

Being your true self isn't always treated equally in the business world, new study finds

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Is authenticity truly beneficial in the workplace? Are places of work conducive to employee authenticity? Not for everyone, research from

FIU Business finds.

"The main insight: We caution this notion of encouraging everyone to be authentic," said Brooke Buckman, assistant professor of global leadership and management at FIU Business who co-authored "Being Your True Self At Work," published in the July 2019 issue of the Academy of Management Annals. "In a lot of instances being your true self isn't always treated equally in the business world."

As [public interest](#) in authenticity increases, she added, research both reinforces and tempers the existing enthusiasm surrounding the topic.

Buckman and her co-authors analyzed more than 100 empirical and seminal studies published since 1997 on individual authenticity in different organizations. The consensus of most authenticity-focused research is that "there are such great personal benefits to authenticity, that we should encourage everyone to be authentic, even at work," Buckman said.

However, those personal benefits, including feeling happier and more energized, often come at a career-focused cost for minorities, making them feel they're walking on a tightrope.

"For example, often times women who are authentic at work risk being viewed as 'not management material' because their authentic selves don't necessarily align with others' ideas of how a leader or manager should act," Buckman said. "Thus, many employees experience contradictory messaging—on the one hand, they are told to 'just be themselves,' but on the other hand, they feel like they need to act in certain ways in order to succeed in the workplace."

One of the biggest challenges the researchers faced was that most of the existing studies on authenticity are siloed. Many have analyzed the topic

using labels such as "authentic leadership," "emotional labor" and "identity management" rather than "authenticity" per se.

"Being Your True Self At Work" aims to create a research agenda for future analyses about authenticity.

"There are lots of definitions and ideas, but until we can all agree on a definition of how we're going to measure [authenticity](#), the literature will become more noisy and messy," Buckman said. "Our research encourages them to start talking to one another, to start looking at the social implications."

Provided by Florida International University

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