

Theorizing working life neurodiversity as a dialogic and dilemmatic communicative process

In this presentation, we reflect on the possibilities of studying working life neurodiversity as communicatively constituted, building on the planned doctoral research of the first presenter. The study brings together the dialogic paradigm in organizational communication and insights from the neurodiversity paradigm. From this perspective, working life neurodiversity is understood as inherently dilemmatic: it encompasses both an innate form of human variation and a communicative construction. While neurodivergent traits are biologically grounded, their meanings emerge through ongoing negotiation among multiple, and at times contradictory, discourses in both public arenas and everyday workplace interactions among neurodivergent professionals, co-workers, and supervisors.

The overall research consists of three objectives addressed through empirical sub-studies, each examining how tensions surrounding neurodiversity are constructed and managed in communication. First, working life neurodiversity is analyzed as emerging from potentially contradictory discourses in Finnish media, drawing on critical discursive psychology. Second, the ways in which neurodiverse employees experience tensions in identity construction in interaction with peers are explored using communication theory of identity. Third, attention is directed to how neurodivergent employees articulate and navigate leadership-related tensions in their accounts of interactions with supervisors, guided by the framework of leadership dialectics.

In the presentation, we discuss how these dialogically oriented frameworks illuminate the tension-laden nature of neurodiversity as simultaneously biologically grounded and socially constructed in communication. The study advances understanding of neurodiversity as an ongoing communicative accomplishment and offers organizations theoretically and empirically grounded insights to support more nuanced diversity, equity, and inclusion practices.

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