The organizational construction of authenticity: An examination of contemporary food and dining in the U.S.

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Abstract
This chapter attempts to strengthen theoretical connections between interpretive cultural studies of authenticity and organizational studies. Adopting an unstructured qualitative approach, we use the domain of contemporary food and dining to develop a conceptual framework for assessing authenticity. We start by recognizing the two very different classical symbolic interpretations of authenticity: (1) type authenticity, where the question involves whether an entity is true to its associated type (or category or genre); and (2) moral authenticity, where the issue concerns whether the decisions behind the enactment and operation of an entity reflect sincere choices (i.e., choices true to one's self) rather than socially scripted responses. We next suggest that, in response to social change, these two interpretations have each spawned a unique but
response to social change, these two interpretations have each spawned a unique but related different meaning of authenticity. From type authenticity came what we call *craft authenticity*, which involves whether something is made using the appropriate techniques and ingredients. *Idiosyncratic authenticity* emerged out of moral authenticity; here the question is whether there is a commonly recognized (usually historical) quirkiness to the product or place. Our analysis then proceeds to develop a general conjecture, namely, that communication and impact of authenticity comes through most forcefully when it is constructed organizationally—tightly and visibly integrated into the structure of an organization. Depending on which of the four meanings of authenticity is operative, the details of the most compelling organizational construction will vary.
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