



Dialogues of recognition: Negotiating authenticity in everyday work practices of neurodivergent employees

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Introduction and research aim

Neurodivergent employees often face exclusionary experiences at work and engage in harmful masking practices, concealing their authentic selves to conform to dominant expectations of how to participate and communicate at work (Dobusch, 2021; Longmire et al., 2024)

Because neurodivergent employees often have communication, memory, and attention patterns that differ from conventional workplace expectations, authentic participation depends on recognition that validates these different ways of participating (Dobusch, 2021; Longmire et al., 2024).

Research aim:

The research aim is to examine how recognition is negotiated and enacted in daily work and how these negotiations shape neurodivergent employees' experiences of authenticity at work.



Recognition as an enabling condition for authenticity



We approach recognition through Charles Taylor's ethics of authenticity (2018/1991) as interpretive framework.

Recognition

We come to know ourselves dialogically through interactions with others, shaped by the recognition or misrecognition within these relationships.

- Dialogical extends beyond spoken or written language, validating also non-verbal, material, sensory and other ways of communicating as meaningful forms of participation.
- Relational understanding of recognition, including the material environment

Authenticity

Involves discovering one's own unique way of being human in dialogical relations with others. It is lived through practices aligned with one's own distinctive valuing of what matters in life and work.

Contribution to the recognition literature within management and organization studies with a focus on neurodiversity, and neurodiversity scholarship with a focus on recognition and authenticity.

Ethnographic methodology

Interpretive ethnographic approach

to explore how recognition is enacted in everyday work practices and interactions

Case organisation

Restaurant world, a mid-sized service company with around 150 employees and 8 neurodivergent employees working in seven restaurant units. Focus on 3 neurodivergent employees in two restaurant units.

Fieldwork details

Five months of fieldwork included 148 hours of participant observation, 30 ethnographic (shorter) interviews and 5 interviews with neurodivergent employees

Analysis

Ethnographic, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) were written as an analytical practice to illustrate how interactions unfolded over time and across situations, guided by our interpretative framework.



Meet Pekka

AI generated image of industrial restaurant kitchen



Dialogically grounded self-understanding as "orderly and reliable contributor" at work

"vocabulary" Pekka uses to communicate his values and negotiates recognition

Materially mediated recognition through tools, spatial arrangements, ordered sequences of work

Others recognizing Pekka

Concrete opportunities to enact what is valued through everyday work

Performs systematic work

Talks to coordinate tasks

Doesn't talk much

Keeps tools and material in precise order

Follows routines

Pekka negotiating recognition

Others co-perform tasks to support orderly flow of work

Others maintain order

Others promptly respond to requests

Others engage in necessary and work-related talk

Concluding thoughts



- These dialogues illustrate how recognition and resulting experiences of authenticity are **collectively and relationally sustained** through everyday work practices and interactions
- They illustrate how recognition **requires attention to the often-mundane workplace practices and interactions** that shape whose contributions become visible and meaningful.
- **Recognition remains a precarious and negotiated enactment**, dependent on the ongoing alignment between how individuals express what is valuable to them and how others recognize their contribution



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Thank you!

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