Authenticity in the Pursuit of Mutuality During Crisis

Rachel Nayani, Marijana Baric, Jana Patey, Helen Fitzhugh,
David Watson, Olga Tregaskis and Kevin Daniels

Norwich Business School, University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, UK
Corresponding author email: kevin.daniels@uea.ac.uk

Employee wellbeing activities constitute a space for organizations to realize a shared agenda with employees, and therefore a means to pursue mutuality. The pursuit of mutuality draws on assumptions of reciprocity in social exchange theory (SET) but is dynamic and put under pressure by external shocks. The first UK COVID-19 lockdown provided the setting to explore how organizations addressed employee wellbeing concerns under conditions of crisis. Using qualitative data from five organizations, we identify authenticity-building, which is the constellation of past and present activities through which organizations channel efforts to be authentic in their concern for employees. Attributions of authenticity emerge as fundamental to authenticity-building, while authenticity work (the organization noticing, understanding and acting on shifts in interests) is enabled by dialogic processes. Authenticity-building shifts the quality of the exchange relationship to allow for mutual benefits and is therefore a vital and dynamic component of mutuality. Our findings contribute to the mutuality literature by providing a theoretically embedded extension of SET and show how organizations may become more (or less) authentic within the context of the employment relationship. We highlight the complexity of organizational endeavour for mutuality and show how mutuality need not be compromised during external shocks.

Introduction

On 23 March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, a UK-wide lockdown compelled organizations to make radical changes to working practices. Worker wellbeing became elevated as a priority relative to economic concerns in unprecedented ways. How organizations approach employee wellbeing highlights the contested nature of employer–employee interests (Guest, 2017), yet how such contested terrain is explained remains theoretically ambiguous. Social exchange theory (SET) addresses the quality of exchange relations between employers and employees (Blau, 1964; Peccei, Van De Voorde and Van Veldhoven, 2013). Mutuality is the theoretical mechanism for balancing the interests of employers and employees and is therefore central to understanding the exchange relationship (Kochan and Osterman, 1994). The attributions that employees place on the organization's intent for the exchange is dynamic (Mignonac and Richebé, 2013) and requires trust in the organization based on predictable behaviours (Guest, 2017). Yet major shocks expose the fragility of employer–employee exchange relations (Dobbins and Dundon, 2017), potentially amplifying the difficulty for organizations to behave predictably and in alignment with employees' concerns. There is a theoretical gap in our understanding of the dynamic in employer and employee interest negotiation during unpredictable shock events. To address this gap, we ask: *In responding to the early stages of an external shock (COVID-19 pandemic), how do organizations negotiate interests*

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around mutuality in relation to employee wellbeing concerns?

Wellbeing is viewed as a key employee interest, as a goal in its own right (Guest, 2017) and as an indication that other employee interests are being met (Frijters *et al.*, 2020). Adopting Grant, Christianson and Price's (2007, p. 52) far-reaching definition of employee wellbeing as 'the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work', we also take the view that wellbeing is socially constructed (Jenkins, 2017; Oman, 2015; Scott and Bell, 2013) and hence a contested concept (White, Gaines and Jha, 2014). Different stakeholder groups have divergent conceptions of the detail of what constitutes wellbeing (Jenkins, 2017; Oman, 2015; Scott and Bell, 2013; White, Gaines and Jha, 2014), as well as how workplace wellbeing should be addressed and by whom (Daniels *et al.*, 2018).

We suggest that reconciling different employer and employee views of the actions required to support wellbeing involves an ongoing process of negotiation because conceptions of wellbeing vary and are subject to change. Identifying the mechanisms through which this dynamic is navigated often assumes the external context remains stable and the focus is primarily on employer–employee relations. However, when there is volatility in the external context, interpretation and attributions of intentions add to the complexity of the changes.

We make three contributions. (1) We identify the construct of authenticity-building as a vital and dynamic component of mutuality, whereby organizations renegotiate shifting employee wellbeing and interests and thereby alter the quality of the exchange relationship. Furthermore, we highlight the dynamics of how organizations may become more (or less) authentic within the context of the employment relationship. (2) In doing so, we integrate attributional elements into the assumptions of SET and so provide a theoretically embedded extension of SET for the mutuality literature. (3) Overall, we emphasize the complexity of organizational endeavour for mutuality and show that, through authenticity-building, mutuality need not be compromised during external shocks.

Social exchange theory and mutuality

The mutuality perspective (Kochan and Osterman, 1994) on the employment relationship is often grounded in SET (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Cropanzano and Rupp, 2003). Social exchange is an open-ended set of transactions whereby partners receive benefits through reciprocal contributions (Kamdar and Van Dyne, 2007), with an emphasis on subjective value and fairness of exchange (Mitchell, Cropanzano and Quisenberry, 2012). In respect of wellbeing, the premise is that, if an employer focuses on wellbeing, employees react positively through performance (Guest, 2017; Peccei, Van De Voorde and Van Veldhoven, 2013).

Mutuality can be viewed as alignment between employer and employee interests (Boxall, 2013; Dobbins and Dundon, 2017; Guest and Peccei, 2001; Johnstone and Wilkinson, 2018). However, there is an inherent complexity in mutuality whereby compromise and an acceptable accommodation of divergent interests are arguably more realistic outcomes than full alignment between employer and diverse groups of employees (Geary and Trif, 2011; Glover, Tregaskis and Butler, 2014). Moreover, mutuality might require effort to pursue, attain and maintain (Geary and Trif, 2011; following Bélanger and Edwards, 2007) and be vulnerable to external shocks (Dobbins and Dundon, 2017). For example, during the financial crash of 2008, organizations pursued a variety of adjustment routes to the employment relationship (Roche and Teague, 2014) that made way for work intensification strategies and shifted interests towards employers (Cook, MacKenzie and Forde, 2016; Johnstone and Wilkinson, 2018).

We focus on the theoretical underpinning of SET, namely the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), to unpack the dynamics of the balance of interests between employers and employees and explain divergent stakeholder perspectives on mutuality. We frame relations as extending from narrow economic transactions to high-quality social exchange (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017), whereby reciprocal relations can be narrow and occur within a single resource domain or broader and encompass the exchange of a multitude of resources (Molm, 1994). Exchange relations are governed by norms of reciprocity, which are conditional and rely on the imputed value of benefits received (Gouldner). One such contingency is the intensity of the recipient's need at the time the benefit was bestowed (Gouldner). The early stages of the COVID-19 shock brought elements of risk to the health of employees and economic risk to organizations.

Therefore, COVID-19 may increase the salience of these interests, leading to divergent interests and expectations on the value of benefits.

Another contingency is 'the motives imputed to the donor' (Gouldner, 1960, p. 171). Stanca, Bruni and Corazzini (2009) argue that reciprocity is stronger when strategic motivations or calculative interests can be dismissed (see also Mignonac and Richebé, 2013). For example, this could entail organizations looking after employees' wellbeing due to genuine concern, rather than as a means to encourage discretionary effort from employees. Using principles from attribution theory (Kelley and Micheala, 1980), Nishii, Lepak and Schneider (2008) explain that employees attempt to discern the motives underpinning HR practices based on attributions made about the organization's intent. We distinguish the focus of intent as the employee (wellbeing) or the organization (performance) (Hewett *et al.*, 2018) as appropriate for the current study, given our adoption of mutuality and SET perspectives. According to Nishii, Lepak and Schneider (2008), employees attribute organizational intent as either within an organization's control (i.e. internal) or in response to pressures outside of the scope of an organization's influence (i.e. external). This distinction recognizes that employees consider the extent to which an organization can meet their needs as situations outside of its control arise, absorbing organizational resources and redefining the nature of constraints (Gouldner, 1960).

The focus on employee attributions emphasizes the importance of organizations demonstrating their concern for employee interests to ensure that motives are imputed by employees as positive, rather than for example paying 'lip service' to employee wellbeing (Guest, 2017, p. 33). Positive attributions may be achieved through consistent, visible, value-congruent actions (i.e. authentic; Cording *et al.*, 2014) that send signals concerning employee wellbeing (cf. Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Such consistent congruent actions indicate predictability, which provides the basis for establishing the trust that underpins beneficial social exchange relationships (Guest, 2017).

Considering the foregoing, whether and how mutuality can be achieved or maintained involves the intersection of multiple processes and potentially divergent understandings/interpretations of mutuality. How this is navigated forms the focus of our study.

Methods

Research strategy

Our qualitative multiple case study research strategy draws on the assumptions of interpretivism and applies inductive methods (Charmaz, 2008; Ridder, Hoon and McCandless Baluch, 2014). We conducted semi-structured interviews with multiple informants to enter their worlds and get close to real-life experiences (Denzin, 1978). We followed a multiple case study design to gain a holistic understanding of how interests were addressed under conditions of crisis (Andrade, 2009), both within and across contrasting interpretively rich situations (Stake, 2006).

Our analytical strategy was centred on developing an understanding of each case, comparing patterns across cases (Gerring, 2007) and developing theoretical analysis (Ridder, Hoon and McCandless Baluch, 2014). Detailed case descriptions and analytical memos were used to capture and share our observations and therefore shape our theoretical focus (Charmaz, 2006). To organize our analysis, we adapted the Gioia analytical framework: this is well suited for theory elaboration (Cornelissen, 2017; Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013) and provides a robust approach for organizing and analysing raw data into emerging themes and dimensions, and to theorize their relationships.

Recruitment and sample selection

We pursued a contrasting cases (Gerring, 2007; Stake, 1995) selection strategy, designed to offer insight into how wellbeing interests were pursued in combination with other organizational priorities at different levels of complexity and stages of implementation. To this end, we recruited both large and small enterprises, because organizational size has been associated with complexity in multi-faceted wellbeing programmes (Mellor and Webster, 2013). We also anticipated contrasts between organizations that had established wellbeing programmes (mature), compared to those that had just started to implement programmes (early stage). To assess maturity prior to field entry we were guided by scoping interviews with sponsors and organizational documents collected prior to lockdown. Categorization was agreed through discussion within the research team in concert

with the organization's assessment. The final case selection comprised two 'early' cases (one large, one small/SME) and three 'late/mature' cases (two large, one small/SME).

Informants were sampled to represent multiple viewpoints and experiences of how interests were addressed within each case. This resulted in interviews with leaders who had direct experience of setting the tone for the wellbeing–performance approach, strategy development, planning, decision-making, etc.; agents/managers involved in implementation and delivery (whether cross-organization or in their own work area); and employees whose main experiences were as recipients or users. Informants were identified through a combination of suggestions from organizational sponsors and snowball sampling. Practical considerations informed the number of interviewees (Saunders and Townsend, 2016), such as finding suitable informants when the organizations were diverting their own resources to deal with the crisis, allocating research resource across multiple cases and data saturation. Bearing all this in mind, we aimed for 8–12 informants in each case, with further recruitment as interviews progressed and new knowledge came to light. We conducted 54 interviews in total. Table 1 summarizes the case studies and informants.

Data collection

To observe how organizations pursued interests in the context of shock, we bounded our empirical focus to data collected from post-lockdown interviews (see Table 1). We viewed the informants as active and 'knowledgeable agents' (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013) and our interviewing approach was to find out what was in and on their minds (Patton, 2014). Interview guides provided the freedom to pursue lines of inquiry whilst also ensuring focus, consistency and systematic data collection around the main topics. We adapted the guides slightly for each viewpoint: sponsor/leaders, agents/managers and workers to ensure we focused on topics relevant to informants' experiences. To anticipate lines of enquiry we formulated example questions in an inquiry-based conversational style (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

The interview protocol comprised a short introduction and ethical aspects of consent and anonymity. Interview guides started with an inquiry into the informants' role to establish rapport

and place informants' accounts in context (Seidman, 2006). Subsequent questions aimed at understanding wellbeing-related approaches, performance requirements and their own experiences, perceptions and interpretations thereon. Upon the first UK lockdown (i.e. the temporal window of this study) we extended the interview guides with questions about the organizational response to the crisis and how this was experienced. Therefore, each informant reported on the pre-lockdown organizational approach and the post-lockdown response. This dual approach allowed us to examine interpretative tensions, consistencies and inconsistencies between pre- and post-lockdown organizational endeavours, which proved crucial to the analysis, given that pre-crisis conditions may be important for understanding post-crisis reactions and perceptions (Dundon and Dobbins, 2015).

Analysis, quality and rigour

To ensure quality and rigour we paid explicit attention to how we could ensure data were meaningful and useful in understanding the informant's perspective as well as theoretically revealing. We interviewed in pairs to enable consistency between interviews and cases and to aide reflexivity (Charmaz, 2017). The second interviewer made observational and analytical notes during the interview, asking for clarification and probing questions where required. Hour-long informant interviews were conducted via online meetings, recorded and verbatim transcribed. To aid holistic interpretation of the cases (Abma and Stake, 2014), all interviewers conducted at least one interview within each case; we compared evidence and case memos for gaps in the data and conflicting evidence throughout. Transcriptions, case descriptions, memos and supporting documentation were maintained in a case database.

We drew on detailed case descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and memos (Charmaz, 2006) to compare data and capture ideas and observations. Analysis centred on examining patterns of organizational approaches to interests post-COVID and informant interpretations. Here our case selection strategy came to the fore, allowing us to compare within-case patterns across differing settings, which enriched our analysis and led to insights that would not have been possible with a single-case approach. The constant comparison method during weekly team meetings and data

Table 1. Overview of case study organizations and informants

Case study	Sector and size	Contextual features informing wellbeing and productivity	Informant	Level	Gender	Tenure (years)
Tech	- Small digital web development agency with 23 staff members and 3 directors- Small, mature wellbeing implementation case	Focus on triple bottom line. Collaborative culture with flat structure and high degree of job autonomy and informal flexible working arrangements	Worker 1	Junior	M	9
			Worker 2	Junior	M	5
			Manager 1	Middle	F	1
			Manager 2	Middle	M	1
			Leader 1	Middle	M	7
			Manager 3	Middle	F	0.5
			Implementer 1	Senior	F	2
Fin	- Multinational investment bank with approx. 1200 UK-based employees in IT and investment banking - Large mature wellbeing implementation case	Business informed by triple bottom line and strong compliance and regulatory focus due to sector. High-performance culture and highly data-driven approach to supporting staff wellbeing	Implementer 1	Senior	M	10
			Manager 1	Middle	F	20
			Worker 1	Junior	M	5
			Worker 2	Middle	F	2
			Worker 3	Junior	F	2.5
			Senior Manager 1	Senior	F	4.5
			Senior Manager 2	Senior	F	6.5
			Manager 2	Middle	M	20
			Worker 4	Junior	F	4
			Manager 3	Middle	M	12
			Implementer 2	Middle	M	3
			Worker 5	Junior	F	2
Con	- Major infrastructure project client/umbrella organization, directly employing 150 staff; through contractors engages approx. 4000 workers - Large mature wellbeing implementation case	The nature of the work and contracted workforce creates challenges and reliance on partner organizations	Leader 1	Senior	M	2.5
			Implementer 1	Middle	F	2.5
			Implementer 2	Junior	M	0.5
			Manager 1	Middle	M	2.5
			Implementer 3	Senior	F	7
			Implementer 4	Junior	F	2
			Implementer 5	Senior	F	3
			Implementer 6	Senior	F	0.5
			Manager 2	Middle	F	3
			Implementer 7	Junior	F	4
			Worker 1	Middle	M	4
			Implementer 8	Senior	F	3
			Implementer 9	Junior	F	1
			Manager 3	Middle	M	3
			Leader 2	Senior	M	4
FM	- Large multinational with approx. 4500 UK-based employees providing services for a range of public/private sector clients - Large early wellbeing implementation case	Highly distributed workforce and significant proportion of work is low skilled and poorly paid. The client-facing nature of the business and a need to remain competitive in winning and running contracts are in tension with developing staff wellbeing	Manager 1	Middle	F	22
			Worker 1	Junior	M	0.9
			Senior Manager 1	Senior	M	10.5
			Worker 2	Junior	M	8
			Manager 2	Middle	M	10
			Supervisor 1	Junior	M	8
			Senior Manager 2	Senior	M	2.5
			Manager 3	Middle	F	2.5
			Leader 1	Senior	M	10
			Implementer 1	Senior	M	9
			Implementer 2	Middle	F	5
Edu	- Education trust with non-profit status employing approx. 150 staff across four academy schools - Small early wellbeing implementation case	Funding constraints and high demands create risks for staff wellbeing with high turnover of teaching staff (in line with wider sector)	Leader 1	Senior	F	8.5
			Implementer 1	Senior	F	6
			Manager 1	Senior	F	5
			Worker 1	Junior	F	1
			Manager 2	Middle	F	6
			Worker 2	Junior	F	16
			Worker 3	Junior	M	1.5
			Worker 4	Junior	F	5
			Manager 3	Senior	F	8

analysis sessions allowed us to evolve our thinking (Strauss, 1995) as new data were generated, hone areas for conceptual inquiry and adapt the probing elements of the initial interview protocol accordingly, whilst maintaining consistency and coherence with the study aim.

Early in the fieldwork, analysis highlighted that perceptions of organizational concern in addressing employee wellbeing-related interests were significant to our informants. This prompted us to integrate the theoretical question of the role of authenticity in addressing wellbeing-related interests in the context of shock into our thinking. Pursuing this line of inquiry (Locke, Golden-Biddle and Feldman, 2008), we adapted the interview guide accordingly. We probed for data on authenticity (e.g. a sense that organizational intentions were genuine) in line with a grounded approach. We ensured consistency in interpretation and conceptual clarity through active discussions among the research team.

A necessary but challenging aspect of theory-building and elaboration is juxtaposing inductively derived concepts and theoretical ideas in relation to existing theories (e.g. Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013; Ridder, Hoon and McCandless Baluch, 2014). Exercises of judgement were required in how to draw comparisons between data and theories throughout the research process (Corley and Gioia, 2011; Ridder, Hoon and McCandless Baluch, 2014). In practice, this was an ongoing process of comparing data and our emerging thinking to the literature, aided through research team meetings and pre- and post-interview discussions amongst interviewers (captured in field notes/memos).

Initially, raw data were extracted and ordered according to tentative analytical categories that emerged from our comparisons: authenticity, interests, wellbeing, communal exchanges, signals/actions, justifications and tensions. Organizing our thoughts and the data required a dialogue with the literature (Locke, Golden-Biddle and Feldman, 2008; Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021). Identifying an area of doubt between the literature and our data (Locke, Golden-Biddle and Feldman, 2008), we integrated what Ridder, Hoon and McCandless Baluch (2014, p. 378) term 'synergistic dialogue' with the mutuality literature, and specifically reciprocal exchange, into our emerging theorization.

Going back to the raw data, we undertook a fine-grained examination by an inductively led pattern-matching technique to order initially identified concepts into 'constellations of observations' (Bouncken *et al.*, 2021). To ensure interpretive consistency, five authors examined the codes, transcripts and extracted data. Throughout, our aim was to enrich our analysis with multiple interpretations and develop understanding across coders in interpreting the data. Points of divergence were discussed among the team, and the coding refined until data saturation was achieved. Coded data were organized for each case (Miles and Huberman, 1994) for cross-case comparison.

We shifted focus to the theoretical domain by taking a step back and asking ourselves 'what is going on here?' Our aim was to abstract transferable models and concepts by theorizing on the dynamic relationships between themes, and uncover the systems of interpretations and meanings around addressing interests (see Cornelissen, 2017; Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013). To cluster the list of first-order codes into themes, we looked for co-location of the codes. For example, several codes described organizational efforts, while others related to employee expectations. We iterated between the codes and axial coding to connect concepts and ideas of how the emerging themes related to each other. These analytical processes provided a focus on whether the emerging themes helped to explain the role of authenticity in addressing wellbeing-related interests in the context of shock. The coding and analysis generated the data structure (Figure 1) that served as the basis for our findings and allowed us to discern how themes and dimensions were deeply intertwined.

Findings

Organizations negotiate interests around mutuality in relation to employee wellbeing concerns through a new construct, authenticity-building. Building authenticity invites a broad range of reciprocity and, therefore, shifts the quality of exchange relations. As such, authenticity-building is a vital and dynamic component of mutuality.

In the aftermath of the first UK lockdown, there were dramatic shifts in employees' interests around the quality of their experience and functioning at work (i.e. wellbeing interests) and perceptions of the actions required of their
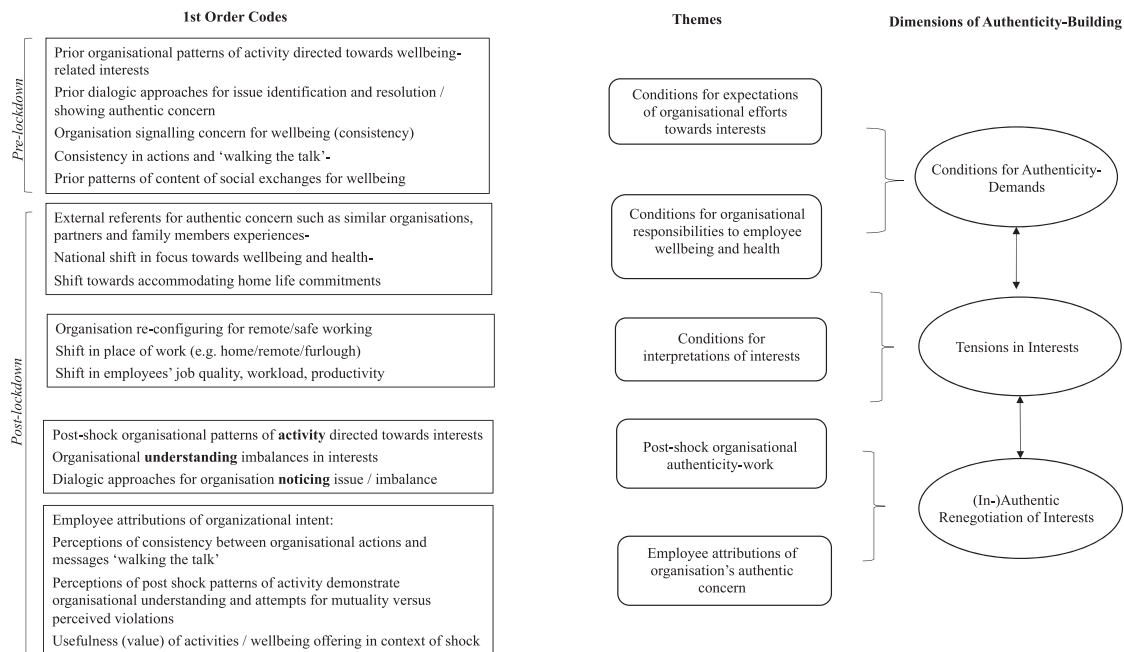
Figure 1. Data structure for the dimensions of authenticity-building

organization. This was compounded by additional pressures for some, such as responsibilities for home-schooling and/or shielding. The five case organizations grappled with how and where work could be performed, while also attempting to address employees' shifting interests. The pandemic shifted mutuality by bringing drastic changes to the ways work was undertaken, as well as raising health concerns for employees.

Observations of the five case organizations' approaches towards mutuality indicated the complexity of realizing reciprocal benefits within the context of shifting interests. These observations are in line with conceptual perspectives that emphasize compromise and acceptable accommodation of divergent and shifting interests in the pursuit of mutuality (Geary and Trif, 2011; Glover, Tregaskis and Butler, 2014). We observed tensions and renegotiations of interests, as imbalances in interests for both parties created potential gains and losses amidst changing conditions, interpretations and expectations. Although each organization expressed symbolic concern and some offered tangible wellbeing benefits for employees, employees' perceptions of this concern as authentic varied between the cases.

To explain the dynamics we observed, in the following sections, we introduce authenticity-building and describe the dynamic relationships between its sub-dimensions. We then explicate how authenticity-building extends the application of SET in the mutuality literature.

Authenticity-building

Based on the principles of SET and viewing authenticity as socially constructed (Kovács, Carroll and Lehman, 2014, p. 460; Lehman *et al.*, 2019; Peterson, 2005; Verhaal and Dobrev, 2022), we propose a new construct – *authenticity-building* – which we define as the constellation of past and present activities through which organizations channel efforts to be interpreted as authentic in their concern for their employees' interests, and employees' perceptions and attributions of organizational effort as authentic. Authenticity-building comprises the dynamic relationship between the three dimensions shown in Figure 1. In light of tensions in interests (dimension: 'tensions in interests'), authenticity is built through a renegotiation of interests that is attributed as reflecting an authentic rather than an inauthentic concern for employees (dimension: '(in)authentic renegotiation of interests') and interpreted as meeting (or exceeding) expectations (dimension: 'conditions for authenticity demands').

As shown in the pre- and post-lockdown conditions (Figure 1), authenticity builds over time: past organizational actions and fulfilment of stated or implied obligations towards employees' interests inform both present expectations and employee attributions as to whether organizational actions reflect a genuine concern. Employees' interests can be impacted by organizational decisions at any time and may not be immediately apparent to leaders (Grant, Christianson and Price, 2007). Therefore, authenticity-building requires concerted and ongoing organizational effort to notice, understand and act to fulfil stated or implied intentions around employees' interests. Evidence from multiple cases suggests that building authenticity improves the exchange relationship between organizations and employees towards higher (i.e. more relational) quality by stimulating a wider range of reciprocity and, therefore, future benefits for both parties (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In contrast, organizations that struggled with authenticity-building also struggled to broaden reciprocal relations to improve the quality of the exchange relationship. Therefore, we propose that authenticity-building is an essential and dynamic component of mutuality, shifting the quality of the exchange relationship between employers and their employees. We summarize pre- to post-lockdown changes in the quality of the exchange relationship through authenticity-building for each case study in Appendix A.

Authenticity-building can be thought of as the interweaving of wellbeing values by the organization, such that shifts in interests are materially and symbolically renegotiated, tensions addressed and expectations fulfilled. As such, building authenticity aligns organizational actions and practices with espoused values (Cording *et al.*, 2014; Hahl, 2016; Lehman *et al.*, 2019; Verhaal and Dobrev, 2022) within the context of the employment relationship.

Dimensions of authenticity-building

Authenticity was the lens through which informants interpreted whether their organization had a genuine concern for their overall experience and quality of work. Authenticity is, therefore, socially constructed, being 'not about facts per se but rather about interpretations regarding those facts' (Kovács, Carroll and Lehman, 2014, p. 460). Authenticity-building manifested in employees' in-terpretations of their organization acting consistently and following through with its promises about concern for their interests, in the past and post-lockdown. The organization was interpreted as authentic by employees when it was able to attune to the employee experience and renegotiate subtle interests shifts, rather than relying on top-down assumptions. Attending to interests shifts helped the organization to follow through on promised intentions. In contrast, a lack of authenticity was characterized by inconsistent action, not following through on promises and a perceived lack of genuine concern. Table 2 provides an overview of the dimensions for authenticity-building for each case study.

Conditions for authenticity demands

The dimension of 'conditions for authenticity demands' comprises two themes that contribute to authenticity-building by setting the conditions for employee expectations and subsequent attributions.

Prior conditions for employee expectations of their organization. Where their organization acted consistently in the past, such as following through with stated intentions around employee wellbeing and making efforts to understand and act when individuals conceived an adverse change, employees expected that their organization would act in a similar way post-lockdown. Applying the principles of reciprocal exchange, acting on employee interests instigates a pattern by stimulating employees to reciprocate and expect reciprocation in return (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005); hence, past actions inform current expectations. Similarly, organizational conditions for authenticity prior to lockdown inform employees' attributions of the genuineness (i.e. authenticity) of post-lockdown organization activities to renegotiate adverse shifts in employees' interests.

Conditions for organizational responsibilities for employee wellbeing and health reflect societal referents for organizational responsibilities towards employees in light of the pandemic. Information such as national messaging about employer responsibilities, societal trends such as shifts to home-working and the experiences of employees in other organizations informed informants' expectations for their organization's response post-lockdown.

Table 2. Dimensions of authenticity-building in each case study

Case study	Authenticity demands	Tensions in interests	(In)authentic renegotiation of interests – authenticity work	(In)authentic renegotiation of interests – employees' attributions
Tech	*High conditions for authenticity demands:* - Put employees at the centre of decision-making - Dialogic structures for issue-raising and collaborative processes for issue resolution - Strong leader role-modelling - Active interest in individuals	*Tech employees' interests shift to remote working:* - Loss of physical collaborative workspace - Adjustment to working from home (some drop in productivity, tendency to work longer hours) - Concurrently taking on new business	*Tech notices, understands and acts on tensions in interests:* - Early understanding via individualized approach and dialogic mechanisms such as daily calls, reflective leadership - Patterns of activity directed towards expanding dialogic mechanisms to the context of remote working - Accommodate individual circumstances to show care; leader role-modelling normalizes appropriate self-care	*Positive attributions of Tech's authenticity-work:* - Employees feel 'looked after' by Tech - Select workload and productivity issues attributed to pandemic and remote working (externalized), rather than within Tech's control
Fin	*Med/high conditions for authenticity demands (although some variability):* - Tangible health and wellbeing provision, but economic (performance) messaging - Variability from team to team - Combination of top-down activities and dialogic processes for issue resolution - Structures (e.g. employee forums) for issue-raising	*Fin employees' interests shift to remote working:* - Loss of access to on-site health and wellbeing facilities and events - Adjustment to working from home (isolation, adjustment to using home workspaces, productivity concerns) - Positive interests shift for some (autonomy around working time)	*Fin notices, understands and acts on main tensions in interests (productivity concerns and loss of on-site facilities):* - Pro-active top-down response (replicating pre-shock patterns) of central initiatives, guidance, self-service resources - Informed by existing employee forums/dialogic processes; varied input from less-established networks/approaches (wellbeing champions, line managers) - Patterns of activity directed towards top-down and forum-initiated activities (e.g. seniors 'doing the rounds') - Previous performance expectation changed to 'people first' messaging	*Positive attributions of Fin's authenticity work (although some variability in attributions):* - Surprise at shift towards wellbeing and accepting possibility of 'mistakes' - Perceptions mostly positive - Variable reception of wellbeing resources provided (responsibility for take-up and use continued to be placed upon individuals, with time constraints for some)
Con	*Med/high conditions for authenticity demands:* - Health, safety and wellbeing provision and forums for issue-raising - Working groups, pulse surveys and existing voice forums - Mental health first aider and wellbeing champions' network	*Con employees' interests shift to remote working and being stood down:* - Adjustment to remote working from home for office-based workers (isolation, loss of social support) - Initially standing down workforce (loss of gainful work): only safety-critical work sustained - Perceived inequalities between office and site workers	*Con notices, understands and acts on some tensions (safety, financial concerns) but not others (perceived inequalities):* - Notices shifts in interests, especially around safety; aware of perception of growing workforce inequalities - No structures for immediate issue-raising due to pausing forums, though instigated home-working support networks - Focus on renegotiating financial interests (furlough); pausing organizational restructure and associated redundancies - Pro-active ahead of government	*Mostly positive attributions of Con's authenticity work by those on furlough, but variability by others:* - Perceptions mostly positive: living up to commitments, including furlough; but uneven and perceived inequalities - Some critique of communication of furlough, but lessons applied to restart of restructuring process - Inconsistencies in support by role/location – perceptions of inequalities

Table 2. (Continued)

Case study	Authenticity demands	Tensions in interests	(In)authentic renegotiation of interests – authenticity work	(In)authentic renegotiation of interests – employees' attributions
FM	*Med/low conditions for authenticity demands:* - Forums for issue-raising but inconsistent approach across business and no clear processes to resolve issues - Struggle with communications, as many workers remote and with little access to enabling portable technology	*FM employees' interests shift to high workload demands, safety concerns and perceived inequalities:* - Adjustment to remote working from home for some employees - Essential on-site working continues for on-site workers - Inequalities and health concerns for on-site workers	*FM notices, understands and acts on some tensions (safety concerns). Notices but does not act on others (perceived inequalities compared to client workers):* - Lack of robust dialogic processes to identify and resolve issues: reliance on top-down assumptions; some managers notice anxieties in essential workers - Messaging and actions focus on demonstrating understanding of economic/job security concerns - Some managers check-in with workers, emphasizing togetherness and solidarity - Externalizes parameters of response (e.g. dictated by government, NHS)	*Variable attributions of FM's authenticity work. Despite medium/low-authenticity demands, some perceived violations:* - Perceived violations (e.g. same performance expectations with reduced resources) - Some perceptions of inauthenticity (due to prior inconsistency and nature of exchange relationships) - Perceptions that economic concerns over-ride wellbeing interests, with some perceived violations (e.g. lack of appreciation)
Edu	*Low conditions for Edu employees' authenticity demands:* - Economic (targets-based) rationale; wellbeing interests secondary - Employees' interests rarely raised at the trust (except re-negotiation of holiday working) - Lack of processes for raising and addressing issues at the trust	*Edu employees' interests shift to exceptionally high workload demands and remote working:* - Adjustment to remote working (isolation, loss of workplace social support) - Shift to online teaching requiring new skills (time-pressured) - Tensions from dealing with the concerns and adjustments to home-schooling for parents and pupils	*Edu notice some tensions in interests but do not act; other tensions not noticed. Understanding is lacking or uneven:* - No existing dialogic processes to notice and understand issues. Reliance on relationship between different headteachers and staff - Activities top-down with some work adjustments - Planned actions (e.g. to hire extra staff) not useful to immediate workloads - Wellbeing messages undercut by performance expectations	*Mainly negative attributions of Edu's authenticity work, with some perceived violations (e.g. lack of/uneven 'thank you' for hard work):* - Perceptions initial (statutory) risk mitigation showed concern, but later patterns and plans less so - Pre-shock exchange relationship based on a children-first ethos so some acceptance of focus on service delivery over wellbeing - Some acceptance of lack of understanding in view of low expectations and that health concerns addressed

In Table 2, we summarize the pre-shock conditions and a comparative evaluation of the level of authenticity demands across cases. Authenticity demands correspond broadly to the maturity of the wellbeing programmes: in the early cases (Edu, FM) expectations were low, while in the large mature cases (Fin, Con) expectations were medium/high and in the small mature case (Tech) expectations were high. Similarly, as shown in Appendix A, social exchange patterns indicated that the range of reciprocity corresponded to the level of authenticity demands: cases with higher authenticity demands had a broader range of reciprocity, while those with low demands had a narrow (i.e. economic-based) range of reciprocity.

Conditions for low employee authenticity demands were felt at Edu, in part due to pre-lockdown patterns of prioritizing the quality of teaching and student outcomes above employees' interests: '… there is quite a tough regime of having to get things done by certain times. And there is a lot of pressure on the teachers to get things done' (Worker-2, Edu). There were also low expectations for addressing shifts in employee interests in some parts of the organization due to fear of sanctions: 'There is, if I'm honest, an anxiety still with some of the teachers that if they don't do exactly what's expected or say what's expected, there'll be some kind of comeback' (Manager-1, Edu).

In contrast, conditions for authenticity demands were high at Tech, whose pre-lockdown approach was marked by signalling of concern and consistent action in putting employee interests at the centre of decision-making: 'They truly care. This is the first place where I've worked where the core employee goes first because if you have a happy employee you have a productive one. It really means that. They are very, very respectful' (Manager-1, Tech). Issues were raised freely as Tech created plenty of formal and informal spaces for employees to raise concerns: '… if you have any concerns or anything like that you can just talk directly at any level and you know that it will land if that makes sense' (Worker-2, Tech). These conditions of prior authentic action for employees' interests and a broad range of reciprocity formed the backdrop for high authenticity demands upon Tech's response post-lockdown.

Like Tech, Fin had a clearly executed approach to signalling its wellbeing approach and dialogic approaches to raising issues, along with a suite of health and wellbeing facilities and benefits for employees prior to lockdown. Overall conditions for authenticity demands were high. However, in some parts of the business messages were interpreted as skewed towards performance expectations, which created the impression of inconsistency and variability in the range of reciprocity for some employees: 'I'd say old-school type of workers still have the old-school mentality… an example would be to arrive before your manager comes into the office in the morning and to leave after your manager has left at the end of the day' (Worker-1, Fin).

Con had a well-developed approach and structures for raising issues pre-lockdown, however, these were predicated largely on historical capabilities in respect of managing health and safety risks. Although this reflected a somewhat narrow range of reciprocity, relative to the other cases, conditions for employee expectations of Con were medium/high. Upon lockdown, employees voiced their expectations for Con to act: '… very quickly our workforce made it known to the management team that they didn't want to be there. And the management took on board the views of the workforce and said we agree we don't want you to be there either so go home' (Manager-1, Con).

Prior to lockdown FM were grappling with a legacy of inconsistent action, such as disbanded forums: 'So, they start off really good, but people soon get, not fed up… but something…' (Manager-1, FM). Issues with communication to a predominantly remote workforce also meant that FM had struggled to provide messages of their intentions around employees' interests. These prior inconsistent conditions, along with a narrow range of reciprocity that centred on employees' financial interests, meant that there were low demands for FM acting authentically.

Tensions in interests

The dimension of tensions in interests encompasses changes to employees' interests brought about by the crisis. In the mutuality literature, wellbeing and a positive employment relationship are essential elements of employee interests; the promotion of employee wellbeing by an organization promotes reciprocity, which affects the employment relationship (Guest, 2017). Following this line of argument and broad conceptualization of wellbeing (Grant *et al.*, 2007), we interpret employees' interests as comprising quality

experiences and functioning at work. Changes in, for example, technology may negatively affect employees' interests by increasing work demands, leading to a perceived lack of autonomy, skills insecurity, and a stalling of career progression, while external threats may negatively impact employees' optimism for the future (see Guest, 2017). Employees' interests constantly shift, often in very subtle ways. However, the COVID crisis brought about a number of fundamental changes in how work was undertaken and viewed, which changed the quality and experience of employees' work in a number of dramatic ways. Table 2 summarizes the post-lockdown tensions in interests in each of the cases, while Appendix B provides a descriptive account of case study contexts for tensions in interests. All five cases reconfigured for remote and/or safe working, which meant that employees had to adapt by working from home, learning how to use online meeting technology and working in isolation from colleagues and managers. In all cases, employees interpreted adverse shifts in their interests.

Cases with site workers (Con, FM) stood some employees down via the UK's furlough scheme. Their office-based workers and managers moved to home-working, which brought experiences of isolation: '… sometimes it can be a bit overwhelming; you can't just turn round and ask somebody a question, you have got to sit at the screen and talk to somebody again' (Implementer-7, Con). Also the inability to 'switch-off': '… before I could have the separation of getting on the train, I've left work behind… if I glance over there's my workstation that I've set up and I can't get away from it' (Implementer-2, Con). In Con and FM, perceptions of inequalities were experienced as essential workers remained on-site with health and safety measures in place, while their managers (at FM, the client) worked from home: '… we inadvertently created an "us-and-them" situation between those that could work from home and those that couldn't' (Leader-2, Con). 'The client is probably mostly working from home; there is not many of them on-site whereas we are expected to be on-site continuously…' (Manager-3, FM). Shifts to working on-site brought acute health concerns in view of the potentially serious consequences of COVID infection and the pressures of running a site with skeleton staff: '… we have got the pressure because we have got the building to run with less resources at the moment' (Worker-1, FM).

The two service-based cases (Tech, Fin) shifted to working from home; Tech in its entirety, Fin with a skeleton staff in the office. Tech employees lost a creative and social workspace, while a predominantly younger workforce struggled with home workspaces: 'I live in a one bed flat and there have been times when we have both been on a call at the same time and I have got nowhere else to go' (Manager-3, Tech). Stresses from the COVID situation also took their toll: '… the last 13 or 15 days, because I am pretty nervous with all of this situation that is going on, but I guess that is because I have all of my family abroad, they are in a country with the number of people infected and dying is very, very high. So even though I'm trying to be productive I'm not achieving it and that is making me to work longer hours. And also, it's a bit of when you work from home where sometimes you end up staying longer because you want to finish something' (Manager-1, Tech).

Fin employees experienced the loss of benefits provided on-site, such as gym, canteens and a range of on-site events about career management, inspirational leaders, etc.: '… they had to cancel most of them (talks and events) in the end because at first people from outside of the office were banned to come in and then they stopped having public gatherings obviously. So, we couldn't have them, but they'd planned really good events, they were really good' (Worker-3, Fin). Similarly, the shift to home-working meant the loss of well-equipped workspaces: 'We've become so used to the technology, having the technology teams available to you if your equipment falls over, the six screens on your desktop where now you're working off of one laptop, you know, how people have had to adapt to certain restrictions to get their job done' (Manager-1, Fin). As with Tech, some Fin employees struggled with focusing on work and this lengthened the working day: 'I found myself working later because I had switched off for few hours in the daytime because I just couldn't keep my focus' (Worker-5, Fin).

Edu switched from face-to-face to online teaching for most of its employees at very short notice, whilst also providing a single site for face-to-face teaching of vulnerable children. This created a dramatic increase in work demands for employees, such as learning new technology, adapting individualized learning to the remote context, helping young children and their parents to access the required learning technology, and dealing with

overwhelmed parents and children: 'Taking into account that none of the teachers had used Google Classroom before, for two days, we were given two days' notice, we are shutting down on Friday these packs have got to go out to kids with their login details, they have all got to be delivered this has all got to be done. And then from Monday they were expected to be online' (Manager-2, Edu). The loss of face-to-face working was felt acutely by some: '… when you're used to working with people and you choose a job where you're working with children, to then find yourself working remotely is difficult' (Manager-1, Edu).

Tensions in interests have implications for the quality of the exchange relationship between employees and their organization if we apply the principles of reciprocal exchange. Prior conditions for authenticity demands established employees' expectations for their organization to act consistently and 'walk the talk' by renegotiating adverse employee interests upon lockdown. Non-fulfilment of perceived expectations and/or acting through a perceived lack of genuine concern has implications for the quality of the exchange relationship, while exceeding expectations may enhance it.

(In)authentic renegotiation of interests

The dimension of authentic renegotiation of interests comprises two inter-related themes. *Authenticity work* refers to the organization noticing, understanding and acting upon shifts in interests (after Peterson, 2005). *Employees' attributions of an organization's authentic concern* encompass employees' interpretations of their organization's efforts at addressing their expectations and reflecting a genuine concern (i.e. authentic) or a lack of concern (i.e. inauthentic) for tensions in their interests. The interpretation of organizational action as authentic has important theoretical implications if we apply the principles of reciprocal exchange. Benefits given when the giver (i.e. organization) is interpreted as motivated towards employees' interests, rather than preoccupied with what they 'get back' (see Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007; Gouldner, 1960) may generate obligations in the beneficiaries (i.e. employees) to reciprocate by 'giving back'. Furthermore, when attributed as genuine, symbolic actions such as leaders' role-modelling of wellbeing sends the message that employees are valued and this can also generate socio-emotional outcomes for future exchanges (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Employees' interpretations of authenticity, therefore, have ramifications for the future benefits they return, such as commitment and support. As such, the attribution of organizational efforts as genuine has important implications for the quality of the reciprocal relationship between organization and employees. Table 2 summarizes the authenticity-work and employees' attributions in each of the cases. In Appendix A we show how (in)authentic renegotiation of interests altered the breadth of reciprocity and relationships for exchange in each case. By comparing pre-lockdown conditions, we evaluate changes in the quality of the exchange relationship through authenticity-building.

All five organizations undertook some authenticity work to notice tensions in employees' interests as a result of changes brought about by lockdown. However, some made efforts to understand and act on interests shifts (Tech, Fin), while others struggled (Con), made top-down assumptions (FM) or noticed but did not act on interests shifts (Edu). Comparing cases, those with prior approaches to identifying and addressing interests shifts (Tech, Fin) were in a better position to notice, understand and act on post-lockdown shifts in interests as they arose and, therefore, build authenticity.

Adapting prior approaches towards employees' interests to the remote work context helped Tech to keep in touch with concerns as they unfolded. Tech's authenticity work involved employees being consistently encouraged to voice opinions and feelings through regular online meetings. Tech created space for employees to ask for support and informal conversations and regular check-ins. Tech leaders encouraged employees through regular and personal communication that built relational ties: 'I ask them what is going on in their personal life and build those kind of bonds between us' (Leader-1, Tech). Furthermore, role-modelling by Tech leaders encouraged Tech employees to put their own wellbeing first: '… even last week I went out during the day; I went out two or three times in the back garden and we did have a very busy day but I told people I am doing it so that they can see I am doing it and therefore they don't feel bad about being away from their computers' (Leader-1, Tech). Tech employees consistently attributed their organization's authenticity work as reflecting a genuine concern for them and addressing their authenticity demands. The reciprocal nature

of authenticity-building is exemplified through the attributions that Tech employees made about the organization's actions: 'One of the situations what I think also makes people just think they want to do their best is, because, as I said, because the company cares for you, you want your company to succeed because you know that they are, as I said people with ethics' (Manager-1, Tech). Therefore, Tech improved the quality of the exchange relationship (i.e. by inviting a broad range of reciprocity) through authenticity-building.

Like Tech, Fin adapted some of their prior approaches to the remote-working context. Fin's authenticity work identified and understood constraints in home-working and performance pressures and acted accordingly: '... as soon as they announced about the school closures, our management team were sending out resources, making sure that anyone that needed to remained at home, it was about well make sure you and your family are OK' (Manager-1, Fin). Fin also put in place tangible benefits such as online medical appointments to replace physical services and online events and resources for managing wellbeing. Symbolic gestures, such as signalling wellbeing as a priority, were attributed as reflecting a genuine concern at Fin and exceeded the pre-lockdown expectations for many employees, thereby potentially broadening the range of reciprocity: 'Our CEO gave a talk and there's one thing […] that really struck me, is for the first time he was saying "yes I appreciate mistakes may happen, but I also appreciate you're doing your best"' (Senior Manager-1, Fin). Therefore, albeit with some variability, it can be argued that Fin improved the quality of the exchange relationship through authenticity-building.

Cases with a lack of prior approaches (Edu), or who paused discursive mechanisms such as manager meetings (FM) and employee forums (Con), struggled to notice and understand adverse changes to employees' interests and so relied on top-down assumptions. Authenticity work for these cases, therefore, comprised a narrow range of benefits in comparison to cases that had robust dialogic mechanisms (i.e. Tech and Fin), who could ensure continuity in identifying concerns.

FM and Con, who had site workers, paused meetings: '... with everything that's happened recently them meetings have been cancelled and [manager]'s not getting about and being able to go to the sites' (Manager-1, FM). This meant that FM relied on top-down assumptions about wellbeing

concerns, rather than experienced issues. Even despite quite low prior conditions for authenticity demands, there were variable employee attributions, with some perceived failures of FM to address employee wellbeing interests. Therefore, overall, FM did not build authenticity. A lack of prior approaches to addressing interests shifts meant a reliance on top-down assumptions, with some employees' perceiving violations of expectations, which did not improve the quality of the exchange relationship.

At Con, pausing processes for raising issues – such as in employee forums and supervisory visits – compounded tensions in wellbeing interests, such as isolation: '... those that were digging holes, fixing steel and pouring concrete... felt as if they were being isolated because they weren't being visited as much' (Leader-2, Con). This limited Con's authenticity work, with variable attributions of authenticity. In building authenticity for some employees but not others, Con did not improve the overall quality of the exchange relationship.

At Edu, concerns around increased workload were noticed: 'The expectation's been high, I can confidently say that pretty much 95% of our staff have been working flat out' (Leader-1, Edu). However, the extent of the effect on employees' wellbeing was not noticed and there was little evidence of Edu understanding these interests shifts: 'It's been harder if you have got younger children and the expectation is still to be doing all the work, I think that's been harder' (Worker-1, Edu). Although Edu put in place top-down communications and localized support for colleagues adapting to online teaching, this was against a backdrop of performance expectations: 'There have been lots of emails about staff wellbeing and things you can read or access... So, they are aware of it but at the same time they have said you are expected to be working hard' (Worker-1, Edu). While some employees accepted Edu's lack of understanding due to the pre-condition of children first and staff wellbeing only just entering the agenda, this mix of messaging was attributed by Edu employees as a lack of authentic concern, with some perceived failures to meet expectations. Therefore, Edu did not build authenticity; a lack of prior approaches to identify interests shifts and prioritization of performance targets meant low authenticity demands prior to lockdown. Despite low expectations, evidence suggests Edu's patchy authenticity work and negative

attributions damaged the quality of the exchange relationship.

Discussion

We have highlighted how organizations responded to shifts in employee wellbeing interests during the acute phases of the pandemic and the dynamic nature of those shifts. Through authenticity-building, organizations improved the quality of the exchange relationship with employees to allow for future benefits for both parties, such as commitment and support (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Conversely, organizations that wrestled with authenticity-building struggled to improve the exchange relationship with a wider range of reciprocity. Attributions of authenticity emerged as fundamental in developing and maintaining the quality of exchange relations, whereby authenticity-building (or lack of) can help to shift the exchange relationship towards either higher quality (more relational) or lower quality (more economic), with the latter having a narrower scope of reciprocity. Through these findings, we make three main contributions.

In the mutuality literature, quality relations are deemed desirable for mutuality (Guest, 2017), however, the use of the underpinning theory of SET is limited in scope of use as reciprocity is assumed: benefits given are assumed to invite future reciprocity. Our first contribution addresses this in providing a theoretically embedded extension of SET for the mutuality literature. By considering the contingencies of reciprocity – namely (1) the value of employees' imputed benefits shifts (e.g. during times of crisis), (2) that the motivations ascribed to the organization by employees influence returned reciprocity and (3) that organizational motivations towards wellbeing interests are interpreted by employees based on past and present organizational action – we provide a deeper application of Gouldner (1960). This deepening of Gouldner's work integrates attribution theory (Nishii, Lepak and Schneider, 2008) in understanding the quality of the exchange relationships and considerations of future reciprocity, and therefore the context of mutuality. We suggest that accommodating these attributional elements into assumptions of SET broadens the field of mutuality research. Similarly, our theoretical account of both context and individual differences on the quality of the exchange relationship are acknowledged gaps in the employment relations literature (Shore and Coyle-Shapiro, 2003).

The organizations that engaged with authenticity-building for mutuality highlight the breadth of the content of exchange and that these resources carry symbolic connotations that are intertwined with the nature of the relationship. As such, our findings also highlight the intricacies of the dynamic shifts in interests and indicate the importance of the processes and structures of exchange, such as blurring between vertical and horizontal exchanges in high-quality relations. Further research is needed to uncover the complexities of such reciprocal relations.

Our second contribution refines the conceptualization of organizational authenticity in the employment relationship, setting the context for mutuality. Whilst organizations gain from being viewed as authentic (Lehman, Kovács and Carroll, 2018), the authenticity literature currently has a limited focus on employees as a key audience. Instead, authentic behaviour is defined broadly and captured by internal and external actions of the organization (Lee and Kim, 2017) or focused on espoused values (Cording *et al.*, 2014), although research interest is growing (see Cording *et al.*, 2014; Gill *et al.*, 2018; Lee and Kim, 2017; Lee & Yoon, 2018; Men & Stacks, 2014) and SET is viewed as underpinning authenticity by some (e.g. Cording *et al.*, 2014; Lee and Kim, 2017). Our contribution narrows the focus of organizational authenticity to the organization–employee relationship context, that is to organizational endeavours that are directly aimed at addressing employee wellbeing interests. Within this, and based on the principles of SET, we offer a framework of authenticity-building as a dynamic account of how organizations may become more authentic in the context of the employment relationship.

With respect to the mutuality literature, we further deepen our theoretically embedded account of SET showing that authenticity-building is a vital and dynamic component of mutuality. Within this, dialogic processes are an important mechanism for organizations to understand shifts in wellbeing interests, as well as a crucial tool in negotiation as interests change. Hence, the dynamic and socially constructed nature of authenticity calls for participative structures of communication (Geary and Trif, 2011; Glover, Tregaskis and Butler,

2014) and reflexive scrutiny (Steckler and Clark, 2019) informed by dialogic engagement to ensure values-congruent actions. The dialogic approach is in line with SET in that dialogue consists of a quality of mutual relationship and engagement (Cissna and Anderson, 1998; Heath *et al.*, 2006) and therefore implies that the route to authenticity lies with attending to relational interactions.

Given the inherent tensions, complexities, potentially conflicting demands and shifting interests (Geary and Trif, 2011; Glover *et al.*, 2014), we suggest that the pursuit rather than the achievement of authenticity is a more realistic aim. Therefore, we view authenticity-building as a 'process of continually becoming' (Liedtka, 2008, p. 238), ensuring that interests-shifts are not merely avoided but addressed when they inevitably occur.

Our third contribution speaks to the wellbeing and mutuality literature by demonstrating that mutuality does not necessarily have to be compromised during external shocks. Identifying shifts in employee wellbeing is a recognized management challenge (Grant *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, our findings expose the fragile nature of mutuality (Dobbins and Dundon, 2017), as in the context of shock employee wellbeing interests became more salient (cf. Gouldner, 1960). These shifts may not always be apparent to managers, which makes the pursuit of mutuality problematic. However, although the literature suggests that authenticity may be difficult to achieve (Lehman *et al.*, 2019), we show that, for those organizations that undertook authenticity-building, this is not necessarily the case. Furthermore, we identify authenticity work as an unfolding and effortful process (Peterson, 2005) for organizations to identify and therefore address shifts in employee wellbeing.

A strength of our research is that we studied organizations from a range of sectors and sizes to account for different contexts and variability in organizational responses. Furthermore, detailed analyses allowed us to examine data from managers and employees in each case to understand the extent of commonality and divergence in experiences. We justified our focus on the acute phases of lockdown as a time when organizational responses to employees' wellbeing concerns would be most significant and the environment most turbulent. However, our analysis does not extend to subsequent lockdowns. Future research may consider organizational authenticity and mutuality in relation to health concerns post-pandemic.

Data availability statements

Supporting data are not yet publicly available, but will be made available by the UK Data Service upon completion of project ES/S012648/1. The data used in this paper are part of a wider project that involves three waves of data collection with informants in eight organizations collected during 2020 and 2021. These data are supplemented by data collected from interviews with organizational sponsors and organizational documents. The data used in the current paper pertain to five organizations from which we were able to collect data in the months following the first lockdown in the UK in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

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Rachel Nayani is a Lecturer in Organizational Behaviour at the University of East Anglia, with expertise in work, behaviour and sustainable change. A specialist in qualitative research design and methodologies, Rachel's research primarily involves understanding organizational process and practices for social value and sustainable change, including wellbeing and enhanced productivity at work, and climate goals.

Marijana Baric is a Lecturer in Human Resource Management at the University of East Anglia. Her research focuses on the employment relationship as well as the norms that govern such relations in organizational contexts, but also those that transcend formal work boundaries. Within this, Marijana takes a particular interest in wellbeing and sustainability.

Jana Patey was formerly a Senior Research Associate and is now a Visiting Researcher at the University of East Anglia, specializing in the area of health and wellbeing at work. Prior to joining Norwich Business School, Jana worked in HR Advisory positions across a number of private and public sector

organizations. Jana's main research and consulting interests are in employee health and wellbeing, organizational psychodynamics, workplace friendship, intersubjectivity and affect at work.

Helen Fitzhugh is a social researcher with a focus on organizations and social value creation. She is currently a Senior Research Associate and Knowledge Exchange Fellow at the University of East Anglia. With diverse experience of applied and academic research, the golden thread of her work is how good intentions are translated into action within organizations, and whether that action is successful in creating positive change for the people involved.

David Watson is a Lecturer in Organizational Behaviour at the University of East Anglia. David is an interdisciplinary researcher. His research interests include the political economy of the food system, alternative organizations and economies, learning in relation to wellbeing, Marx's concept of alienation, wellbeing theory – in particular Marx and wellbeing, the capabilities approach and the role of wellbeing in policy.

Olga Tregaskis is Professor of International Human Resource Management and Head of Norwich Business School at the University of East Anglia. Her work focuses on human resource management issues within an interdisciplinary context that traverses occupational psychology, employment relations and international management. Her research addresses academic and practice concerns in the fields of wellbeing, management norm making and networks.

Kevin Daniels is Professor of Organizational Behaviour at the University of East Anglia. A Fellow of the British Psychological Society, Academy of Social Sciences and Royal Society of Arts and Manufactures, his research has focused on psychological processes underpinning the relationships between work and health, safety and wellbeing. More latterly, his research has focused on transdisciplinary approaches to workplace wellbeing. He has a strong interest in the application of research on employee health, safety and wellbeing to policy and practice.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A. Pre- to post-lockdown changes in the quality of exchange relations through authenticity-building
Appendix B. Case study descriptions