

**'I've found it extremely draining': Emotional labour and the lived experience of line
managing neurodiversity**

Abstract

Purpose: The paper addresses a significant gap in the line manager, HRM and diversity management literature, that of exploring the role and significance of emotional labour (EL) in relation to the lived experienced of line managing neurodiversity.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative approach was used to explore lived experiences of line managers responsible for managing neurodiverse employees. Interviews were conducted with line managers employed in the UK transport industry.

Findings: The findings provide rich insights into line managing neurodiversity. A key overall finding is reasonable adjustments deemed essential to support neurodiverse employees require a myriad of hidden, complex, time consuming and often emotionally draining interactions with disabled employees, the employee's wider team, and HRM and occupational health (OH) practitioners.

Research limitations/implications: This is an exploratory study and therefore limited by nature of the research design, industry focus, scope of study and sample size.

Practical implications: The findings have the potential to inform HRM and OH practitioner support for line managers responsible for managing neurodiverse employees.

Social implications: The study contributes to wider societal attempts to make employment more inclusive to a range of historically disadvantaged groups.

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Originality/value: The study fills an important gap in the HRM literature on line managing neurodiverse employees. The study makes a specific and unique contribution to the extensive literatures on line management, disability and EL.

Key words: Line management, diversity management, disability, neurodiversity, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD, Asperger syndrome, emotional labour, transport industry

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

While there is no apparent consensus on what distinguishes the role of a line manager from other management roles, line management essentially concerns responsibility for directing non-managerial employees in the direction of accomplishing goals set at a higher organisational level (Sims *et al.*, 2001). What more broadly defines contemporary line management is the impact of the external environment on practice, including the requirement of 'leaner' or 'flatter' structures, resulting in line managers increasingly expected to take on the responsibilities and pressures of middle management roles (Hale, 2005).

A further trend is the increased expectation of line managers to be involved in HRM practice (Dick and Hyde, 2006). The upshot from this trend is more line manager responsibility for putting HRM policies into practice. However, placing expectations on line managers has proven to be problematic. For instance, research stresses a dissonance of opinions between line managers and HRM practitioners on the detail of everyday HRM practice (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003; Maxwell and Watson, 2006), line managers report insufficient support in their new HRM role (Gibb, 2003), and line managers lack time and resources to acquire

sufficient confidence to take up specialist HRM roles (Beattie, 2006). The result is a range of significant shortcomings in the HRM competencies of line managers (McGuire *et al.*, 2008).

A specialised HRM practice line managers are expected to increasingly observe is managing diversity. Managing diversity concerns creating work-based cultures seeking, respecting, valuing and harnessing difference (Schneider, 2001). Diversity defined by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2018) is:

... about recognising difference, but not actively leveraging it to drive organisational success. It's acknowledging the benefit of having a range of perspectives in decision-making and the workforce being representative of the organisation's customers.

There are many facets to diversity, with diversity conventionally associated with age, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and disability. The focus of the research is disability, defined as a product of social and economic structures, with structures leading to institutional forms of exclusion and cultural attitudes embedded in social practices (Terzi, 2004). Applied to the context of the current research, disability is the contribution of employers to the disabling process.

The study, however, represents a departure from conventional takes on disability. The current research concerns line manager responsibility for an emergent aspect of managing diversity. This emergent aspect of diversity practice concerns managing "neurodiversity", involving an increased recognition by employers of employees who exhibit behaviour associated with life-long conditions such as: dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, Tourette syndrome, ADD/ADHD and Asperger syndrome; conditions covered by the Equality Act 2010, and conditions associated with high levels of employment exclusion.

To be expected with new and emergent issues, there is likely to be a haphazard range of existing research on such matters, indicating a wide-range of options in terms of where and how to close the knowledge gap surrounding neurodiverse conditions (NDCs). Careful attention must also be given to the location and framing of a study of this kind. In brief, the study ahead involves an exploratory study of an emergent facet to diversity management - line managing neurodiversity. The aim of the study is to explore line managing neurodiversity through a lens based on framing disability as a structural process, as well as the lived experiences of line managers, or how line managers live through and respond to their experiences (Boylorn, 2008). Further, given neurodiversity practices are likely to be at an embryonic stage of development in even the best resourced organisation, requiring line managers to work to some extent with HRM and occupational health (OH) practitioners, a further aim is to frame the study using theories related to emotional labour (EL) (Hochschild, 1983). EL is chosen as line managing neurodiversity may in one sense involve applying a range of practical advice and information, the lived experience is also likely to require extensive amounts of EL.

The study aims will be achieved via the following research questions:

- 1) How and to what extent does EL feature in the myriad of interactions expected in line managing neurodiversity?
- 2) What is the impact of EL on line managers expected to manage neurodiversity?
- 3) How might an approach based on EL, lived experience and the social model of disability inform HRM practice in relation to managing neurodiversity?

To achieve study aims and answer associated research questions, the paper is structured as follows. First, the literature relating to NDCs and neurodiversity, line management and

diversity/disability, and EL, is discussed to guide and frame the study. Second, details of the study, as well as its methodological and analytical underpinnings, are described and discussed. Third, the findings are presented, analysed and discussed. In the fourth and final section key findings, contributions, study limitations and suggestions for future research are summarised.

Literature review and theoretical framing

The aim of this section is to define key terms and discuss key literature related to NDCs and neurodiversity, line management and diversity/disability, and EL, all necessary for further guiding and framing the study ahead.

Neurodiverse conditions and neurodiversity

The focus of the study is four NDCs: dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADD/ADHD and Asperger syndrome (see Table I). Further NDCs including dyscalculia, dysgraphia and Tourette syndrome, come under the neurodiverse umbrella (see Armstrong, 2010; Babineau, 2010; Hendrickx, 2010), but not considered for the study. The selection of dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD/ADD and Asperger syndrome was requested by the commissioning body - the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association trade union (TSSA), principally because the four conditions were the main NDCs reported by members and trade union representatives to the TSSA.

Insert Table I about here

The prevalence and scope of concern regarding the NDCs is complicated by overlap between medical descriptions (Portwood, 2000), with individuals commonly diagnosed with two or more NDCs (Hendrickx, 2010). However, ten per cent of the UK adult population, or over three million employees, is believed to have a diagnosed or undiagnosed NDC (Butterworth and Kovas, 2013). It is estimated between two and fifteen per cent of adults of working age has dyslexia (POST, 2004), two and five per cent dyspraxia (Dyspraxia Foundation, 2012), one and

four per cent ADD/ADHD (NCCMH, 2009) and one per cent Asperger syndrome (Brugha *et al.*, 2009). The figures suggest many UK line managers are already involved in managing neurodiversity, even if there is little research out there to guide such practice. In terms of what makes NDCs unique is NDCs often go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed, widely mistaken by non-experts as odd behaviour, with much of how the general population understand NDCs based on popular media and journalistic accounts or out-dated views.

Until recently it was common for the NDCs described in Table I to be understood based on medical discourses of disability. For instance, medical professionals and the wider public typically viewed Asperger syndrome people as deviant and incapable based on bodily or cognitive impairments (Krcek, 2013). This perspective is evident in the medical language used to describe NDCs (see Table I) and thus likely to create negative, stigmatising and disabling stereotypes of neurodiverse people. However, the emergence of neurodiversity can be attributed to autistic people deeply offended by media reports in the late 1990s of an "autism epidemic" (Baker, 2011). Since then an assortment of organisations, as well as an emergent group of academics, have pressed for NDCs to be recognised as part of normal human variation (Paletta, 2013), hence the potential to include NDCs within the management of diversity in organisations.

NDCs fall under the emergent concept of neurodiversity, a concept allowing an alternative perspective on a wide-range of NDCs. Neurodiversity should also be thought of as a growing social movement (Armstrong, 2010). Further, neurodiversity is associated with a positive statement of difference (Grant, 2009); neurodiverse people having brains "wired" differently from the wider population (Hendrickx, 2010). The neurodiversity as a concept remains problematic though. For instance, neurodiverse people are unique and NDCs affect individuals differently (Hendrickx, 2010). There is the goal of social inclusion to consider, but there are many moral, social, legal and medical problems associated with the ideals of neurodiversity

(Herrera, 2013). Further, outside certain academic and political circles, NDCs are widely viewed through the lens of medical models of disability (Baker, 2011). Despite limitations, neurodiversity appears to be an overdue candidate for inclusion in diversity practice, especially as there is increasing evidence of organisations already working towards recognising such differences alongside more conventional categories of diversity.

Line managing diversity

As noted earlier, there is growing expectation for line managers to be involved in managing diversity (Riach, 2009). Where studies exist, however, the focus tends to be on the organisational response (e.g. Liff, 1999; Wilson and Iles, 1999) and employee perspectives (Kulik, 2014), but rarely examines the lived experiences of line managing diversity (Riach, 2009). Consequently, Tatli (2011) called for further research on line managing diversity to understand the field and the experiences of those engaged in such work. Further research will help to address gaps identified by Kulik (2014), including the role of line managers in implementing diversity management, and a need for sectoral level analyses. This is important considering the gap between organisational equality policies and equality practices by line managers (Woodhams and Lupton, 2006). For example, Foster and Harris (2005) identified disparities in the conceptualisation of “diversity” between line managers, including cynicism of the concept of diversity management. Further, while HRM responsibilities are increasingly associated with line managers, this does not mean equality and diversity processes are followed (Creegan *et al.*, 2003). In addition, there is a tendency for those engaged in diversity management to adopt discourses which hide heterogeneity within social groups (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). In short, while the extant literature has explored line manager engagement with age (Riach, 2009), gender (Woodhams and Lupton, 2006) and ethnicity (Kamenou and Fearfull, 2006); disability has been neglected in this literature.

Where studies exist in terms of exploring the line management of disability, the focus tends to be acute impairments, and impairments attracting wider public understanding or experience. For instance, studies explore the line management of chronic ill health (Munir *et al.*, 2009; Haafkens *et al.*, 2011), a stroke (Coole *et al.*, 2012), cancer treatment (Amir *et al.*, 2010), mental health conditions (Sainsbury *et al.*, 2008; Shift, 2009), and serious illness and injury (Cunningham *et al.*, 2004). Common to such research findings is how line managing disability is time-consuming, representing a distraction from the wider line manager role (Roulstone *et al.*, 2003). A further finding highlights how line managers are rarely literate in the specifics of disabilities (Irvine, 2001), yet when they do have insight or experience, often come into conflict with organisational practitioners concerning mechanisms best able to support disabled employees (Haafkens *et al.*, 2011). Crucially, as noted by Coole *et al.* (2012), the line management of disability often comes with considerable costs to line managers, with practical issues associated with excessive emotional strains. The line management of disability is also defined by a lack of support with manager sensing isolation in supporting roles (Amir *et al.*, 2010). Despite these findings, studies reveal little about the level, intensity and nature of EL required when line managing disability.

Line managing neurodiversity

As referred to earlier, Riach (2009) bemoans a lack of consideration of the lived experiences of line managers in diversity literature. This is the case for line managing neurodiversity with perhaps one exception. Babineau's (2010) study highlights how line managers are routinely compromised by having to improve productivity and employee morale at the same time as respecting the medical confidentiality of the disabled employee. In this study an imbalance of priorities led to line managers contributing to the disabling process by directing frustrations towards neurodiverse employees. In the wider literature, line managing neurodiversity is guided by a range of non-empirically driven practical advice. While EL is not explicitly

considered in such literature, it is assumed the most basic reasonable adjustments will only work with an additional commitment to EL on behalf of the line manager.

Practical advice includes the following. Line managers are encouraged to develop trusting relationships with dyslexic employees, because dyslexic employees often perceive little benefit from disclosing their condition (Morris and Turnbull, 2007). Line managers should be prepared to work with dyspraxic employees on developing orderly working habits (Howard, 2009), providing instructions on operating office equipment and developing flexible patterns of working (Hagan, 2004). Line managers should consider developing flexible working patterns for ADD/ADHD employees, as well as putting in extra support to compensate for memory and attention problems (Painter *et al.*, 2008; Adamou *et al.*, 2013). Line managers, however, need to consider more tailored strategies in the case of Asperger syndrome, including encouraging Asperger syndrome employees to work with other Asperger syndrome employees (Johnson, 2005), as well as line managers willing to work with autism advocacy groups (Hurlbutt and Chalmers, 2004). In sum, it seems line managers should be expected to work with neurodiverse employees on a range of informal, practical and low-cost reasonable adjustments, which are sometimes overseen by HRM and OH practitioners. However, the adjustments are in all probability going to require the line manager to expend a certain amount of EL in setting them up and keeping them going.

Line management and emotional labour

While research considers line managing disability (e.g. Haafkens *et al.*, 2011), as well as disability and EL (e.g. Wilton, 2008), there is no known research bringing together the key issues at stake in the current research: line management, EL and disability. Therefore, the final sub-section is focused on defining EL, followed by discussing research linking line management to EL, for the purpose of further framing the line management of neurodiversity.

Hochschild (1983, p. 7) was one of the first to identify EL, referring to it as ‘the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display’. Hochschild conceptualised EL as something that could be sold for a wage and therefore has an exchange value. In earlier work, Hochschild (1979) proposed EL to be a gesture in a social exchange, designed to serve a function and not to be understood as a facet of personality. Hochschild (1983) broadly divided EL into two areas: ‘surface acting’, where employees pretended to feel, and ‘deep acting’, where the employee transformed inner feelings by use of trained imagination. EL was initially conceptualised as being a form of alienation, as performing EL constituted a separation of the self, possibly leading to psychological harm and job burnout.

Theorists have developed increasingly complex and nuanced takes on EL. Further, studies have found employees display genuine feelings, as well as derive satisfaction from performing EL (Payne, 2009). EL has been explored in a wide-range of employment-related contexts, allowing a means to conceptualise increasing employer attempts to control and measure emotions related to, for example, service work (Korczynski, 2003), sex work (Sanders, 2005) and university lecturing (Ogbonna and Harris, 2004). For the purpose of this paper, EL is defined as the emotions required in the interpersonal interaction between line manager and neurodiverse employee (and employee’s team, customers and broader sources of formal organisational support); EL is a critical facet in the line management of neurodiversity. The nature of the EL used in such situations will depend, however, on a range of factors, including experience, skill levels and time and autonomy to line manage neurodiversity.

There is limited research on EL and line management. However, where it does exist, it features line managers who work in the following industries or ways: projects (Predelli, 2013), care (Gorman, 2000), civil service (Newman *et al.*, 2009), banking, electrical engineering and hospitality (Wang and Seibert, 2015) and HRM (Mustafa *et al.*, 2014; O’Brien and Linehan, 2018). Importantly, as noted earlier (e.g. Sims *et al.*, 2001), line management has many

common characteristics, suggesting commonality to an extent with line managers forming the basis of this paper. In this small crop of literature line managers use or resort to EL for a wide-range of reasons. For instance, to cope when industrial action spills over into personal and family life (Scales *et al.*, 2014), to present a caring image in an otherwise emotionless bureaucracy (Newman *et al.*, 2009), to 'mop up' feelings of anger towards the company when dealing with redundancies (O'Brien and Linehan, 2018), raise the performance of subordinates (Humphrey, 2012; Wang and Seibert, 2015), help to retain talent (Bratton and Wilson, 2018), and as a soft, yet key skill to navigate complex care work (Gorman, 2000).

Further relevant research, for example, highlights how EL needs to be better recognised as a key part of effective line management (Gorman, 2000) and EL skills are central to line management roles involving many complex social interactions (O'Brien and Linehan, 2018). However, line managers are unlikely to be trained to do EL in an effective and sustainable manner (Bratton and Wilson, 2018). More specifically, Humphrey *et al.* (2008) found line managers performed a more complex and advanced form of EL compared to service or frontline employees. Humphrey *et al.* identified three types of EL performed by line managers: sympathy, support and anger. Further, EL can lead to high levels of personal stress for line managers (Scales *et al.*, 2014), although the stresses of EL can be reduced if line managers are granted high levels of autonomy (Newman *et al.*, 2009) and time to build long-term relationships with employees and the wider team (Mustafa *et al.*, 2016).

Summary

The literature indicates a complex range of challenges faced in the line management of neurodiversity. However, time, skill, autonomy and support seem key to the successful line management of neurodiversity. EL seems a key part of line managing neurodiversity, although unsupported or unskilled line managers may experience unnecessarily high and unsustainable

levels of EL, posing potential problems for line managers and jeopardising reasonable adjustments.

Study details and methods

This section of the paper serves to describe and discuss the context to the study: white-collar employment in the UK transport industry, describe and discuss the methods used to achieve the research aims and answer research questions, and, to present and discuss how the datasets were analysed.

The study context: White-collar employment and the UK transport industry

The research is based on stage three and four of a wider research project initiated by the TSSA on neurodiversity in the UK transport industry. TSSA commissioned the research in late 2012 because union members reported not taking up learning, development, and promotion opportunities, due to difficulties arising from undiagnosed, unsupported NDCs. Some members had been disciplined and their employment terminated because their NDC had not been recognised as a causal factor. Stage one of the research project involved exploring, through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, levels of knowledge and attitudes towards neurodiversity, with reference to the lived experience of support for neurodiverse employees in areas of learning and development (see Sang *et al.*, 2016). Stage two involved semi-structured interviews with neurodiverse employees, as well as trade unions representatives and full-time union officials specialising in supporting neurodiverse employees (see Richards and Sang, 2016).

The research is based on 18 interviews (from stage 3) with line managers. The research is based on a further 10 interviews (from stage 4) conducted 2015-2016, bringing the total of interviews with line managers to 28. Stage 4 was based on the TSSA commissioning further

research exploring the line management of NDCs. Due to methods of recruitment, most research participants are members of TSSA.

The TSSA represents highly skilled transport workers, typically from an engineering background, yet often found in administrative, clerical, supervisory, managerial, professional, technical, research and executive roles (TSSA, 2017). Our sample of line managers (see Table II) reflects the composition and types of employees represented by the TSSA, as well as wider white-collar work found in the UK transport industry.

According to Arrowsmith (2003), wholesale privatisation has had a significant impact on industrial relations in the UK rail industry. The increased importance of commercial imperatives may not have overly weakened trade unions operating in the UK rail industry, yet such pressures have led to increasing heterogeneity in industrial relations practices, with labour flexibility representing a key bargaining issue. In what remains of the publicly owned transport industry (e.g. Network Rail and Transport for London), Morris and Farrell (2007) report high levels of restructuring, with managers facing longer hours, operating in complex working environments, experiencing declining job security, a less secure career path and challenges to seniority-based pay. In terms of the study, these research findings suggest managing diversity across the transport industry will be noted by inconsistent practices. Further, the changing nature of work in the transport industry suggests line managers are likely to find managing diversity to be a challenging task and a distraction from their wider role (Roulstone *et al.*, 2003).

There is limited literature on white-collar work in the transport/rail industry, yet literature relating to the work of engineers and engineering managers provides some important contextual information. For instance, white-collar transport employees have seen a decline in personal autonomy (Rose, 2014), increased problems in relation to work-life-balance (Hughes

and Bozionelos, 2007) and increasingly required to develop interpersonal skills (Cooke, 2002). Further, engineers promoted into management roles see themselves as engineers in critical situations (Johnson and Sargeant, 1998). The findings suggest transport line managers are unlikely to be formally trained in EL (Bratton and Wilson, 2018), face high levels of stress if expected to perform high levels of EL (Newman *et al.*, 2018), and may be conflicted by a commitment to line managing neurodiversity when facing a critical situation. Overall, there may be limited literature related to the transport industry, but the wider literature appears to have relevance to the current case study.

Methods

Due to the lack of research exploring line manager engagement with diversity management (Riach, 2009), a qualitative approach is adopted, allowing the collection of rich data not possible via survey methods (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011).

Insert Table II about here

As noted above, the research is based on interviews with line managers, all of whom have experience of managing at least one neurodiverse employee. Table II (line managers 1-18 are from stage three of the research and line managers 19-28 represent participants from stage four) provides demographic information about participating line managers, including job title, age range and gender. In 2012, line managers were recruited via emails sent through the TSSA membership list. In late 2015, similar recruitment emails were sent out via a Network Rail line manager-based internal email list. 13 of the eventual participants were women and 15 men. The average age of participants is 48 years of age. Eight participants reported experience of having managed two or more neurodiverse employees (see Table II). No financial inducements were used to attract participants and participants self-selected for the study. The first interviews were conducted October 2012 to March 2013. The second set of interviews were

conducted December 2015 to December 2016. Interviews were conducted by the first three named authors of the paper. Twenty-one interviews were conducted by telephone and 7 face-to-face. Interviews varied from 32 to 75 minutes, averaging approximately 50 minutes each. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed before analysis. Telephone interviews allowed access to hard-to-reach groups, defined by employment of a peripatetic nature, who are geographically dispersed and often committed to anti-social work patterns. Interviews were semi-structured to ensure consistency across participants, but so questions could be asked out of sequence and more information could be asked for if needed (Fielding and Thomas, 2008).

Given the lack of extant literature on line managing neurodiversity, interviews aimed to gain rich and varied understanding of their experiences. Factors informing the interviews (see Appendix 1 for wider details of the interview guideline) included important job-related information from interviewees (job information and work history), awareness of neurodiversity and sources of information on NDCs. In addition, interview topics were drawn from extant literature surrounding employment and NDCs, as well as contextual information related to the current, difficult, economic climate. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of privacy and anonymity. To preserve anonymity, limited details are provided about research participants.

Data analysis

Transcribed interviews were analysed using template analysis, allowing the use of priori codes from the interview schedule, in addition to the development of codes emerging from the data (King, 2004). Template analysis is consistent with research aimed at understanding perspectives of participants (Donnelly, 2011; Tietze and Nadin, 2011), which underpin the study. Coding was undertaken by the lead author and verified by the second author. Given

the size of the datasets (modest) and exploratory nature of the study, the process of code verification was informal and principally involved the first author consulting the second author on choice of codes and how codes related to various aspects of the research. Priori codes included, for example, line manager sources of information on NDCs, use and experiences of diversity practices, as well as use and experiences of organisational support related to NDCs. Codes to emerge from the data included levels of EL required by line managers to navigate between neurodiverse employees, team colleagues, and forms of support. Priori codes link to sub-sections in the following findings section. Codes to emerge from the data analysis are incorporated into the sub-sections.

Line managing neurodiversity in the UK transport industry

The following section presents findings from interviews with line managers employed in the UK transport industry. All participants had responsibility for line managing neurodiversity. The broad purpose in this section is to provide a multi-faceted account of the lived experience of managing neurodiversity. The broader picture is divided into five areas: line manager and NDC information; interactions with neurodiverse employees; interactions with the employee's wider team; interactions with formal organisational support structures; and, the impact of managing neurodiversity on line managers.

Acquiring information on neurodiverse conditions

Information is a critical part of the role of any manager. Indeed, a key conclusion from the first main part of the paper is how information on NDCs is likely to lessen the chances of disabling a neurodiverse employee, principally because the information will lessen the need to perform EL in relation to managing neurodiversity. This sub-section is not about EL per se; instead it represents an exploration of where line managers get important information on NDCs and

whether what is received represents an appropriate level of information to ease the expected burden of line managing neurodiversity.

Most line managers reported the neurodiverse employee as a key and sometimes only source of information on NDCs. In other words, most managers received little or no formal training on NDCs. While neurodiverse employees are likely to represent an important source of information, research suggests such information will be limited by the plain fact that NDCs affect individuals differently (Hendrickx, 2010). That said, a sizeable minority of line managers reported acquiring information from a range of further and more reliable sources. Indeed, two line managers received information because of trade union equality representative training: ‘... being also an active union representative, we’re aware of people with dyslexia and things like that’ (Line Manager 10).

A similar minority of line managers reported acquiring information from formal internal and external sources, including an internal organisational support group. The line manager of an Asperger syndrome employee explains how important information was acquired from an employer sponsored group:

I'm on the Diversity and Inclusion Group, steering group and working group now. So, you know, there's some really great people on there and helping them to help others... I get some expert assistance here (Line Manager 27).

In a very small number of cases, further and specialised sources of information was obtained from an external organisation specialising in NDCs (Hurlbutt and Chalmers, 2004):

One thing was to call in the help of NAS [The National Autistic Society] for further advice. Very helpful in briefing individual teams. As a [Asperger syndrome] grad trainee he moved

from team to team for various learning experiences. They were very good in running little workshops before our guy arrived there, so they knew what to expect (Line Manager 4).

More generally, however, line managers compensated for a lack of information provided by their employer and cited television, newspapers and Internet searches as important sources of information on NDCs. Overall, the findings suggest most line managers were insufficiently literate on the specifics of NDCs (Irvine, 2001) and consequently likely to feel unsupported and isolated in such roles (Amir *et al.*, 2010), suggesting problems ahead when line managing neurodiversity.

Interactions with neurodiverse employees

The lived experience of line managing neurodiversity is defined by frequent and ongoing interactions with neurodiverse employees, far in excess when compared with interactions with neurotypical employees. Such interactions, as expected, took up an excessive amount of line manager time. Further, the lived experience of line managing neurodiversity was heavily defined by EL. Typically at the heart of the interactions were attempts to develop orderly working habits (Howard, 2009) and raise the performance levels of neurodiverse employees (Humphrey, 2012; Wang and Seibert, 2015). For instance, Line Manager 1 detailed a system involving images on filing cabinets to help with memory and attention problems of an ADHD employee (Adamou *et al.*, 2013), which also increased employee productivity.

However, for the most part, practical solutions required extensive interactions with neurodiverse employees to ensure their effectiveness. The example below demonstrates how extensive interactions with an Asperger syndrome employee can lead to effective reasonable adjustments:

He had the quietest office. Only two people in at any time... He had a lot of big dictionaries, despite our "clean desk" policy, but I just left him to it... I had to plan anything that came out of the blue, as he found it hard to cope with, and his delivery was quite slow, so it was a case of planning everything upfront with him and having a lot of dialogue. Spoke to him probably more than my other staff because we couldn't articulate through email that well, like instructions... It takes more time to manage... it definitely has an impact (Line Manager 9).

Similar successes, typically based on developing informal and flexible patterns of working (Hagan, 2004), were widely reported by line managers. However, such adjustments to working patterns rarely came without difficulties and frustrations for the line manager (Babineau, 2010). In the subsequent interview extract, a line manager responsible for three dyslexic employees, relives the emotion-draining nature of managing dyslexia:

They [three employees] are all very sensitive and demanding in the way of attention-seeking. Not in a horrible way, but it is constant attention that they draw, which flares up from time to time, but in a big way (Line Manager 15).

Interviews further revealed high levels of EL to be required when line managing neurodiversity in relation to customer relations. In the following instance, the line manager supports a dyslexic employee struggling to manage with a customer-facing part of the job:

I don't think [his dyslexia is] widely known. I suspect some people are aware, but it's not widely known. I mean we've had some things that haven't gone so well over emails [with suppliers], the language that he uses isn't always -- doesn't always flow. It's not easy to read sometimes in an email, so trying to encourage him to phone up people to have the conversation because his communication by speaking is much better than by writing (Line Manager 20).

Supporting neurodiverse employees in customer-facing roles was commented on by several further line managers. A further example (below) is of a Station Manager consistently having to remind her Asperger syndrome/ADD employee of the customer-facing part of his job:

So slowly, but surely, he is now talking to the staff and then what I do is I stand on the platform with him and then drag him along with me saying: “come on, we’re going to help this customer...” (Line manager 28).

In most instances line managers viewed such interactions as part of their normal day-to-day job, but for many this represented an unwanted burden.

Interactions with the neurodiverse employee’s wider team

Two key teamworking issues arose from the first main part of the paper: the definition adopted on EL recognises how line managing diversity is likely to require interactions with the wider team to make sure certain reasonable adjustments work effectively; and, unless the line manager has ample time, information, resources and relevant skills to navigate such interactions, making reasonable adjustments may result in a degree of team-based conflict, thus jeopardising reasonable adjustments in a particular way.

Problems associated with reasonable adjustments and teamworking featured widely in the interviews. The following quote, however, demonstrates it is possible for line managers to make reasonable adjustments requiring wider team consent:

I've been lucky in that I've had the relationship with the [team] involved to be able to say: you trust me on this one... In the case of the guy with dyslexia, he went on to be quite open about it [to the team] and people understand when you're open (Line Manager 23).

In some cases, team members may resist the reasonable adjustments, but even then, it is possible for line managers to make good in such situations and remove such disabling forces. This is demonstrated below where a line manager challenges the disabling behaviour of wider team members, who are called out on making offensive remarks to a dyslexic employee:

I think I have told one or two people to leave it out. Open banter, people could call it. It goes to a point where you say “enough”, and that was enough to deal with it... (Line Manager 9).

In a slightly different scenario, line managing neurodiversity took on a multi-faceted format. In the example below, to guarantee the effectiveness of reasonable adjustments, the line manager had to interact with the wider team to create awareness of the problems faced by the Asperger syndrome employee, but also had to interact with the employee in terms of developing a better understanding of how he needs to work with his team:

In my team, there have been issues, he has not contributed at times as much as people would have expected and I have had to explain to them. Once people understand, and I make sure people understand, it is okay... There is a degree of understanding how much of this he needs to explain to people, to make sure they have confidence in him (Line Manager 14).

However, line managers reported limitations to interactions with team members. Indeed, in some instances, wider team members appeared heavily resistant to line manager requests to cooperate with reasonable adjustments. The following passage represents a situation where team members resist line manager attempts to enact reasonable adjustments, leading to the disabling and underperformance of the Asperger syndrome employee:

Day to day it is not quite so easy to make all the allowances that you need to, but some [wider team members] just don't answer his emails, as they just know he gets incredibly frustrated. It's not their problem, and then he failed his targets, because nobody communicates with him (Line Manager 13).

Interactions with formal organisational support structures

While most reasonable adjustments could be enacted informally by the line manager, it was often the case that recommendations regarding such reasonable adjustments came via formal organisational support structures, typically in the form of HRM and OH practitioner support. However, as reported in the extant literature, line managers revealed a general lack of support in their new HRM role (Gibb, 2003), rarely had the time and resources to take up their specialist diversity role (Beattie, 2006) and often showed awareness of a gap between what they were expected to do and what was possible (Woodhams and Lupton, 2006). There were a few exceptions to this, however. For instance, a line manager recounts a positive interaction with an HRM practitioner regarding the details of reasonable adjustments for a dyslexic employee:

When the person came to my team, I was able to contact the lady who did the [awareness] training and ask her for advice, about software for my colleague. I asked her to see the trainer to ensure she has all the support she could have. I knew the contact trainer was there. Trainer was really helpful (Line Manager 6).

The broader picture, however, echoed the findings of the extant literature on these matters. An example of line manager frustrations with formal organisational support structures is provided by a line manager attempting to secure wider formal support for an Asperger syndrome employee:

[The employee] couldn't do the job. Getting Occ Health to help me was really hard... I went to a staff network meeting, and we had a talk to Occ Health. I asked for this facility that they were talking about at the meeting, and they just gave me another number! There was no "one stop shop" service to access. You have to wiggle your way through (Line Manager 12).

While eventually preventing the disabling of the employee, interactions with formal support structures came with hidden costs, hidden costs burdened by the line manager. A further example concerns line managers coming into conflict with the providers of formal organisational support structures concerning reasonable adjustments (Haafkens *et al.*, 2011). Again, the situation incurred unaccounted costs to the line manager, typically in the form of excessive and burdensome interactions with the providers of formal support structures. Such a scenario, based on circular interactions with OH, is retold by a line manager below:

Occupational health will say you've got to do this, you've got to do that [for a dyslexic employee], but then from a business point of view it's hard to do and you've got to get a balance that's right for the business, being a team leader and a manager but also helping and supporting that person and it is quite difficult. You have to come up with these things yourself and then go back to them and say can we do this, is this okay, and then you have to wait for them to come back and say, well, maybe, but it's hard (Line Manager 24).

This was by no means an isolated instance of line managers investing high levels of EL to secure formal support for reasonable adjustments. Indeed, a further example comes by way of having to deal with problematic HRM practitioner decisions related to transferring a neurodiverse employee to a new place of working. Rather than being sorted out at a more formal and specialist level, the line manager is left to sort out the problem of finding a line manager for

the employee and in doing so faced challenging behaviour from the Asperger syndrome employee:

[The employee] was concerned about moving here, I get that and it's a change to his routine... [The new] line manager he got didn't like him. So, there was lots of arguments and him storming out and having meltdowns and stuff. So, we swapped his line manager for somebody else and then the line manager was taken away... I've had to take [on] managing him... it's quite stressful for me... I've found it extremely draining (Line Manager 19).

These experiences chime very much with the work of Mustafa *et al.* (2016) who noted how stresses related to EL rise considerably when line managers do not have the time to build long-term relationships with subordinates.

Impact of line managing neurodiversity

Overall, the personal impact of line managing neurodiversity varied between participants. However, in all instances line managing neurodiversity was a time-consuming and highly distracting commitment (Roulstone *et al.*, 2003). Further, the impact was high as the EL involved in line managing neurodiversity typically took the form of deep acting (Hochschild, 2003). Indeed, interviews revealed no sense of pretence when it came to line managing neurodiversity. That said, this did not mean all line managers were alienated in their role; rather, several line managers reported high levels of satisfaction from supporting a neurodiverse employee (Payne, 2009). The following quote provides an example of how line managing dyslexia comes with its ups and down, but overall it can be a fulfilling experience:

It was challenging. On reflection, you tend to remember all the positives over the negatives... As a manager, it worked well. Overall, I got a positive experience out of it (Line Manager 9).

There were further instances of line managers reporting high levels of satisfaction when managing neurodiversity. However, in this instance, line managers attributed the positive experience to non-employment experiences. The following example is based on a line manager reflecting on a positive experience of managing Asperger syndrome:

... I think I've done it reasonably diplomatically, so I'm happy with it, but what I can understand is that a person who was, you know, less aware of others or hadn't got personal experience that they could relate to this could probably get quite exasperated (Line Manager 19).

The quote is based on the line manager applying experience acquired when raising a neurodiverse child, effectively applying skills used to nurture and care for a child when managing neurodiversity. In other words, line managers in such instances are resorting to performing EL outwith what is expected of the formal employee-employer exchange relationship (Hochschild, 1983).

Satisfaction from line managing neurodiversity by no means reflected the lived experience of all line managers. In the subsequent quote, the line manager in question reflects on the personal stress (Scales *et al.*, 2009) of line managing dyspraxia:

Frustrating. Sometimes had to walk away... A couple of the team said I had the patience of a saint. People around me were getting exasperated; as I was. It was very difficult... (Line Manager 3).

In some instances, line managers reported high levels of psychological harm (Hochschild, 1983). The following interview excerpt details how managing neurodiversity has the potential to damage the health of line managers:

It has caused me a couple of health issues. I have done her job for her, caused a big drain on my time, to do all her work as well... I started to have heart palpitations, exacerbating an existing condition... It has had a direct effect on my health, which I am not prepared to do again (Line Manager 18).

While in some cases managing neurodiversity was a positive experience, in some instances this was only possible because the line manager drew on skillsets unrelated to the wider management role, or the line manager went above and beyond in making sure reasonable adjustments took effect. However, it is apparent there are many instances of line managers incurring considerable practical and emotional costs when supporting a neurodiverse employee (Coole *et al.*, 2012). This is not to blame the employee; rather, it tells the tale, or the lived experience of, unique, hidden and often unsustainable burdens employers place upon line managers required to manage neurodiverse employees.

Discussion

Approximately 10 per cent of the UK workforce, or over three million employees, has a diagnosed or undiagnosed NDC (Butterworth and Kovas, 2013), representing a very serious and rapidly emerging diversity issue for HRM and OH practitioners. With the management of diversity increasingly expected of line managers, it seems line manager practice in this highly specialised and emergent facet of diversity deserves far more research than is currently afforded.

However, until the current research, little was known generally about line management involvement in diversity practices (Kulik, 2014), particularly in terms of the lived experience of and the EL required to line manage neurodiversity (Riach, 2009; Tatli 2011). In short, the aim of the current research was to explore lived experience of line managing neurodiversity, to understand the potential for both discrimination and successful reasonable adjustments to be implemented, but also to understand the stresses and strains such practice may place upon line managers. A range of research questions were constructed to guide the proceedings, all of which variously sought answers related to evaluating the role of EL in line managing neurodiversity.

Key study findings

An important discussion point is: what are the key findings to come from the study? One key finding is EL figures widely and prominently in the line management of neurodiversity. EL seems critical in terms of, for example, when implementing minor, yet critical reasonable adjustments, mediating between team members, and dealing with everyday matters that have got out of hand. Further, EL figured prominently in line manager interactions with a range of parties to the implementation and maintenance of reasonable adjustments. This is an important finding as the line managers were performing a form of EL that departs significantly from the EL increasingly the focus of a wide-range of research and wider management practice (e.g. Korczynski, 2003; Ogbonna and Harris, 2004; Sanders, 2005). Specifically, the EL performed also differed to an extent than reported by Humphrey *et al.* (2008), who found line managers to perform more varied, complex and therefore demanding forms of EL than service or frontline employees. In the case of line managing neurodiversity, line managers not only performed a varying and complex range of EL, they performed EL in interactions with multiple parties to the reasonable adjustments process. In short, the findings made visible wide and high-levels of EL required to effectively line manage neurodiversity.

Another key finding is how the EL required in line managing neurodiversity appears substantial in all instances. Where line managers appeared more prepared and willing to line manage neurodiversity, the lived experience was viewed as somewhere between positive and neutral (Payne, 2009). However, in situations where line managers were less supported or trained in EL, the impact of such EL ranged from high levels of personal frustration through to a risk to personal health (Scales *et al.*, 2014). The findings seemed to suggest the level of EL required related to how much information line managers had on NDCs, although more research is likely to be required to clarify this facet of managing neurodiversity. A further problem to arise from such situations is the potential to undermine reasonable adjustments. Ironically, line managing neurodiversity involved mopping up feelings of anger expressed by some neurodiverse employees (O'Brien and Linehan, 2018), suggesting the devolvement of diversity practice has gone too far, or the concept of diversity management needs to be further developed to better recognise the importance of EL in such practices. The findings have parallels with Babineau's (2010) work, which first drew attention to the frustrations of line managing neurodiversity. The current study, however, supersedes such work because it offers a more nuanced and conceptual take on the impact of EL on line managers expected to manage neurodiversity.

A further key finding is to clarify how what all the above means in relation to informing HRM and OH practice related to neurodiversity, as the findings appear to reveal a previously unrecognised and under-theorised side to line managing neurodiversity. For instance, a line manager new to managing neurodiversity is likely to benefit from being at least aware of the EL required in such situations. In the broadest sense the results add weight to research finding effective line management, especially involving navigating many complex interactions, requires advanced-level EL skills (Gorman, 2000; O'Brien and Linehan, 2018). More specifically, the findings have the potential to inform the practice of line managing

neurodiversity in two distinct ways. Firstly, the findings highlight how reasonable adjustments for neurodiverse employees are far more likely to be successful if the line manager overseeing the reasonable adjustments is skilled or trained in EL. In effect, line managing neurodiversity has parallels with complex care work (Gorman, 2000). Second, the findings stress a need for line managers, and as noted in wider studies (e.g. Newman *et al.*, 2009; Mustafa *et al.*, 2016), to be allowed generous levels of autonomy, a workload allowance for managing neurodiversity and time to build long-term and trusting relationships with neurodiverse employees. If not, the findings suggest line managers may become exhausted or even unwell by the EL required to manage neurodiversity, which also increases the prospect of disabling neurodiverse employees. Overall, it appears line managing neurodiversity is similar in many ways to managing disability more generally. However, line managing neurodiversity is distinct in many ways, specifically in terms of the amount of autonomy, EL, information and wider support, required to make reasonable adjustments effective and sustainable.

Study contributions

Discussion of the main findings allow the contributions of the study to be clearly formulated and stated. In the broadest sense, the study adds to debates surrounding the devolution of HRM (e.g. Dick and Hyde, 2006) and new developments in line management (e.g. Hale, 2005). In short, the findings have the potential to advance contemporary discussions on HRM and line management.

More specifically, an original contribution is made in empirical terms, noted most broadly by a rich and detailed account of line manager lived experiences of managing neurodiversity. Indeed, there is an empirical contribution made by the paper because the findings both add to and change, in more ways than one, our knowledge of what it means to be an effective line

manager of neurodiversity. Further, the empirics, as such, allow us to see and conceptualise previously hidden diversity management processes.

The study makes a specific theoretical contribution to the practice of diversity management. Further the study makes individual contributions to theories related to EL (Hochschild, 1983), because EL is framed in relation to a highly specialised diversity management practice; lived experience (Boylorn, 2008), because of what has been learnt from line managers living through and responding to a range of challenging situations; and the social model of disability (Terzi, 2004), because a lack of EL skills can lead to line managers disabling neurodiverse employees.

The study also makes a practical contribution. In this sense the study has the potential to inform line managers directly seeking advice on how to better manage neurodiverse employees. The study also has the potential to inform the work of HRM and OH practitioners who have a wider and overarching responsibility for the management of neurodiversity in organisations. In both instances, the contribution to practice comes in terms of drawing attention to the role and significance of EL skills in the line management of neurodiversity.

Conclusions

At the start of the paper it was demonstrated how there is a distinct lack of research concerning an emergent facet of diversity management, that of line managing neurodiversity. The findings indicate a key role for advanced EL skills in the effective line management of neurodiversity. It is important to recognise the role of EL in the effective line management of neurodiversity, because without advanced EL skills, line managers are more likely to disable neurodiverse employees and at the same time expose themselves to psychological harm and job burnout. To date the literature has not explicitly recognised the role of EL in the line

management of neurodiversity, but the findings from this study indicate the importance of EL is in such situations.

Study limitations and further research

The study does not offer a conclusive account of EL in the line management of neurodiversity, principally because the study is limited in a range of ways. For example, the scope of the study, the size of the sample, the industry location and the design of the study, place distinct limitations on the generalisability of the findings. However, the study does offer new and novel insights into an emergent facet of diversity management, suggesting the study should inspire further and wider research on the management of neurodiversity in organisations. As such, the study may well provide new and novel insights, yet it does little to consider wider issues at stake in the management of neurodiversity in organisations. For instance, it is proposed that further research on managing neurodiversity in organisations should consider the role and lived experience of wider parties to the inclusion process, including neurodiverse employees, team members, customers, HRM and OH practitioners, senior managers and third parties, such as external support organisations and trade unions.

Given the evident limitations of the study and the importance of the issues at stake, further research is required to test out, verify and develop the findings. Where there are far more resources available to conduct research on such issues, it throws open possibilities for a much broader utilisation of available methodologies, particularly longitudinal methodologies, including ethnography, as well as reflecting wider parties to the process of line managing neurodiversity and NDCs not covered in this paper.

Finally, if HRM and OH practitioners were to accept the main findings from the study, they may wish to invest in EL skills development for line managers given the task of managing neurodiverse employees.

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Appendix 1. Interview guideline

- 1) Tell me about you and your job - a short career history, what does job involve, experience/qualifications needed, recent changes in experiences of work/management?
- 2) Have you heard of the term neurodiversity? If so, what do you understand by the term? If not, explain the term then ask for their views, e.g. does the term "neurodiverse" fit with your experiences of managing neurodiverse employees?
- 3) Where does your information on dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADD/ADHD, Asperger syndrome come from?
- 4) Do you have family or friends who have a neurodiverse condition? Ask for details and whether has informed how you manage neurodiverse employees.
- 5) Please provide details and experiences of the neurodiverse employees you have managed. Provide details of any disclosure.
- 6) What training have you had in terms of managing neurodiverse employees?
- 7) Who should be responsible for providing the support a neurodiverse employee may need when at work?
- 8) Have you worked with any of the following when supporting a neurodiverse employee – HRM/occupational health practitioners, trade union representatives, external support organisation, relatives of family, self-advocacy representative? How did it go?
- 9) Do you feel the climate for managing neurodiverse employees has changed in recent years? Where do you see support for neurodiverse employees?
- 10) Do you wish to add to or further elaborate on anything discussed in the interview?

Neurodiverse condition/impairment	Description of neurodiverse condition/impairment
Dyslexia	Weaknesses in short-term memory, sequencing skills, and phonology. Affects reading, spelling and higher level literacy skills, such as reading for comprehension, note taking and structured written work (Moody, 2009)
Dyspraxia	Difficulties with physical coordination, spatial judgement, organisational skills, and social skills (Moody, 2009)
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD/ADD)	A developmental disorder of self-control. Consists of problems with attention span, impulse control, and activity level (Barkley, 1995)
Asperger syndrome	Life-long developmental disability that affects communication and relating to people. Affects individual's ability to understand and interpret non-verbal behaviour, motivations and expectations of others. Difficulties understanding social relations and thinking in abstract and empathetic ways (Prospects/NAS, 2005)

Table I. Medical descriptions of dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD/ADD and Asperger syndrome

Line manager	Occupation of line manager	Neurodiverse condition(s) of employee	Age range	Gender
1	Facilities Help Desk Manager	ADHD, Asperger syndrome, dyslexia	40s	M
2	Station Manager	Asperger syndrome	50s	F
3	Project Manager	Dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD	40s	M
4	Programme Manager	Asperger syndrome	50s	M
5	Project Manager	Asperger syndrome	50s	M
6	Project Manager	Dyslexia	40s	F
7	Transport Support Manager	Dyslexia	30s	F
8	Buildings Manager	Dyslexia	40s	M
9	Signalling Manager	Asperger syndrome	40s	M
10	Train Controller	Asperger syndrome and dyslexia	50s	M
11	Senior Project Manager	Asperger syndrome, dyslexia and ADHD	40s	F
12	Planning Engineer	Asperger syndrome	30s	F
13	Senior Engineering Manager	Asperger syndrome	60s	M
14	Health and Safety Specialist Manager	Asperger syndrome	50s	F
15	Operations Manager	Dyslexia	50s	F
16	Taxi Licensing Team Leader	Dyslexia	60s	M
17	Examination Manager	Dyslexia	40s	F
18	Surveyor Manager	Dyslexia	50s	M
19	Workplace Development Manager	Asperger syndrome	40s	F
20	Commercial Manager	Dyslexia	40s	F
21	Business Development Manager	ADD, dyslexia	50s	M
22	Risk and Value Manager	ADHD	40s	F
23	IT Services Manager	Dyslexia, Asperger syndrome	30s	M
24	Help Desk Team Leader	Dyslexia, Asperger syndrome	30s	F
25	Service Delivery Manager	Dyslexia	50s	M
26	Route Control Manager	Dyslexia	50s	M
27	Project Manager	Asperger syndrome	50s	M
28	Station Manager	Asperger syndrome, ADD	50s	F

Table II. Line manager study participants and managed neurodiverse conditions