

# Clear expectations are instrumental for employees with autism

August 30 2022, by Lacie Blankenship

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In addition to combating stigma in the workplace, employees with autism are challenged with navigating systems developed for the neurotypical. This means that supervisors and employees have fundamentally different understandings of what makes a good or even ideal employee. These gaps in understanding (referred to as the "double empathy problem") can undermine effective job performance and lead to unnecessary turnover.

Efforts to solve the double empathy problem can be transformational for [autistic individuals](#), neurotypical [supervisors](#), and their broader organizations. Job coaches can also play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of employee-[supervisor](#) relationships.

A new study forthcoming in the journal *Disability and Rehabilitation* finds that clarifying job expectations holistically and creating and sustaining high-quality relationships between supervisors and employees plays a crucial role in creating positive employment outcomes for employees with [autism](#).

"Sustainable Employment Depends on Quality Relationships Between Supervisors and Their Employees on the Autism Spectrum" by Tim Vogus, Brownlee O. Currey, Jr., Professor of Management and Deputy Director of the Frist Center for Autism and Innovation, explores what organizational factors help sustain employees with autism.

"When people think about the challenges autistic employees face at work, they too often misperceive them as being about failings of the autistic person rather than failures of shared expectations and necessary supports for successful performance," says Vogus. "In this study, we

were able to document how misunderstandings emerge and their consequences, and what can be done to bridge them."

The study, co-authored by Valerie Martin, Tara D. Flanagan, and Denis Chênevert, evaluates nine case histories that the authors developed based on interviews with managers, employees with autism, and job coaches.

The authors detail the importance of high-quality relationships between supervisors and supervisees when involving autistic employees and emphasize the added value of job coaches to proactively set clear and comprehensive expectations and help establish modes of communication that address the double empathy problem to get employees and managers on the same page.

Job coaches can also be an essential resource, as they can help provide supervisors and peers with a better understanding of autism and guidance on more effective management practices, especially regarding feedback and performance evaluation.

This study has implications for policymakers and [business leaders](#) on every rung of the ladder, from shift leaders to executives. Recognizing the demonstrated importance of facilitating high-quality relationships between managers and employees can break barriers for employees with autism.

"To me, the importance behind this study is the understanding that there are steps we can take to support people with autism in the workplace," says Vogus. "By understanding the types of different misunderstandings that emerge between autistic employees and neurotypical supervisors, HR practices and tools can be updated to ensure a shared understanding emerges and job coaches can be invaluable for supporting and facilitating higher quality relationships and help managers grow and [employees](#) with autism sustainably thrive."

**More information:** Valerie Martin et al, Sustainable employment depends on quality relationships between supervisors and their employees on the autism spectrum, *Disability and Rehabilitation* (2022). DOI: [10.1080/09638288.2022.2074550](https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2022.2074550)

Provided by Vanderbilt University

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