

= The Merger ( The Office ) =

" The Merger " is the eighth episode of the third season of the American comedy television series The Office and the show 's 36th overall . It was written by consulting producer Brent Forrester and directed by Ken Whittingham . It first aired on November 16 , 2006 , as a special " super @-@ sized " 40 @-@ minute ( including commercials ) episode on NBC .

The series depicts the everyday lives of office employees in the Scranton and Stamford branches of the fictional Dunder Mifflin Paper Company . In this episode , the two branches are merged . Jim Halpert ( John Krasinski ) and Pam Beesley ( Jenna Fischer ) have an awkward reunion , Michael Scott ( Steve Carell ) tries to make his new employees feel welcome , and a rivalry begins between Dwight Schrute ( Rainn Wilson ) and Andy Bernard ( Ed Helms ) .

The episode featured recurring guest stars Helms , Creed Bratton , Rashida Jones , Wayne Wilderson , Mike Bruner , and Ursula Burton . According to Nielsen Media Research , an estimated 8 @. @ 63 million viewers watched " The Merger " on its first broadcast . Critical reception to the episode was mainly positive , with many reviewers spotlighting Helms and his character in particular as highlights .

= = Synopsis = =

The Scranton and Stamford branches prepare for the upcoming merger . Pam Beesley ( Jenna Fischer ) professes excitement over the merger , mostly because of the return of Jim Halpert ( John Krasinski ) . Andy Bernard ( Ed Helms ) proclaims he 'll be the No. 2 man in Scranton in six weeks time through " name repetition , personality mirroring and never breaking off a handshake . " A rivalry between Dwight Schrute ( Rainn Wilson ) and Andy begins over the No. 2 position in the office . At the welcoming party , Michael Scott ( Steve Carell ) plays a videotape he has created called " Lazy Scranton " , which features him and Dwight rhyming over the music of Saturday Night Live 's " Lazy Sunday " .

Michael embarrasses overweight new employee Tony Gardner ( Mike Bruner ) by attempting to push him onto a table with the rest of the new employees ; this causes Tony to quit . However , an angered Michael fires him instead , unintentionally entitling him to severance pay . Michael learns that Jim is the No. 2 in the office , which prompts Andy and Dwight to argue over who is No. 3 . After a plan to unite the employees goes awry . They find that they have a common interest : their contempt of Michael .

= = Production = =

" The Merger " was the fourth episode of the series to be directed by Ken Whittingham . It was written by consulting producer Brent Forrester , his first writing credit for The Office . The episode featured guest appearances from recurring actor Creed Bratton as well as from Ed Helms , Rashida Jones , Wayne Wilderson , Mike Bruner , and Ursula Burton , whose characters joined the Scranton branch . In her weekly blog for TV Guide , actress Kate Flannery stated that it " was a really fun episode " to film , as she was able to work with a variety of new actors . She added , " They double the size and they double the comedy ... It was like a party all week shooting this episode . "

The season three DVD contains a number of deleted scenes , including Kevin and Angela reacting to Jim 's return , Karen noting that she and Meredith have the same thermos and being offered alcohol , Andy introducing himself to Kevin , Michael telling Karen and Phyllis that eventually they will " share the same menstrual cycle , " Hannah and Meredith fighting over desk space , Andy asking Kevin if he has lost weight , and Michael performing a magic trick in front of the office . The original broadcast contained a small subplot involving Kevin and a new paper shredder from Staples Inc . , where Kevin talks about how he is given almost no responsibility at work but is content as long as they let him shred documents . It was removed from the episode for the DVD release and is not contained in the deleted scenes .

= = Reception = =

" The Merger " was first broadcast on November 16 , 2006 in the United States on the National Broadcasting Company ( NBC ) . As a special promotion , the network broadcast " super @-@ sized " , forty @-@ minute episodes of The Office , 30 Rock , and My Name is Earl . According to Nielsen Media Research , an estimated 8 @. @ 63 million viewers watched the episode . Among adults aged 18 to 49 , it earned 4 @. @ 2 / 10 ratings share , meaning that it was seen by 4 @. @ 2 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds , and 10 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds watching television at the time of broadcast . The episode reached second place for the night in that demographic , and twenty @-@ fourth for the week among all the major networks .

IGN 's Brian Zoromski rated " The Merger " 9 out of 10 , an indication of an " amazing " episode . He called the opening sequence " arguably the funniest " scene , and believed " Andy 's proven to be an even better source of hilarity than he ever was in the Stamford office . " Zoromski was unhappy however with the " outright product placement " with Staples , writing that " the show 's quality felt a little compromised . It 's one thing to see blatant product placement in a reality show like Survivor or American Idol but when it invades a great scripted comedy ? well , it kinda drags the show down to the reality level . " Doug Elfman of the Chicago Sun @-@ Times thought the episode was " funnier than it 's been in a while , " praising Kelly but criticizing the " fat @-@ guy joke . " Elfman cited Michael and Andy 's new relationship as a positive element . Television Without Pity graded the episode with an A + .

Entertainment Weekly columnist Abby West praised Fischer 's " masterful " performance , writing that it " really is nice to see Pam coming into her own ... And I love that she didn 't inhibit herself when Jim walked in ? she just ran right up and hugged him . " West also highlighted Carell and Helms , explaining that with the former , " Michael is never completely loathsome ? because Steve Carell imbues him with such vulnerability . " AOL TV writer Michael Sciannamea also enjoyed Helms ' performance , believing that " the competiton [ sic ] between Andy and Dwight will surely make for some classic moments . " Sciannamea concluded his review , " What makes this show so great is that the supporting players have a chance to shine at the right moments . I thought Stanley 's reactions to the whole situation were hysterical , and Creed is just great . He deserves some more airtime . "