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Recognizing Employees:  
Reification and Dignity in  
Management

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Recognizing Employees: Reification and Dignity in Management

## ABSTRACT

The current paper develops the idea of recognition in organizations, arguing that recognition is a fundamental building block of workplace dignity, and a key element of cultural respect in the workplace. Recognition perspectives begin with problems arising from viewing workers as commodities, and not recognizing their intrinsic dignity as social actors. Traditional economic views of human capital and human resources are particularly apt to view employees as units to be strategically managed, and not actors to be recognized, a situation which can both deteriorate the quality of their work and cause a series of psychological and interpersonal dysfunctions in the workplace. Such views are here termed *reifying*, because they view employees and their work as “thing-like” units of trade, rather than as outcomes of the lived social experiences of actors trying to create works of value. The paper discusses the implications of reifying views of workers with the contrasting *recognition* view, using contemporary social theory on recognition to reconceive of the workplace as fundamentally social and dignifying. Finally, recognition views are applied to managerial practice, in the attempt to imagine the workplace in a way that combines practical action with the valuation of diverse individual and cultural experiences.

Traditional perspectives in management have emphasized a “human capital” view of employees, imagining organizational members as sets of human resources that market actors trade to organizations in return for monetary payment, stable employment relations, and other benefits (e.g. Foss, 2008. Konzelman, Conway, Tranberth & Wilkinson, 2006). Under this conception, employees are considered sets of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs; e.g. Guion, 1998; Chan & Schmidt, 2005) that may be allocated to specific tasks in order to maximize organizational productivity. Such views have become the mainstream of human resource management practices, and a key part of introductory texts in the area of management (e.g. Cascio, 2000)

To be sure, human resource management also has a history of taking into account aspects of employee satisfaction (e.g. Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002) and more recently, other aspects of employee well-being (e.g. Avey, Luthans, Smith & Palmer, 2010). For example, literature in the areas of work-life issues (e.g. Eby, Maher & Buts, 2010) has acknowledged the importance of balancing work life with non-work issues, and promoting flexibility with regards to individuals’ diverse individual and family lives. In addition, work on diversity has acknowledged that cultural, gender, racial, and other identity issues are important at work, and color individual experience in ways that affect work processes (e.g. Pless & Maak, 2004). What is often missing in such treatments, however, is the acknowledgment that work itself is a socially valuable process, one expressive and formative of individual identity and a sense of personal dignity. Acknowledging this aspect of work means going beyond satisfaction and work-life balance; it may mean a reconceptualization of work itself as a social and existentially engaged process (Sayer, 2007; Honneth, 1995b).

Following this idea, some critiques of management have emerged in the human resource area that go beyond questions of flexibility and work-life balance (e.g. Townley, 1993; Islam & Zyphur, 2008). These “macro” critiques call into question the notion of human resources more generally, claiming that even human resource policies that take into account employee satisfaction often do so only to maximize productivity, thus “using” employees, which is ethically problematic (e.g. Greenwood, 2002). Similarly, work on inclusion and diversity has noted that attempts to promote diversity must begin by recognizing the relational and social aspects of human beings, and not reducing employees to material and psychological

resources to be managed for financial gain (e.g. Pless & Maak, 2004). Such macro-critiques are not content with simply extending additional monetary or scheduling benefits to employees, but explore how the work-relation can be reconsidered as a means for promoting dignity, diversity, and the intrinsic worth of employees.

In order to provide a theoretical framework for such an exploration, the current paper will use recent discussions of recognition theory (e.g. Honneth, 2009; 2008; 1995a; 1995b) to discuss how why human resources policies so often unwittingly detract attention from issues of human dignity, and how promoting recognition can reverse the undermining effects of human resource policies. Following Honneth (2008), I contrast recognition with a *reification* perspective on work, claiming that reification amounts to a kind of forgetting or *misrecognition* of employees. In the remainder of this essay, I will first discuss worker dignity and individuality in light of reification, showing how human resource policies tend to promote reification. Then, I will discuss how reification appears under a recognition-theoretic lens, and why we should see reification as problematic from the perspective of inclusion and diversity. Next, I will reframe the employment relationship as inclusive of diversity by adopting a recognition perspective. Finally, I will present the advantages and limitations of this perspective, suggesting future research into the conditions that promote recognition thinking.

#### REIFICATION AS AN ASPECT OF MANAGEMENT

Managing people at work requires working with concepts such as action, motivation, and relationships, and thus implicitly involves ideas about human thought and behavioral processes, in other words, ideas about human agency (Kallikanos, 2003). Some scholars have recently begun to question the underlying concepts of agency that managers employ, modes which are often assumed in studies of labor and economics (Kallikanos, 2003). Thematized in this work is the idea that agency is cultivated and maintained through interpersonal relationships in the workplaces, and that these relationships are essential for employee's self-concepts (e.g. Kallikanos, 2003). Thus, failed or pathological relationships at work may have ramifications for employees' self-esteem, and sense of self-worth.

Drawing from critical theory, Lukacs' (1971; see also Honneth 2008; Berger & Pullberg, 1966) notion of reification explicitly elaborates an important link between employee self-conceptions and the ways that

products and selves are created at work. In his formulation, the products of contemporary work, including the production of the worker him/herself as a social role, are made to appear “thing-like”, subject to mechanical constraints and objective influences (e.g. Jay, 2008; Whyte, 2003). In the case of products, reification means that the social processes involved in making the product are obscured or forgotten; in the case of the employees themselves, they come to be seen as bundles of human capital rather than as conscious, freely choosing agents (Honneth, 2008).

The process of reification, according to Honneth (2008), involves a way of framing work processes, but goes beyond work to affect both social relationships and worker identities. First, framing work purely in terms of goals, objectives, and products promotes a view of the environment as composed of inert objects of exchange, rather than as a field of complex relationships, promoting an essentially mechanical view of the workplace. Next, this mechanical view is transferred to social relationships at work, such that other people are seen as means to an end, bearers of desired capacities or liabilities. As the reified view of the workplace develops, employees come to see their own personalities in terms of productive potentials, assets and liabilities, and view themselves as disembodied “products” that are independent of social networks and processes, and that the elements of their individual “profile” (capacities, skills, knowledge) can be bartered and traded as commodities (Whyte, 2003).

Honneth (2008) claims that reification derives from social practices, but these practices do not determine reification directly. Indeed, a deterministic view, because of its negation of human freedom, would itself promote a reified view of people. Thus, the task of a theory of reification at work would specify those conditions under which reified views tend to be adopted without reflection, as default ways of acting at work, habitualized over time, and leading to a dehumanized workplace. In the context of managing human resources, we can describe such conditions at various levels. Some practices work at the level of individuals, defining workers in terms that leave out their creative potentials. Other practices involve more general aspects of contemporary workplaces, practices which promote a view of work as the production of tradable goods rather than meaningful works. I will describe some relevant human resources practices at both of these levels. However, what they have in common is that they ignore the personal and social significance of work in favor of a decontextualized view, one that disconnects work from its existential, expressive bases.

The forgoing of autonomy and personal meaning at work is evident in many of the key works of management, where, in order to place employment within the sphere of market relations, it is conceptualized as inert and separate from existential needs. For example, Simon (1951) describes worker behavior as “guided by a decision reached by another, irrespective of his own judgment” (p. 21), a clear statement of work as separate from agency. Foss (2008) describes human capital as “a capital asset like any other”, and asserts that nothing is essentially different accounting to the “human” nature of this asset. Of course, as economic actors, workers own their human capital, but may trade it as they may trade other property. The job of the human resource manager, under this conception, is to monitor the terms of this trade through surveillance and measurement, to reduce its price to the extent possible, through standardization, selection and training, to decrease competitor imitation, through diversity and organizational culture promotion, and to reduce transaction costs, by promoting flexible work. I will treat each of these themes below.

#### Measurement and Incentives

Honneth (2008), in his essay on reification, claims that modern life has been dominated by processes of *watching* other people, and in particular, watching with regards to monitoring, measuring, and evaluating. Honneth claims that a culture of monitoring and surveillance, a fact of modern workplaces, can become “so much an end in itself that any consciousness of an antecedent social relationship disappears” (2008, p 79). Workers under surveillance become described through standardized categories, which become linked through economic incentives meant to reinforce or inhibit categories of behavior. It stands to reason that such measurement and incentive systems could promote reification among managers. Ball (2005), for example, describes organizational surveillance in terms of a decentering of lived experience from the body, and the tendency to view one’s body as an object separate from lived experience, a phenomenon that clearly echoes the reification idea. Because behavioral measurement tends to be at the individual level, and measures operational behaviors rather than psychological motives, it stands to reason that such measurement would promote the idea that behaviors are objective, individual units. What is obscured is how individual action might be driven by social contexts, relationships, and expectations not observable in measurement systems. To the extent that social relationships enter performance measurement, for example, they may be considered sources of bias or measurement error, rather than as interpersonal, socio-cognitive processes

inherent in all social systems. Carlon et al (2006), for example, discuss the use of statistics about performance as masking the underlying social dynamics of performance, a process which leads the authors to describe performance statistics as “fetishes”.

With regards to incentives per se, much has been written about effects of incentive systems on the intrinsic motivation to engage in work (e.g. Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999; Holtgrewe, 2001). The empirical literature tends to support the thesis that incentives can reduce intrinsic desire to work particularly in those situations where employees believe that such systems encroach on their autonomy or freedom (e.g. Deci et al, 1999). Incentives, in addition, may act as substitutes for more “authentic” types of social rewards for work (Holtgrewe, 2001), such as social recognition, belonging and esteem that come from competent work. Similarly, Lamont (2000) suggests that when managers refrain from measuring employee performance in purely economic terms, they can increase feelings of dignity among employees, who feel that the organization is thereby increasing their autonomy and giving them a “vote of confidence”. Finally, Sayer suggests rewarding employees, but de-coupling rewards from specific transactions at work, in order to create a general sense of employee value, rather than a specific, market-like exchange among members.

#### Individual Differences and Trait-Based Views

Managing people involves attempting to meet organizational objectives through the development of “human capital” within organizations (e.g. Foss, 2008; van Marrewijk & Timmers, 2003). Developing human capital involves building a stock of accessible knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs; e.g. Guion, 1998) among organizational members, a process that involves both selection of preexisting worker aspects (e.g. Anderson, 2005) and training of firm-specific KSAs. Increasingly, employers are recognizing cultural, gender, and ethnic diversity as further sources of diverse employee capabilities (e.g. Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009) and are attempting to use these capabilities to improve organizational performance.

There is nothing inherently reifying about discussing individual and cultural differences, or developing ideas about human capabilities and skills. In fact promotion of competencies is often hailed as an empowering aspect of work, and promotion of diversity has been discussed as an important factor in re-inserting work in its social context, creating a culture of inclusion and dignity (Pless & Maak, 2004).

However, to the extent that work in this area develops theories and concepts that help conceptualize KSA's as discrete, context independent, and deterministic, they can promote reifying attitudes.

In fact, much of the literature on personality at work has taken exactly this standpoint, viewing individual differences as universal, biologically driven dimensions largely derived from genetic and pre-existing potentials (e.g. Loehlin, 1992; McCrae & John, 1992), and useful insofar as they provide sources of organizational performance (e.g. Weiss & Kurek, 2003). Thus, rather than viewing personality as a series of choices made by free, existentially engaged people in order to live as best they can, personality traits are framed as capabilities that can be traded, bargained or acted upon in order to reach objectives.

The treatment of individual traits and capacities as independent, separable, and tradable also tends to underplay the social bases of individual behavior, promoting a sense of "modularity" among actors (Gellner, 1996). Gellner's "modular man" essentially a tradable portfolio of capacities, rather than a human being with a sense of unity, integrity, and narrative coherence over time (Kallikanos, 2003). As some have argued, a skill-focus goes hand in hand with social fragmentation, as individuals treat their own human capital as toolkits that they carry from workplace to workplace (Bernstein, 2006), reflecting a kind of dislocation among individuals and a sense of social drift (Deranty, 2008; Sennett, 2006).

#### Diversity and the Reification of Groups

Similar to trait-based views of human resources, treatments of cultural, gender, or ethnic diversity in the workplace implicitly reify group-based traits, unwittingly decoupling group traits from the lived experiences of their members and treating diversity in an instrumental fashion (e.g. Zanoni, Jansens, Beuchop & Nkomo, 2010). In many cases, for example, workforce diversity is touted less for its intrinsic valuing of human diversity than for its putative effects on group and organizational performance (e.g. Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009). In addition, organizations may implement diversity programs as a way of sending an image of dynamism and flexibility and due to institutional pressures (Prasad, Prasad & Mir, 2011), treating diversity as symbol rather than substance.

Additionally, diversity programs often focus on simple group membership status as a marker of diversity, promoting stereotyped views that are reminiscent of reification because they do not allow for individual autonomy within categories. The resulting tokenism treats demographic group membership in a

stereotyped fashion, rather than as a source of individual potential. In other words, it may be true that gender, ethnic or cultural backgrounds color people's experiences, allowing them to bring interesting new perspectives into the workplace; but this does not mean that people are determined by these background characteristics. Cultures of diversity should not assume that people are bound to their cultures (e.g. Pless & Maak, 2004), but that they may draw on unique experiences to formulate their own autonomous views.

Some work suggests that reification in the workplace can become reflected in group-based prejudice and stereotyping (Honneth, 2008), since stereotyping involves a reduction of a person to a single, standardized category and does not allow individual freedom within that overdetermining category. Human resource policies which do not promote a strong sense of community within the workplace may push individuals to seek community to a greater extent from alternative social networks, such as culture and ethnic networks (Christopherson, 2008), thereby highlighting group-based differences and promoting inter-group tensions. According to Christopher (2008) such networks become necessary sources of economic security, promoting their instrumentalization, wherein social and group identity are referred to as sources of "social capital."

Based on the above, whether individual or group-based, reified individual capacities to produce valuable goods and services are treated as tradable components rather than as forms of self-expression. Honneth is explicit in linking the measurement and psychometric conceptualizations of psychological capacities to reification, warning particularly against theories that overly emphasize the intractable or genetic component of such capacities, because it is precisely in these conceptions that free agency is mostly likely to be overlooked. Other recognition-theorists (e.g. Borman, 2009; Gutmann, 1994) suggest that recognition at work is not fulfilled through offering opportunities for skill acquisition, and an overly skill-based focused has been argued to be exploitative (Borman, 2009).

As mentioned, the ways that management practices cognitively frame employees do not determine, but may influence, the ways employees see themselves and their colleagues. Practices promote habitual forms of interaction and taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world that divert attention from alternative views. But the question remains as to what alternative views would not promote reification? What constitutes an alternative to reification? From a recognition theoretic view, reification constitutes a

*misrecognition* of the underlying dynamics of social relationships, and thus to critique reified treatment of employees, we must explore the alternative view, which we may term a “recognition view”.

### RECOGNITION AT WORK

Axel Honneth’s (e.g.1995) recognition theory attempts to specify the grounds of social systems in terms of a basic human need for social recognition, in which people’s self-views as respectable and worthy of dignity derive from social recognition. Recognition theory views individual projects as deriving meaning from their participation in wider social systems of meaning and value. Recognition is “pre-cognitive”, in that it precedes particular world views (Honneth & Margalit, 2001), and consists in an affirmation of the basic personal bond between social actors, their willingness to participate in society together. This basic commitment to *be together*, it is argued, builds a groundwork upon which more sophisticated social formations, projects and systems can be built. Affective and affirmative in nature, according to Honneth (e.g. 2008), we recognize social actors even when we disagree with them or feel strong negative emotions toward them, because it is only in their role as recognized others, as human actors bestowed with their own minds, that we are able to consider their views at all. Thus even “pathological” forms of sociality, such as reification, contain a core of recognition, which, according to Honneth (2008), is repressed or ignored in the act of reifying.

Because the sense of recognition as positive affirmative does not mean by “positive” that one agrees with the person one recognizes (Honneth, 2008; 1995a), recognition is different from sympathy, or support for a cause. It is more akin to a notion of solidarity, in that one recognizes other actors as legitimate participants in society, entitled to points of view and embedded in their unique life narrative. When individuals feels that their basic self-worth has not been acknowledged, alternatively, they feel invisible or alienated (Honneth & Margalit, 2001), rather than simply different from others. Thus, within an organization, recognition would be prior to similar concepts such as organizational cohesion, value alignment, or identification, but these forms of social closeness would depend upon a prior recognition.

Honneth does not contrast recognition to instrumental or utilitarian forms of social organization; rather, he claims (Honneth, 2002), instrumental social forms themselves also depend on relations of recognition. Market relations cannot take place in the absence of a basic affirmative social bond, according

to this view, although it is possible that in the course of market relations, actors come to misunderstand and distort their underlying relationships (for a critique, see Butler, 2008). This point makes recognition theory particularly interesting for management, because it does not constitute an anti-business view, claiming that all market relations are immoral. Rather, it affirms the social legitimacy of markets as a social form, and urges actors to come to terms with the acceptance of human dignity *that they have already assumed* by entering into commerce with each other. In addition, which earlier versions of critical theory had dismissed instrumental action as external to the sphere of lived, holistic experience (e.g. Habermas, 1981), Honneth attempts to rescue instrumentality (i.e. productive work) from a pure functionalism, arguing that just as other forms of sociality, work is a space in with lived, phenomenally rich social experience is possible and desirable (Honneth, 1995b). This aspect makes Honneth's work ripe for contributing to a field of management looking to emphasize the human side of business.

At the same time, as outlined above, management often promotes practices and habits of mind that seem to undermine the very principles that recognition theory claims undermine social relations. According to Honneth (1995a), this is explainable by a kind of inauthenticity with regards to our social bonds. Although social systems rely on fundamental bonds, actors may misrecognize, ignore, or actively repress these bonds. In particular, where instrumental action requires devoted attention, competition with others, combative negotiation, or other processes that imply opposition, actors may divert their attention away from basic connectedness, and act *as if* no social ties existed between members of an organization. The neglect of an underlying social connectedness due to lack of attention or misrecognition makes organizational goals seem as if they float freely of human concerns, leading to reification of employees as means toward the end of reaching such goals (Honneth, 2008).

Because, following Honneth (2008), misrecognition and the reification that accompany it are not simply incorrect views of humans, they cannot be remedied by argument alone, nor by management research as traditionally conceived. However, reification is also not "a transgression against moral principles" (Honneth, 2008, p 53), meaning that one has not committed a wrong action or espoused a wrong principle (for a critique of this moral argument, see Lear, 2008). Because recognition is implicit in our social relationships, it is best to think of reification as an *inauthentic* standpoint, rather than as either incorrect or

immoral per se. In many cases, reification is described as a social pathology, thus something to be remedied, although not in the sense of punishing an immoral act or disproving an empirically false statement. Thus, recognition theory attempts to steer a middle ground between descriptive and normative views of well-being at work, and combine the two in a view of society that is at once fact-based and ethical. In the case of contractual relationships, recognition appears as primary in the fact that contractual relationships presuppose the autonomy and freedom of both parties (Honneth 2008; 1997). With such a presumption, submitting one's actions to a manager's discretion within an organizational hierarchy would be tantamount to slavery or servitude. Once recognition is presupposed as an internal part of the management agreement, it becomes possible to see how freedom is consistent with organizational hierarchy, and must be a trump card or limit to that hierarchy's power. Thus, subsequently treating employees as nothing more than "capital" goes against presuppositions that underlie their employment. As Honneth states, reification conceals authentic social connection from our perception, but this is best described as a type of "forgetfulness" (Honneth, 2008). The answer to reification, therefore, would consist in promoting practices of remembering, to remind organizational members of who they have been all along.

#### Promoting Recognition in the Workplace

The implicit nature of recognition implies that, despite the reifying practices described above, reification is not caused by particular practices, nor can it be "cured" technically; rather, recognition and reification are promoted, not caused, by work environments, according to a recognition-theoretic view. In some ways, this makes managers' job easier, because it is conceivable to promote a more humane view of work within current frameworks; on the other hand, the subtle forms of consciousness raising that recognition views imply may be in practice difficult to detect, in part because to measure them could itself promote reification (e.g. Butler, 2008).

In the area of diversity, Pless and Maak (2004) provide some direction in thinking about diversity topics while breaking free from views of diversity as "capital". Rather, they discuss how diversity can promote reflection about the richness of a common humanity with organization, "reminding" individuals about the cognitive bases of their relations. Promoting diversity does this, for example, by allowing a free expression of cultural and individual differences, leading to a more democratic form of organizing, a form

which they refer to as “human relations” rather than “human resources”, a subtle difference that is key in the context of our discussion. They mention that such expression may be a source of profitability, by improving creativity, but it is important to note that this creativity depends on the non-instrumental promotion of human relations, even as these relations produce instrumentally positive outcomes.

Also, recognition theory has dealt with issues revolving around organization incentives and the need to provide incentives without promoting reification. For example, Heinich (2009) specifies conditions under which prizes in professional work can promote a sense of recognition, while Sayer (2007) discusses how rewards can function to reinforce employee dignity when they are temporally decoupled from action, so as not to give the sense that they are being used to control or “buy” good behavior. These findings fall in line with empirical work on intrinsic motivation (e.g. Deci et al, 1999), which finds that intrinsic motivation can be (but is not necessarily) undermined by extrinsic rewards. According to Deci et al’s meta-analytic results, extrinsic rewards work best when they do not compromise employee’s sense of autonomy, results which fall into line with recognition theory.

In summary, human resources practices tend to promote recognition and “remembering” of social bonds when they emphasize autonomy, interpersonal value and belongingness over and above economic transaction. The socially integrative function of work (Honneth, 2009) may not be at odds with its economic function, and may improve it by promoting intrinsic motivation and creativity.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this theoretical essay, I have used recognition theory to describe how management can promote a more humane view of employees, and avoid the problematic yet prevalent perspective described as reification. Recognition theory gives us criteria by which we can diagnose and combat reification at work. Like all perspectives, the recognition perspective has advantages and disadvantages, of which some final words should be said.

One clear advantage of a recognition perspective on work is that it extends the importance of employee well-being beyond economic concerns, and into key issues of respect and dignity at work (Holgrew, 2001). Thus, creating a humane workplace cannot be solely discussed in terms of providing adequate benefits and material working conditions, although such conditions are, of course, important. It

means recognizing that, as all human institutions, contemporary organizations provide sites in which individuals build their identities, and create their life stories in a social context (Levinson et al, 1978). Undermining social recognition at work can result in undermining the “behavioral and existential unity” (Kallikanos, 2003, p. 600) of employees, an existential feature of work that deserves further attention.

On the other hand, in an era of increasing job insecurity, decreasing worker protections, and increasing economic inequality (e.g. Kalleberg, 2009), it might seem utopian to devote so much attention to social issues of respect at the cost of concrete, material gains for workers. As Nancy Fraser (e.g. Fraser & Honneth, 2003) points out in her critique of recognition theory, issues of respect and self-esteem have implications for demands for economic and material equality, and recognition views par far to little attention to these less “philosophical” types of equality. Fraser’s critique essentially accuses Honneth of conservatism because, as is made clear above, very little must change materially in the workplace for recognition to be promoted; in fact, it is already presupposed in the workplace and must simply be acknowledged (Honneth, 2008). Thus, the very advantage of recognition theory also generates an important critique, because recognition may not demand changes in the workplace that some deem necessary to worker well-being.

With regards to diversity, recognition views have a natural affinity to attempts to humanize the diversity literature (e.g. Pless & Maak, 2004). Because recognition does not depend on a particular set of cultural beliefs, or even organizational goals, but rather is the pre-cognitive groundwork for social relationships, recognition creates a wide space for plural forms of life. Diverse worldviews are able to thrive in a recognition-rich environment because social respect is not tied to particularistic world-views, and allows for plural and even contradictory standpoints without compromising on the basic respectability of organizational members (e.g. 2008). This does not mean that, within organizational contexts, members do not attempt to create specific cultures with particularistic values and practices (Honneth, 1997), but rather that the organization remains open to alternative values and practices.

This very focus on diversity, however, has led to criticisms of recognition as being a weak or thin ethical standpoint, because it gives little council on how managers or organizational actors should behave in specific circumstances. Because recognition does not assume support for particular identities, positions, or

behaviors, it cannot direct behaviors beyond affirming the basic dignity of persons (Geuss, 2008). I would argue however, that this simple step of affirmation is already a needed addition to contemporary organizational life, given that affirmation and social integration are not assured in contemporary organizations, but are increasingly precarious (e.g. Goodwin, 2005). Although recognition might not solve all organization problems, it is a good first step.

In sum, recognition theory offers an important step in understanding the “human side” of management, correcting traditional views of human capital by arguing that organizations are, first and foremost, social systems inhabited by existentially engaged human beings. Empirical research should focus on why it has been so easy to “forget” that the workplace is a seat of social meaning, and how we can best remain conscious of our social bonds at work. Although such knowledge is not likely to take the form of “techniques” of recognition, it may promote habits of thought, small ways of reminding ourselves what we do everyday at work, and why it is important.

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