024). However, there are some doubts about the effectiveness of outplacement services, since this service does not always lead to re-employment in the labor market (Martin & Lekan, 2008a). Despite this, it has been found that it is possible to design comprehensive outplacement programs that have a positive impact on the re-employment of laid-off employees (Feldman, 1994). However, for this service to be effective, it cannot be short-term and cannot focus on isolated parts of the job search process because all aspects are equally important in providing support for re-employment in the labor market, namely: skills assessment, job search skills training, and the provision of job search support services (Feldman, 1994). According to Martin and Lekan (2008a), it is also important to consider the personality traits of laid-off employees because it enables an understanding of the success of reemployment.

From another perspective, any outplacement intervention should contain three essential elements: psychological support, training, and personal guidance. Psychological support is necessary to help dismissed employees deal with the dismissal process, including their emotions and affects. Training serves to improve the candidate's profile in relation to the market and the role they wish to perform, using different methods (e.g., video simulation, group discussions). Finally, personal guidance is provided by an outplacement consultant and has two main goals: to show empathy by serving as a source of support for the employee; and to outline a path that the employee should follow, taking into account their personal needs. (De Witte et al., 2005).

The benefits for employees include facilitating their re-entry into the job market, avoiding undesirable consequences for mental health (e.g., depression), fostering more positive attitudes toward dismissal, increasing self-efficacy and self-confidence in job searches, reducing the psychological and social effects of dismissal, providing a source of support and emotional balance, and enables employee self-awareness (e.g., Caplan et al., 1989; Davy et al., 1995; De Witte et al., 2005; Gandolfi & Hansson, 2015; Parente & Rocha, 2017; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987; Westaby, 2004). Outplacement also improves perceptions of well-being and prospects, as well as increasing job search activities. (Marzucco & Hansez, 2016).

## Dignity in Dismissal

Dignity in dismissal process refers to the employee's perception that their dismissal was fair and ethical, which prevents negative feelings (e.g., anger, bitterness) from arising. Dignity in dismissal consists of five dimensions, two of which are positive – respect and empathy – and three of which are negative – anger, complaints, and legal action. (Wood & Karau, 2009). According to Kant (1785), the dimension of “respect” means that human beings should not be treated as objects or units of production, and that humanity should always be approached as an end and never as a means. Furthermore, the author believes that we should not treat others as indifferent, as this denies respect for the other. Applying these ideas to the dismissal process, the employee should be informed that their collaboration in the organization is no longer necessary, but this does not mean that the organization can treat that employee as a mere object or unit of production, nor to an end. (Wood & Karau, 2009). The dimension of “empathy” refers to a key dimension of emotional intelligence and refers to considering the emotions of others as a factor that allows organizations to improve in subtle and important ways, and should not mean that we feel the emotions of others as if they were our own (Goleman, 1998). The dimension of “anger” is a negative emotion that arises from the perception of unfair, disrespectful, and/or unethical treatment in the face of dismissal. The “complaints” dimension represents an employee's negative or positive opinion about the company that dismissed them, which may consequently lead them to convey that opinion to friends, the media, and the community at large. Finally, the “legal action” dimension refers to all the proceedings that an employee can take to harm the company and seek justice for some unethical practice (Belo, 2024).

When faced with layoffs, organizations must follow certain procedures to ensure the dignity of their employees, one of which is to provide outplacement programs that alleviate the pain felt by employees and help them transition to new jobs, minimizing stress and offering support (Barbee, 2001; Groves et al., 2024). According

to Butcher and Hallock (2005), carrying out pre-dismissal planning, which may include an outplacement service, ensures that organizations carry out the dismissal process openly, making employees feel informed and treated with respect, which fits into one of the dimensions of dignity in dismissal - respect. In an outplacement service, it is important for an outplacement consultant to provide personal guidance to dismissed employees, demonstrating empathy, which is in line with one of the dimensions of dignity in dismissal—empathy. (De Witte et al., 2005).

A study indicates that outplacement services reduce negative emotions in employees (Marzucco & Hansez, 2016). Another study indicates that outplacement services have the benefit of managing the feelings of anger of dismissed employees, where an outplacement specialist helps the employee deal with their anger and frustration before moving on to the job search process (Knowdell et al., 1983). Finally, reflecting on the dimensions of complaints and legal action, it is understood that employees who have been dismissed may take legal action due to the lack of dignity and humiliation felt during the dismissal (Butcher & Hallock, 2005). As such, to avoid these situations, organizations can resort to outplacement services. (Alewell & Pull, 2009; Butcher & Hallock, 2005; Challenger, 2005). That said, the first hypothesis is presented:

*H1: Individuals who viewed the dismissal process with the offer of outplacement services are expected to have a more positive perception of dignity in dismissal, i.e., lower levels of anger, complaints, and legal action, and more positive perceptions of empathy and respect, compared to individuals who viewed the dismissal process without the offer of outplacement services.*

## Affects

Affects fall within the realm of subjective well-being, which is characterized by the way individuals evaluate their lives and consists of two dimensions: 1) the cognitive dimension, which encompasses life satisfaction, including overall satisfaction with life and satisfaction with areas of life; 2) affective dimension, which encompasses positive affect related to overall happiness, including positive emotions (e.g., joy, pride); and negative affect, which includes negative emotions (e.g., sadness, guilt) (Diener et al., 1997; Galinha & Pais-Ribeiro, 2008).

According to Russel (2003), a core affect is a neurophysiological state that is accessible to the conscious mind, being something simple, primitive, and universal that can exist without being interpreted or related to a cause.

Central affect can be represented by a two-dimensional model: 1) horizontal dimension, which concerns emotional valence, with pleasure-displeasure poles ranging from one extreme (e.g., agony) through a neutral point to its opposite extreme (e.g., ecstasy); 2) vertical dimension, which characterizes emotional activation, with activation-deactivation poles ranging from drowsiness to frenetic excitement. These dimensions may include emotions (e.g., upset, sad) or other concepts (e.g., excited, calm). In this model, there are four quadrants: pleasure-activation, with concepts such as excited and happy; pleasure-deactivation with concepts such as calm and serene; displeasure-activation with concepts such as upset and tense; displeasure-deactivation with concepts such as sad and tired (Russell, 2003). According to Russel (2003), all individuals have a central affect that can be neutral, located in the center of the model, moderate, or extreme, located on the periphery.

In other perspective, this study will focus on the standpoint in which affect can be divided into two dimensions: positive affect (PA), which relates to subjective well-being and pleasure, where the individual feels emotions such as enthusiasm, interest, and inspiration; and negative affect (NA), which refers to the dimension of subjective discomfort encompassing emotions such as fear, nervousness, and guilt (Watson et al., 1988). The two dimensions allow us to describe the affective experience of individuals, and affects include emotions (Galinha et al., 2014; Watson et al., 1988).

A study interviewing individuals who had used outplacement services found that the dismissal process leads to negative emotions in dismissed employees, and that these emotions are more intense when the process is unpredictable. However, in the participants' opinion, outplacement services help to reduce feelings of loss and isolation during this difficult phase (Parente & Rocha, 2017). In line with this perspective, authors Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) found that a dismissal process can cause negative emotions (e.g., anger) in dismissed employees. To deal with these emotional problems associated with dismissal, outplacement services can be used, as they aim to offer psychological support to dismissed employees to help them deal with their emotions by creating a support system. (De Witte et al., 2005; Martin & Lekan, 2008b).

The second study hypothesis is proposed:

*H2: Individuals who viewed the dismissal process with the offer of outplacement services are expected to have more positive feelings compared to individuals who viewed the dismissal process without the offer of outplacement services.*

## METHOD

### Participants

The sample comprised 448 participants, 50% of whom watched the video in which the outplacement service was not offered, while the remaining 50% watched the video in which the outplacement service was offered.

The sample consisted of individuals aged between 18 and 70 ( $M = 40.96$ ,  $SD = 14.03$ ), with participants divided into three age groups: 1) up to 35 years old (40.1%); 2) 36 to 49 years old (30.4%); and 3) over 50 years old (29.5%). In terms of gender, 79.9% of participants were female and 20.1% were male. In terms of academic qualifications, 41.3% of participants had completed high school education and 52% had a higher education degree – bachelor's degree (36.5%), master's degree (14.8%) or doctorate (0.7%), with the remaining participants having other academic qualifications.

Regarding some additional variables on outplacement processes, 18.5% participants were already familiar with outplacement services and 68.1% had not experienced a situation like that presented in the video. However, 31.9% had experienced a situation like that presented in the video - 19.6% as an employee, 5.4% as an individual who had dismissed someone, and 6.9% as both an employee who had been dismissed and an individual who had dismissed someone.

## **Instruments**

*Outplacement* Outplacement was operationalized by randomizing two videos (with or without the outplacement offer), where each participant viewed only one of the videos. Other questions relevant to the analysis of this construct were also asked, namely: “Were you already familiar with outplacement services?” (Yes/No); “Have you ever had an experience similar to the situation presented in the video?” (Yes, I have been laid off/Yes, I have laid someone off/Yes, I have experienced both situations/No);

*Dignity in dismissal* We used Dignity in Dismissal Scale developed by Wood and Karau (2009), which was adapted into Portuguese and where some items changed from “boss” to “human resources manager” to be more aligned to the video. This scale consists of 21 items divided into five dimensions: respect (5 items; e.g. “The HR manager treated me as a person”), empathy (3 items; e.g. “The HR manager treated me with empathy”), anger (4 items; e.g. “I feel indignant towards the company”), complaints (4 items; e.g. “I would say negative things to others in the community about this employer”) and legal action (5 items; e.g. “I would consider taking legal action”), originally using a 9-point Likert scale, but in this study a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree) was used. It should be noted that items 1, 4, 5, 13, 14, and 16 are reverse. (Wood & Karau, 2009)

*Affects* We used the PANAS-VRP scale (Galinha et al., 2014), which is divided into two dimensions with a total of 10 items: positive affect (PA) with 5 items (e.g., enthusiastic, inspired) and negative affect (NA) with 5 items (e.g., scared, frightened). The response scale is a Likert scale from 1 (Not at all or very slightly) to 5 (Extremely).

## **Study Design and Procedure**

This study used a quasi-experimental design by manipulating an independent variable—the provision of outplacement services (present or absent) (Kline, 2016). This study was based on a master's thesis in Social and Organizational Psychology.

The first phase consisted of creating two scripts simulating a dismissal process, where only one of the scripts included the offer of outplacement services. To develop these scripts, it was essential to understand the best practices to use in a dismissal process. Therefore, a human resources manager with experience in managing dismissals was interviewed and asked questions about the best practices to adopt. A dismissal was then simulated, with the HR manager assuming the role of the person doing the dismissing and the master's student assuming the role of the person being dismissed. These scripts were also validated by two other human resources managers and by the supervisor of this study. It should be added that these scripts also followed theoretical assumptions evidenced in the literature (Feldman, 1994; Finnie & Sniffin, 1984; Groves et al., 2024; Wood & Karau, 2009).

Before recording the videos, it was necessary to rehearse the scripts via Zoom a week before the final recording to consolidate small details. On the day of recording the two videos were shot. Three people were needed to create the videos: the individual who played the role of the dismissed employee, the individual who played the role of the HR manager, and the individual who handled all the technical aspects of recording the videos. The role of the dismissed employee was assigned to a person with no experience in dismissals and was chosen due to her voluntary availability to participate in the videos. The role of HR manager was played by the master's student, and the individual who handled the recording process was a video-audio technician. The supervisor was also present in the room. All participants signed consents to participate in the video and to disseminate it in the questionnaire. After the videos were recorded, they were validated by three other HR managers and the supervisor of this study. The scripts are presented in the appendix.

Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to collect data, as the questionnaire was shared online on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook, and participants were asked to share the questionnaire with colleagues, friends, and acquaintances (Coutinho, 2014). The inclusion criteria for this study were that participants were aged 18 years or older and had previous work experience.

Regarding the data collection process, this was carried out using the Qualtrics XM platform between November 2024 and January 2025.

Participants began by viewing the first section containing instructions and informed consent. This section included a presentation of the university, the student, and the supervisor, the study's objective, the inclusion criteria, data confidentiality, voluntary participation, and contact information for questions. It should be emphasized that participants could only proceed with the questionnaire if they accepted the informed consent. Next, sociodemographic data were presented, and participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, and academic qualifications. Subsequently, the third block included two videos simulating a dismissal process (with or without an outplacement offer), where participants viewed only one of the videos through a randomization process. After watching the video, participants answered three questions: "Were you already familiar with outplacement services?" and "Have you ever had an experience similar to the situation presented in the video?". This block also included the PANAS-VRP Scale (Galinha et al., 2014) to assess positive and negative emotions, and the Dignity in Dismissal Scale (Wood & Karau, 2009).

The data analysis process was divided into different phases. We started by assessing the psychometric properties of the scales used in the study. We performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) whose reference values were:  $\chi^2/gl < 2.5$ ,  $CFI > .9$ ,  $RMSEA < .08$ , and Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha > .7$ ) (Marôco, 2010). We then verified the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and correlations between the dimensions under study. Finally, several T-Tests and One-Way ANOVAs were performed to analyze the exploratory objectives and hypotheses under study. All assumptions of the T-Tests and One-Way ANOVAs analyses were verified *apriori*.

## RESULTS

Regarding Dignity in Dismissal, the CFA with 5 factors (respect, empathy, anger, complaints, and legal actions) showed a good fit ( $\chi^2/gl = 2.44$ ;  $CFI = .97$ ;  $RMSEA = .06$ ), with all items presented factor loadings above .4. Regarding reliability, Cronbach's alpha for each of the dimensions ranged between .84 and .93, revealing acceptable to excellent internal consistency (Marôco, 2010) (Table 1).

Regarding the Affects, the CFA showed good fit ( $\chi^2/gl = 2.4$ ;  $CFI = .99$ ;  $RMSEA = .06$ ) with factor loadings equal or greater than .4. Regarding reliability, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the two dimensions, yielding values of .90 and .88, showing internal consistency between acceptable and excellent (Marôco, 2010).

Regarding the mean scores for each dimension, almost all means are close to the midpoint of the scale (3) except for the negative affect ( $M = 1.96$ ;  $SD = 0.94$ ), which means that participants felt little or no negative affect after watching the video (Table 1).

Regarding the correlations, it can be noted that the dimensions with the strongest correlation are empathy and respect ( $r = -.798$ ;  $p < .001$ ), followed by complaints and anger ( $r = -.712$ ;  $p < .001$ ). On the other hand, the dimensions with the weakest correlation are positive affect and negative affect ( $r = -.054$ ;  $p > .05$ ), followed by empathy and negative affect ( $r = .174$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 1.** Correlations, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas for each dimension

Dimension	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Positive Affect	2.071	.980	(.90)						
2. Negative Affect	1.960	.938	-.054	(.88)					
3. Respect	3.377	.934	.333**	-.244**	(.88)				
4. Empathy	2.857	1.079	-.338**	.174**	-.798**	(.91)			
5. Anger	2.584	.913	.342**	-.333**	.557**	-.463**	(.87)		
6. Complaints	3.123	.854	-.381**	.228**	-.552**	.480**	-.712**	(.84)	
7. Legal Actions	3.304	.964	.306**	-.197**	.556**	-.448**	.587**	-.644**	(.93)

*Note.* Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is shown in parentheses; \*\* The correlation is significant at 0.01 (2 ends).

## Differences Between Groups

To analyze potential differences in the perception of dignity of dismissal (respect, empathy, anger, complaints, and legal actions) and affects (positive and negative) between men and women, a T-test was performed. The results of the t-test suggest that statistically significant differences were found in all dimensions but presenting different patterns. Thus, results suggest that men seem to experience higher levels of positive affects and respect but also of anger and legal actions. On the contrary, women experience higher levels of negative affects, complaints and empathy.

**Table 2.** Differences between groups – Gender

Dimension	T-Test	Mean and Standard Deviation
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		<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Respect	$t(441) = 3.87, p < .001, d = .46$ , IC 95% [0.21, 0.64].	$M = 3.72, DP = 0.888$	$M = 3.29, DP = 0.93$
Empathy	$t(441) = -3.63, p < .001, d = -0.43$ , IC 95% [-0.71, -0.21]	$M = 2.49, DP = 1.01$	$M = 2.95, DP = 1.08$
Anger	$t(441) = 2.74, p < .006, d = .33$ , IC 95% [0.08, 0.51]	$M = 2.82, DP = 0.97$	$M = 2.53, DP = 0.89$
Complaints	$t(122) = -3.00, p < .003, d = -0.37$ , IC 95% [-0.55, -0.11].	$M = 2.85, DP = 0.96$	$M = 3.19, DP = 0.82$
Legal Actions	$t(441) = 2.13, p = .034, d = .25$ , IC 95% [0.02, 0.47]	$M = 3.50, DP = 0.98$	$M = 3.26, DP = 0.96$
Positive Affects	$t(121) = 3.20, p = .002, d = .40$ , IC 95% [0.16, 0.66]	$M = 2.40, DP = 1.10$	$M = 1.99, DP = 0.93$
Negative Affects	$t(441) = -3.00, p = .003, d = -0.36$ , IC 95% [-0.55, -0.11]	$M = 1.70, DP = 0.86$	$M = 2.03, DP = 0.95$

### Academic Habilitations

Academic qualifications did not have a significant effect on positive affect ( $F(4,14.8) = 1.953, p=.154$ ). Academic qualifications were found to have no significant effect on negative affect ( $F(4, 411) = .758, p=.553$ ). The same pattern was found in the dimensions of respect ( $F(4,441) = 1.445, p=.218$ ), anger ( $F(4,411) = 2.710, p=.050$ ), complaints ( $F(4,441) = .961, p=.428$ ) and legal actions ( $F(4, 441) = 2.125, p=.077$ ). Only empathy showed a significant effect ( $F(4,441) = 2.376, p=.051$ ). Tukey's post hoc test showed that there are significant differences between high school graduates ( $M = 2.71, SD = 1.04$ ) and college graduates ( $M = 3.03, SD = 1.09$ ) ( $p=.048$ ).

### Age

Age had no significant effect on either positive affect ( $F(2,441) = .791, p=.454$ ) or negative affect ( $F(2,441) = .740, p=.478$ ).

Focusing on the dimensions of dignity in dismissal, it was found that age had no significant effect on respect ( $F(2,441) = .888, p=.412$ ), empathy ( $F(2,441) = .788, p=.455$ ), or complaints ( $F(2,268) = .756, p=.471$ ). It had a significant effect on anger ( $F(2,441) = 4.337, p=.014$ ), with Tukey's post hoc test suggesting differences between the "Up to 35 years" ( $M = 2.67, SD = 0.85$ ) and "Over 50 years" ( $M = 2.39, SD = 0.91$ ) ( $p=.018$ ) and between the "36 to 49 years old" group ( $M = 2.65, SD = 0.98$ ) and the "Over 50 years old" group ( $p=.044$ ). Differences were also found in legal actions ( $F(2,274) = 3.541, p=.030$ ). The Games-Howell post hoc test showed that there are significant differences between the "Up to 35 years old" group ( $M = 3.43, SD = 0.89$ ) and the "Over 50 years old" group ( $M = 3.15, SD = 0.96$ ) ( $p=.024$ ).

### Hypothesis Testing

The objective of this study is to understand whether participants' perceptions after viewing the video vary depending on the availability of outplacement services. That said, in order to analyze the assumptions of this study, a t-test was conducted, comparing two groups: the group that viewed the dismissal process without the offer of outplacement services and the group that viewed the dismissal process with the offer of outplacement services.

Regarding H1, all dimensions showed significant differences in the dimensions of dignity in dismissal (Table 3); however, the differences in means between groups followed different patterns, so the hypothesis is partially confirmed. The group of participants who viewed the video with the outplacement offer showed higher levels of perception of respect, anger, and legal action. On the other hand, those who watched the video without the outplacement offer perceived higher levels of empathy but also higher levels of complaints.

Regarding hypothesis 2, statistical significance was found, with the outplacement group experiencing more positive emotions, while the non-outplacement group experienced more negative emotions. Therefore, the hypothesis was confirmed.

**Table 3.** Hypothesis Testing

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>T-Test</b>	<b>Mean and Standard Deviation</b>	
		<b>Group without Outplacement</b>	<b>Group with Outplacement</b>
Respect	$t(446) = -4.83, p < .001, d = -0.46$ , IC 95% [-0.59, -0.25]	$M = 3.18, DP = 0.94$	$M = 3.59, DP = 0.88$

Empathy	$t(446) = 5.65, p < .001, d = 0.53$ , IC 95% [0.36, 0.75]	$M = 3.12, DP = 1.10$	$M = 2.57, DP = 0.98$
Anger	$t(446) = - 3.73, p < .001, d = - 0.35$ , IC 95% [-0.49, -0.15]	$M = 2.43, DP = 0.88$	$M = 2.75, DP = 0.93$
Complaints	$t(446) = 2.55, p = 0.011, d = 0.24$ , IC 95% [0.05, 0.36]	$M = 3.22, DP = 0.87$	$M = 3.02, DP = 0.83$
Legal Actions	significativas $t(446) = - 4.14, p < .001, d = - 0.39$ , IC 95% [-0.55, -0.20]	$M = 3.13, DP = 0.96$	$M = 3.50, DP = 0.94$
Positive Affects	$t(446) = - 2.97, p = 0.003, d = - 0.28$ , IC 95% [-0.45, -0.09]	$M = 1.94, DP = 0.97$	$M = 2.21, DP = 0.98$
Negative Affects	$t(446) = 2.11, p = 0.036, d = 0.20$ , IC 95% [0.01, 0.36]	$M = 2.05, DP = 0.98$	$M = 1.86, DP = 0.89$

## DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to understand how perceptions of dignity and affects after dismissal are affected depending on whether an outplacement service was offered. It also sought to understand whether dignity in dismissal and affects also varied according to gender, academic qualifications, and age. To this end, two videos were created simulating the dismissal process, with only one of them offering an outplacement service.

Regarding gender, it was observed that men scored significantly higher on positive affect, respect, anger, and legal actions. On the other hand, women revealed significantly higher scores for negative affect, empathy, and complaints. This result is interesting as both genders exhibit a negative emotional component—anger and likelihood of taking legal action in men, and negative affect and complaints in women. It appears that the negative component is more extreme in men than in women. It is also noted that in both genders, positive emotional orientations can arise from the experience of dismissal—positive affects and respect for men and empathy for women. About academic qualifications, the results indicate that there is a greater perception of empathy among participants with a bachelor's degree compared to participants with a high school diploma. One reason that may explain this result is that participants with a bachelor's degree have more knowledge about the benefits of this service. As for the age, it was found that, with increasing age, participants show lower scores of anger and legal actions. A possible explanation for this result may be related to the fact that younger generations are in more frequent contact with the digital world, including social networks that share discourses that encourage personal affirmation and active protest, as well as greater reflection on perceptions of justice. However, the literature on differences in reactions to dismissal processes according to the demographic characteristics of the subjects is still scarce and needs further study.

The results also suggested that providing outplacement services led to higher perceptions of respect but, contrary to expectations, also to anger and the likelihood of taking legal action. On the other hand, in the absence of this service, there were higher perceptions of empathy, which was not expected, and of complaints. These results do not corroborate the perspective of Butcher and Hallock (2005), who argue that offering outplacement services contributes to individuals feeling treated with respect, leading to a decrease in their intention to file complaints regarding the dismissal process (Alewell e Pull, 2009; Butcher & Hallock, 2005; Challenger, 2005; De Witte et al., 2005; Knowdell et al., 1983; Marzucco & Hansez, 2016).

These results can be explained by the fact that the participants had not experienced the dismissal process as what one believes in a situation may not correspond to the actual emotions experienced when the situation itself occurs. Additionally, although the video scripts were reviewed by experts in HRM and with previous robust experience of dismissals, it is possible that the scripts still do not accurately represent reality, as there is still no exact formula for how to conduct a dismissal process. Another possible explanation for the data obtained is related to the participants' idea that the organization offers the outplacement service in its own interest, motivated by the intention to improve its image in the labor market and prevent possible legal problems. That said, participants may have interpreted the offer of this service as a form of bribery or manipulation, which affects their perception of empathy and anger, as well as their intention to take legal action.

Regarding affects it was confirmed that participants who viewed the video with outplacement showed more positive affects, while participants who viewed the video without outplacement showed more negative affects. This result is in line with the literature that supports the idea that outplacement services help laid-off individuals manage their emotions, leading to a reduction in negative affects (De Witte et al., 2005; Martin & Lekan, 2008b; Marzucco & Hansez, 2016).

To sum up, offering outplacement services has an impact on dignity in dismissal and on emotions. Although it promotes positive emotions and a greater perception of respect, it is also associated with perceptions of anger

and intentions to take legal action. That said, given the emotional complexity associated with the dismissal process, it is important to explore this topic in greater depth in future research.

### Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes to the understanding that providing outplacement services leads to more positive emotions and feelings of respect. Contrary to expectations, in our sample, it also leads to higher perceptions of anger and legal action. In addition, the results suggest that age, gender, and academic qualifications have significant effects on some of the dimensions of this study.

The practical implication of this study is that it raises awareness in both the labor market and organizations of the importance of investing in outplacement services as it may have positive effects on laid-off employees. However, it should be noted that the adoption of this service should be considered carefully, as it may also be associated with an increase in legal actions and a decrease in the perception of empathy. ~

In practical terms, organizations offering outplacement services should invest in awareness sessions to present this service as a benefit, thereby clarifying any doubts about its advantages and disadvantages. These sessions could take place at conferences and/or seminars in the field of human resources, leading to increased knowledge about this service, as well as about the dismissal process in general.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Regarding the limitations of this study, we highlight the scarcity of empirical articles about outplacement and dismissal processes. To face this limitation, we mostly resorted to articles based on the opinions and experiences of different authors. Another limitation of this study is the difficulty in verifying the accuracy of the participants' responses, given that it is not possible to ensure or assess whether the participants watched the video carefully, and furthermore, it is not known for certain what the reaction and emotions of the participants would be when experiencing a real dismissal situation.

To address some of the limitations, future research could analyze the same dimensions but through an experimental study involving individuals who have experienced a dismissal process and who have had the opportunity to use an outplacement service or by qualitative studies. In this way, the study would be based on the participants' real experience, rather than on their perceptions of a simulated situation. Because the results of this study reveal an inconsistency in the emotional component, and as such, it is important to analyze the different emotions (e.g., joy, sadness) in detail to understand the complexity of the participants' reactions to the dismissal process.

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**Data Availability:** Data is available by request.

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## APPENDIX

### **Video Script with the Outplacement Service Offer**

**HR Manager:** Good morning (employee's name), thank you for coming. I am here to talk to you about your situation at the company. The company has decided to terminate your contract. As you know, we are preparing to reorganize your department, mainly due to the introduction of new technologies, which means that your position will be eliminated. As such, we no longer require your services, but we appreciate your collaboration. From this moment on, you will no longer be working with us.

**Employee:** What? What's this all about? I wasn't expecting this news, as you can imagine. I've been with the company for four years and wasn't expecting this... but it has nothing to do with my performance, right?

**HR Manager:** It has to do with a restructuring of the organization and the department, and the introduction of new technologies. As such, the organization is forced to make difficult decisions, and we have therefore decided to terminate your contract. We understand that this is not easy news to hear. After meeting with our lawyers, this job termination process comes with legal compensation of €10,000, and you are also entitled to unemployment benefits for up to two years. However, moving forward with this situation will make the process more time-consuming. Therefore, we are offering another alternative, which consists of a mutual agreement, whereby we guarantee compensation of €15,000 and you retain your right to unemployment benefits.

**Employee:** Yes, in fact, it will be more complicated since I have bills to pay... but don't you offer anything else?

**HR Manager:** Yes, if you choose the mutual agreement option, you will also be entitled to an outplacement package. Do you know what that is?

**Employee:** No.

**HR Manager:** Through this service provided by an external company and financially supported by us, you will receive specialized support during this professional transition phase, i.e., from the moment you leave the company until you find a new job. This includes more personalized support, for example through interview training or improving your resume. With this service, we hope you will feel more supported and be more likely to find a new job in the near future.

**Employee:** This is too much information... do I have to make a decision now?

**HR Manager:** No. We can do the following: take a few days to think about these options. I will send you a written document with everything we have discussed. Today is Monday, so I would like to talk to you on Thursday, is that okay? Quero ainda dizer que a partir deste momento esta dispensada do serviço, por isso não pode trabalhar, ou seja, não deve dar continuidade a processos que tem em desenvolvimento, não pode responder a emails, nada. Do you have any questions?

**Employee:** Not for now.

**HR Manager:** Thanks again. If you need anything, I'll be here. See you Thursday!

***Video script without the outplacement service offer***

**HR Manager:** Good morning (employee's name), thank you for coming. I am here to talk to you about your situation at the company. The company has decided to terminate your contract. As you know, we are reorganizing your department, mainly due to the introduction of new technologies, which means that your position will be eliminated. As such, we no longer require your services, but we appreciate your collaboration. From this moment on, you will no longer be working with us.

**Employee:** What? What is this? I wasn't expecting this news, as you can imagine. I've been with the company for four years and didn't expect this... but it has nothing to do with my performance, right?

**HR Manager:** This is due to a restructuring of the organization and the department, and the introduction of new technologies. As such, the organization is forced to make difficult decisions, and we have therefore decided to terminate your contract. We understand that this is not easy news to hear. After meeting with our lawyers, this job termination process carries a legal compensation of €10,000, and you are also entitled to unemployment benefits for up to two years. However, moving forward with this situation will make the process more time-consuming. Therefore, we are offering another alternative, which consists of a mutual agreement, whereby we guarantee compensation of €15,000 and you retain your right to unemployment benefits.

**Employee:** Yes, in fact, it will be more complicated since I have bills to pay... but is there anything else you can offer?

**HR Manager:** No. At the moment, you have two alternatives. The first is to choose for the job termination process. With this alternative, you must evaluate the entire job termination process and comply with all legal requirements. This is a more time-consuming process and the compensation is lower. The second option is to choose for a mutual agreement, which is a quicker process in which both parties agree to terminate the employment relationship. With this option, the financial compensation is higher.

**Employee:** This is too much information... do I have to make a decision now?

**HR Manager:** No. We can do the following: take a few days to think about these options. I will send you a written document with everything we have discussed. Today is Monday, so I would like to talk to you on Thursday, is that okay? I would also like to say that as of this moment you are dismissed from your position, so you cannot work, meaning you should not continue with any ongoing processes, you cannot respond to emails, nothing. Do you have any questions?

**Employee:** Not for now.

**HR Manager:** Thank you once again, if you need anything I'll be here. See you on Thursday!