



Sustainable employment depends on quality relationships between supervisors and their employees on the autism spectrum

Valerie Martin, Tara D. Flanagan, Timothy J. Vogus & Denis Chênevert

To cite this article: Valerie Martin, Tara D. Flanagan, Timothy J. Vogus & Denis Chênevert (2023) Sustainable employment depends on quality relationships between supervisors and their employees on the autism spectrum, *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 45:11, 1784-1795, DOI: [10.1080/09638288.2022.2074550](https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2022.2074550)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2022.2074550>



Published online: 16 May 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 588



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

RESEARCH PAPER



Sustainable employment depends on quality relationships between supervisors and their employees on the autism spectrum

Valerie Martin^a , Tara D. Flanagan^b , Timothy J. Vogus^c  and Denis Chênevert^d 

^aDepartment of Psychoéducation, Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada; ^bDepartment of Educational Counselling, McGill University, Montréal, Canada; ^cOwen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, USA; ^dDepartment of Human Resources Management, HEC Montréal, Montréal, Canada

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Employment outcomes for individuals on the autism spectrum may be contingent upon employers' knowledge of autism and provision of appropriate workplace supports. We aimed to understand the organizational factors that influenced the organizational socialization of autistic employees.

Materials and methods: We wrote nine case histories based on interviews from managers, autistic employees, and job coaches. Intra-case analysis, then cross-case analysis, provided an understanding of organizational factors that lead to sustained employment of autistic employees.

Results: The quality of the relationship between managers and autistic employees was consistently seen as the key facilitator of organizational socialization and positive employment outcomes of autistic employees. These relationships, however, relied on the skilled facilitation of the job coach during each stage of the employment cycle (hiring, on-boarding, training, performance management), as they had an important role in building a mutual understanding between supervisors and employees. As such, our study draws upon and contributes to leader-member exchange theory.

Conclusions: Consistent with prior research, our study shows the importance of high-quality relationships between supervisors and supervisees for positive employment outcomes of autistic employees in organization but adds skilled communication facilitation as a novel antecedent to leader-member exchange, as a potentially key factor for autistic employees.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 June 2021

Revised 29 April 2022

Accepted 30 April 2022

KEYWORDS

Autism; disability; leadership; leader-member exchange theory; supervisor employee interaction; supported employment; workplace

► IMPLICATIONS FOR REHABILITATION

- The relationship between the a manager and their employee is an important factor in effective organizational socialization and workplace outcomes for autistic employees.
- Job coaches can play a crucial role in building mutual understanding and high-quality relationships between managers and employees.
- Job coaches can support the inclusion of autistic employees by illustrating the multi-faceted socio-emotional performance benefits over the longer term.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition with diverse manifestations, characterized by communication and social interaction difficulties as well as restricted or repetitive behaviors and interests [1]. In 2015, 1 in 66 children in Canada was identified with autism spectrum disorder [2]. The IQ and support needs of autistic people vary widely with some individuals requiring significant support in all spheres of their lives while others require little to no support in daily activities. With appropriate support at school, a growing number of autistic students have an educational path leading to a secondary or post-secondary diploma [3], and eventually entering the labour market.

Though their educational attainment may match or even exceed those of people without disabilities, autistic individuals may require support to participate in the workforce. In the United States, the demands for employment services for autistic individuals doubled between 2009 and 2014 [4]. Difficulties with social interactions may serve as a barrier to the job search and job performance of adults on the autism spectrum [5,6]. Indeed, adults

from this population may possess fewer resources to cope with interpersonal relations in the workplace [7] and behave in ways that do not match employer expectations [5,6]. Individuals having additional physical or mental health issues experience further barriers [6,8]. Common co-occurring conditions are intellectual disability [9], attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), mood disorders, anxiety disorders [10], gastrointestinal problems or sleep disorders [11].

Some managers expressed positive attitudes regarding employees on the autism spectrum even when they needed continuous support to function in the workplace [12]. Autistic adults have many employable strengths that include, but are not limited to, attention to detail, task focus, ability to adhere to routine, ability to tolerate monotonous tasks, expertise in certain areas, good memory, passion, creativity, open-mindedness, loyalty, trustworthiness, and dependability [13,14]. Some companies have decided to capitalize on these strengths to achieve business benefits [15]. For example, most employees at Specialisterne, an international

company that provides consulting services in software testing, programming and data entry [16], are on the autism spectrum. Similarly, large international enterprises in different sectors, such as SAP, Microsoft, Ford, JP Morgan Chase & Company, and EY have created specific programs employing autistic individuals [17] and regularly tout the benefits of doing so for outcomes ranging from innovation to productivity. Nevertheless, despite the benefits of hiring someone on the spectrum, autistic adults continue to face obstacles related to stigma [18], lack of autism awareness [19], lack of flexibility and employer understanding toward possible adaptations [5], or unsupportive colleagues and bullying [20,21]. Building employer capacity to fully include autistic individuals into employment holds promise for employers and employees alike and is thus a key research priority [22].

Workplace as a critical context that affects employment outcomes

Autistic individuals struggle to maintain employment [23], as they may hold, on average, four to five different jobs over a five-year period [24]. For autistic employees, employment integration (or lack thereof) cannot be explained exclusively by personal characteristics related with autism. An individual's functioning from a biopsychosocial perspective is also explained by environmental factors such as other people's attitudes, societal norms, and the availability of support [25]. The employment of autistic individuals is contingent on employer knowledge of autism as well as confidence and capacity in identifying and providing appropriate and effective workplace supports [26]. Numerous other employer factors lead to positive employment outcomes, such as coworker advice, accommodated workspaces, and finding a good fit between individual personalities, communication styles, and the organization's needs [7,27–29].

Organizational socialization refers to the process whereby an organizational newcomer becomes a fully accepted and functioning member of the organization [30]. This process depends on both organizational practices and the newcomer's information seeking behaviors. When done well, socialization leads to greater employee role clarity, self-efficacy regarding job tasks, and social acceptance from peers [30]. Supportive leadership from manager could mean adapting organizational socialization tactics, job and work environment design as well as being more flexible and understanding and otherwise tailoring their supervision strategies [7,27,29]. Recently, Vogus and Taylor [31] called on autism and organizational researchers to study key concepts such as diversity climate, psychological safety, and inclusive leadership to understand employment outcomes of autistic individuals. To date, a few empirical studies have used leadership theories to explain employment outcomes of individuals on the autism spectrum [17,32]. Parr and Hunter [33] studied neurotypical managers supervising autistic employees to re-examine three established leadership theories: transformational leadership, authentic leadership, and the two-factor model of leadership. They found that autistic individuals had different needs and preferences that required clarity and customization. As such, authentic leaders that displayed honesty, respect, and individualized consideration were associated with job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions [33]. Their research as well as other studies of autistic employees [34] suggest the importance of a more individualized approach and fine-grained analysis of specific leader-employee dynamics. Leader-member exchange theory (LMX) provides a foundation for conducting such an analysis [35].

LMX theory describes how the supervisor (or leader) develops different relationships with each of their subordinates and how the quality of this relationship is a determinant of each subordinate's workplace experience. Leader-member exchange theory is derived from social exchange theory [36,37], which posits that social exchanges are based on reciprocity and negotiated rules. Social exchanges are characterized by two outcomes: economic (i.e., work output or wages) and socioemotional (i.e., one's social and esteem needs) [37]. In LMX theory, the relationship is developed (or fails to develop) as the result of a mutual testing process [38]. LMX quality is indicated by a leader's use of behaviors like providing feedback, rewards and recognition, clarifying task requirements, and customizing work design to fit the individual (e.g., their skills and interests) [39]. In addition, employees that have a good relationship with their supervisor will be more likely to seek feedback on performance, embrace a learning orientation to the feedback that allows them to make necessary adjustments and corrections to their work, and improve job performance [40]. The disability status of an employee influences the supervisor's evaluation of LMX (i.e., the quality of the relationship with their employee) [41,42]. Supervisors may have less positive affect toward employees with disabilities, and view the relationship as lower quality, because they perceive them as different from themselves [41]. Employees with disabilities also receive less feedback, and the feedback provided is less forthright and developmental, in part, coming from a belief that it is not "nice" to critique disabled people [43,44]. Given the centrality of this relationship, it is critical to develop a richer process understanding of how leaders perceive their autistic employees and the conditions under which their relationships are of higher or lower quality.

Supported employment services for adults on the autism spectrum

Employment support services are an important factor in the organizational socialization of employees on the autism spectrum [13,18]. Research has shown that a supported employment approach is effective in assisting people with autism, with or without additional disabilities, gain and maintain employment [28,45,46]. In this approach, a job coach facilitates finding a job, teaches the individual how to apply and interview for a position, liaises between their client and coworkers or supervisor, and manages crisis situations [45]. In Quebec, Canada, government-funded community organizations provide supported employment services to adults with disabilities. Such programs also offer partial wage subsidies to the hiring organization if a job coach evaluates the employee as having a lower productivity rate or requiring additional supervision time. When a wage subsidy is offered, the employee is hired by the organization and protected by labor laws, including the provisions related to the minimum wage. The value of the subsidy is evaluated annually as the employee gains experience or meets additional challenges.

In this study, we partnered with a community organization that specializes in supported employment for people with autism. To receive services, individuals must have a documented autism diagnosis, sufficient adaptive skills to transport themselves to work independently, and be motivated to work. Our research aimed to understand the process through which autistic employees are socialized to the organization and the corresponding leader and organizational factors that contribute to or inhibit sustained employment in a supported employment program. Our specific research question was: how do organizational and

leadership factors influence the organizational socialization and employment outcomes of autistic employees?

Materials and methods

Research design

Our methods are rooted in a post-positivist and pragmatic realist approach. We assume that social phenomena exist in the real world, and that legitimate and relatively stable relationships can therefore be found when analyzing such phenomena [47]. As social phenomena are also historical and social products, imbued with subjective meanings assigned by the people who experience them, the researchers should elicit the most important stakeholders' views on social phenomena. In our research, we conducted semi-structured interviews with managers of autistic employees, autistic employees, and job coaches of autistic employees to document their experiences. In five cases, we supplemented interviews with files from job coaches on their clients. We engaged a pragmatic approach to our data. First, we wrote case histories from coded interviews and notes. Second, we used two methods to further explore our case histories, we illustrated the timeline of events by actors [48] and created a matrix outlining positive and negative factors influencing organizational socialization by actors [47]. Third, across all cases, we explored possible explanations by looking for patterns and contradiction. This allowed us to produce meaning from the various sources of data that fit our research needs without being bound by their origins [47]. Procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional review boards of the Université de Montréal (approval reference CERAS-2016-17-187-P). All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study. Autistic participants received a financial compensation of 15\$CAD.

Participants

Eighteen individuals participated in this study to document nine (eight males and one female) case histories: eight managers of autistic employees, five autistic employees, and five job coaches from our partner organization. Table 1 describes for each case the sources of data, information on autistic employees, their jobs, their organization size, type and industry sector, the presence or absence of salary subsidy given to the organization and employment outcomes (pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants). Summary for each case histories (or exhaustive case histories in French) are available from the corresponding author.

Recruitment

Our community organization partner selected nine cases, where their clients had been in employment for at least three months. We provided selection criteria aimed at representing a variety of client profiles based on education, support needs, types of jobs, and types of employers. This purposeful sampling with a maximal variation strategy was chosen to highlight common factors or central themes that cut across cases [49].

Given our focus on organizational socialization of autistic employees, our first sample of four cases focused on ascertaining managerial experiences related to the range of organizational practices and interventions that comprise socialization (e.g., onboarding, training) as well as ongoing supervision of autistic employees through an in-person semi-structured interview, which was recorded and transcribed. To better capture the relational dynamics and the experience of the work and workplace, we

Table 1. Description of cases.

Name (gender)	Education	Workplace support needs	Job(s)	Organization Size / Type	Industry	Salary Subsidy	Employment Outcomes	Sources of data
Alex (Male)	Special education	High	Assistant cook	Small / Non-profit	Healthcare	Total subsidy	Employed for contract duration	Manager
Thomas (Male)	Postsecondary education	Moderate	Dishwasher	Small / Private	Restaurant	Total subsidy	Positive. Quit due to conflicting school schedule	Manager
Felix (Male)	Postsecondary degree	Moderate	Database clerk	Small / Non-profit	Healthcare	Total subsidy	Contract not renewed after declining work performance	Manager
William (Male)	Postsecondary education	Low	Tour guide	Large / Public	Media	No subsidy	Positive, still employed	Manager
Martine (Female)	Postsecondary degree	Moderate	1- Human resource clerk 2- Accounting clerk 3- Complaint analyst	Large / Private	Manufacturer	No subsidy Specialized recruitment program	Positive for jobs 1 and 3 Dismissed of job 2	Manager of job 3, Employee, Job coach, Job coach files
Jeremy (Male)	Postsecondary degree	Low	Programmer	Small / Private	Information Technology	No subsidy, then partial subsidy	Fired then rehired Resigned after organizational changes	Manager, Employee, Job coach, Job coach files
Arnaud (Male)	Special education	Moderate	Housekeeping	Large / Private	Grocery store	Partial subsidy	Dismissed	Manager, Employee, Job coach, Job coach files
Travis (Male)	Special education	High	Dishwasher	Small / Private	Restaurant	Partial subsidy	Positive, still employed	Manager, Employee, Job coach, Job coach files
Gabriel (Male)	Postsecondary degree	Low	Programmer	Large / Non-profit	Banking	No subsidy Specialized recruitment program	Positive, still employed	Employee, Job coach, Job coach files

constructed a second sample of five cases by enlisting autistic clients of our community organization partner to participate in the research. With their approval, we supplemented their experiences by interviewing their job coaches and accessing their case files. For these five cases we also asked their managers to be interviewed. One manager declined our invitation, but the case was kept in the sample as interviews from the autistic employee and his job coach were informative.

Data collection and procedures

The semi-structured interview guides included questions on hiring, on-boarding, training, job performance, relationships with coworkers, obstacles encountered, adaptations and support, the perception of upper management of the organization toward the autistic employee and relevant organization's policies (full interview schedule is available from the corresponding author). One employee was interviewed by phone and the others either at their job site or the community organization offices. Interviews lasted from 15 to 60 min, with the average interview being 34 min. Adaptations were made to the interview to respect the communication needs of autistic employees (i.e., open-ended questions were broken down into more specific questions (e.g., what is the first task you do in the morning) [22,50], questions were reworded to be less abstract or anchored in the timeline of the work experience (e.g., the last time your job coach came at work, what did you discuss), additional time was given to answer [50], some questions were dropped when interviewees did not seem to be able to answer them, said that they had no answer or otherwise displayed signs of possible discomfort (e.g., squirming in their seat, staying silent after a question). Interviews of job coaches (average duration 53 min) and managers (average duration 65 min) were held in their offices, except for one manager who came to the first author's office.

Analysis

We coded each line of the transcribed interviews to note events, actions, decisions, motivations, and opinions of participants on autistic employee socialization. Initial codes were derived from our literature review in the field of autism and disability employment. We developed many supplementary codes during analysis as new concepts were mentioned by participants or to reflect finer distinction of concepts already in our list of codes, including different perspective coming from type of participants (employee, managers and job coaches) [47]. Information extracted from job coaches' files served to clarify the chronology of events and the job coaches' perceptions of client strengths and support needs. The sensitizing concept [49] for our study was the organizational socialization of the employee.

We wrote nine case histories that described in detail the steps of the socialization process of each autistic employee, from recruitment until either the moment of the interview where they were still employed (3 cases) or to the moment when their employment ended (6 cases). Case histories detailed the hiring process, the on-boarding and training of the employee, daily supervision and performance management, and performance evaluation. The five cases based on multiple interviews included the perspectives of all interviewees, even when it led to differing interpretations of the same events. To display our individual case data, we created a matrix outlining positive and negative factors influencing organizational socialization by actors. We also used a temporal decomposition strategy and tried to identify, at each stage of the integration

process (hiring, training, daily supervision, performance evaluation), if similar or different factors explained the positive or negative employment outcomes, displaying the information on a timeline [48]. We analyzed individual cases to look for factors that influenced the progression toward becoming an employee meeting the supervisor's job performance expectations.

Then, we compared the analysis of all cases to look for regularities and contradictions. Our analysis started with Martine's and Jeremy's cases because they both experienced positive employment outcomes (maintaining employment and meeting his supervisor's performance expectations) and termination of employment in the same organization. From both cases, we devised analytic propositions. We then look to the other cases to confirm or disconfirm those propositions, again contrasting positive and negative employment outcomes. Throughout our analysis, we went back to the autism, disability, and management literature to inform our reflection.

During the data collection process, we did not ask direct questions about work relationships. However, all managers shared information spontaneously on that topic, and commented on how relationship evolved over time. As the relationship concept became more prominent in our analysis, we contrasted the cases of Alex and Arnaud, two autistic employees whose neutral facial expressions did not convey their thoughts or emotions in ways expected by their neurotypical managers, but who experienced positive and negative employment outcomes, respectively. The absence of expected emotional displays highlighted adaptations that managers needed to make to understand their employees and build relationships. The theme of relationship became focal in our analysis, reinforcing the importance of leader perceptions of relationship quality to autistic employees being seen as full organizational members and achieving positive employment outcomes. Given the supervisor's direct role in socializing employees, evaluating them, and determining their employment outcomes, we relied primarily (but by no means exclusively) on managerial accounts regarding these practices and processes. Importantly, as we detail further below, autistic participants provided little description of the relational dimensions of socialization and leader efforts to integrate them and focused more on specific tasks. This discrepancy is conceptually important as it suggests different understandings of workplace and job requirements and what constitutes being a "good employee."

To enhance the trustworthiness of our analytic process, we first asked a research assistant to thoroughly read, for five cases, the transcription of interviews, the case histories, our data displays (intra-case matrices and timelines), and then the final analysis to ascertain accuracy of quotes and look for unsupported affirmations and explanations. Regular discussions between the first author and other members of the research team served to clarify the analysis process and explore alternative interpretation of data. In addition, we presented our findings to six job coaches to validate that our conclusions seemed credible and consistent with their own experiences [51]. The data for this study is part of a larger 5-year project evaluating the program of our partner community organization [46]. Our interpretation of our 9 cases was made in the context of prolonged engagement with the organization [51] and regular formal and informal conversations with job coaches.

Results

Case descriptions

The nine case histories represent different organizations, jobs, and profiles of employees on the autism spectrum (see Table 1). Some

cases described a four-month experience, while other cases described experiences that lasted more than three years. Employees worked in small private organizations, small non-profit organizations, large private organizations, a large public organization, and a large non-profit organization. Businesses sectors included the food industry, manufacturing and distribution, media, information technology, banking, and healthcare services. Three employees had their entire salary subsidized and three had them partially subsidized.

Six participants had post-secondary education, while three had not graduated from high school. Participants on the autism spectrum had different levels of support needs (e.g., communications and social interaction with peers and supervisors). We did not formally assess the autistic employees described in our cases. We defined support needs in terms of what employees, job coaches, and supervisors expressed as challenging aspects of the job for the employee. A frequently mentioned aspect was perceived difficulties in communication and social interaction, often expressed by neurotypical managers as adaptations they had to make with their autistic employees. We used these as inputs to categorize the level of support needs in the particular workplace, especially during initial socialization (i.e., first few weeks of employment), as low, moderate, or high. Higher support needs entailed greater adaptations and customization to existing on-boarding and training as well as ongoing supervision. We focus on the employer adaptations because supervisors play a central role in the evaluation of employee performance and determining employment outcomes. However, as we find in our data below, the support needs were often commingled with attempts by the autistic employees and job coaches to make adaptations themselves (e.g., using pictograms).

We considered Jeremy as requiring a low level of communication adaptation by his managers. Jeremy explained that he could not deal with ambiguity "If it's not square [straightforward], don't expect that you will get to get what you want." Some participants had good conversation skills, but still struggled with some rules of social interactions or implicit communication. Others were categorized as needing a higher level of support from managers and coworkers. They used expressive language but had limitations in comprehension or being able to answer questions that were not simple, rarely initiated conversations, and had a limited repertoire of conversations. For example, Travis would agree to two contradictory propositions, and one would have to observe his behavior to comprehend his preference. Others had highly nuanced arrays of communication skills. For example, Arnaud had an elaborate vocabulary, but had difficulty understanding the rationale underlying requests from his manager to change specific behaviors because he felt he was doing a good job on his work tasks. He would also regularly make blunt or critical remarks: "Sometimes I say something wrong, sensitive stuff. And then after ... it turns ... It ends in ..." (Arnaud). Martine had a language impairment. Her sentences were often incomplete, and she stumbled on many words. She would give only short answers to questions, even when prompted to add details. Despite her postsecondary degree, she explained her job exclusively in terms of very concrete tasks and not in terms of the more abstract and relational features of the organization, even with prompting to do so. As such, making sense of her experiences required supplemental material that contextualized her employment history and detailed her role and how it fit into the broader department.

Some participants had positive employment outcomes as well as negative outcomes in their organization. Martine satisfactorily accomplished all the tasks planned in her contract in the first

department where she was assigned. The manager of the second department thought she made too many mistakes and ended her assignment. She was employed in a third department at the time of the interview. Jeremy was fired because he made several "political" mistakes according to his manager, but then rehired because his professional contribution was recognized as essential to the team. After a few years, higher management gave Jeremy new unwanted responsibilities, despite attempts by his manager to protect the specific job he had crafted for him. Jeremy felt his new job was too stressful and decided to resign. Felix's manager was satisfied with his work performance; his manager and the higher management had decided to give him a permanent position. After a change in supervisor though, he became disengaged from his job. He started spending an increasing amount of time on personal interest during work time, and his contract was ended. Arnaud was fired for performance issues: the manager said he was not using the equipment in a safe way and would not follow instructions. Gabriel and William were still employed at the time of the interview. Thomas and Alex were no longer employed, despite meeting their manager's expectations, because of conflicting college schedule (for the former) and end of funding for the position (for the latter).

Manager-Autistic employee relationship quality and organizational socialization

Our analysis of the integration process of a new autistic employee in an organization reveals that the relationship built between managers and their employees as an important factor in the organizational socialization of autistic employees and their subsequent employment outcomes. In other words, the continued employment of the autistic employee in our cases was explained by factors beyond the satisfactory completion of work tasks.

Previous knowledge of autism and open-mindedness

Previous knowledge of autism, of disability, or of general difficulties with social interaction was mentioned by many managers in our cases in relation to hiring an employee on the autism spectrum. William did not disclose his diagnosis during the interview. When he later did, his manager reacted positively because of her previous personal experience: "my son had a friend who was autistic when he was younger so, hey, I knew a bit about that" (William's manager). Martine's third manager was willing to give a chance to a candidate coming from another department, even if the interview was not conclusive. "Martine is someone who is quite impressed with authority figures" (Martine's manager). She was so nervous that she froze and became unable to talk. Arnaud's manager valued employing employees with disability in his store but had no awareness about characteristics related to autism and type of support needed.

Demonstrating learning and progressing

Managers felt reassured when their employees were learning and demonstrating their potential, even if it was at a slower pace. One said, "It was going well. And he wanted to learn. So, I said to the management, he wants to learn, and I enjoy working with him, he is nice" (Felix's manager), and another noted, "There has been an increase in efficiency. There has been an increase in Travis's autonomy, definitely" (Travis's manager). William appeared inattentive during training, but he was able to show he had learned the material. On the contrary, managers became uncertain of the employee's place in their team when they showed what they deemed as no progress. After the first couple of

months, Martine's manager felt her employee didn't seem to be learning, even with an adjusted training pace: "I said to myself, I would take person X in the street, well it would be better than Martine" (Martine's manager). Arnaud's manager believed his employee was not listening to instructions: "he's too closed, I can't do anything" (Arnaud's manager).

Time and effort for their autistic employee

All managers interviewed indicated they had to invest additional time or adapt their usual ways to train and supervise their employee. Martine's third manager explained: "At the beginning, that was the most difficult, to train Martine and then succeed in doing my own tasks" (Martine's manager). Felix's manager taught him one task at the time, gave him extra information, and showed him how to do some tasks instead of simply telling him. Still, managers mentioned that the additional efforts they made for their autistic employee were comparable with adaptations they made for other employees: "I also have restrictions for other matters, for example, I have some [other tour guides] who are not bilingual, so I don't give them certain assignments" (William's manager). Both Martine and Felix's managers highlighted how they came to appreciate this direct way to give instruction and feedback they developed for their autistic employee.

Meeting adjusted performance expectations

Managers who viewed their experience of supervising an autistic employee positively tended to assess the performance of their employee as being good or excellent. But they qualified their appreciation in the context of the expectations they had outlined for their employee, considering their challenges in specific areas. Jeremy's manager underlined the intelligence, the expert knowledge of software, and the quality and speed of the work of his employee. He was tempted to qualify him as his best employee, but "I find it hard to say the best because [...] it is a whole, a person, it is also the ability to listen, the ability to analyze" (Jeremy's manager). William's boss noted that his performance as a tour guide was adequate and that he was passionate about the organization, but he needed very clear directives. Thomas performed well and was reliable, but he could only work in shifts that were less busy. Felix was viewed as a good database clerk who was rigorous and motivated, but he needed close supervision. His punctuality problem was compensated well enough by his other strengths. Alex met the expectations that were set out for him when first hired and demonstrated "that he can really help in the kitchen, not just be [a] supervision and coordination burden" (Alex's manager). The managers understood that their employees would perform well when the requisite supports and adaptations were provided.

Time and effort invested in training and supervising their autistic employees were also compensated by unique strengths and the positive effects on their peers and outsiders alike. Travis was reliable in following rules, Alex had a phenomenal memory. Thomas's manager appreciated how his presence improved the team climate as other employees became more respectful of each other purposely to create a less stressful environment for Thomas. Travis's enthusiasm about his job was contagious: "You see that he is very happy to be at the restaurant. He is an incredible ambassador for the rest of us, because he talks about us as something extraordinary" (Travis's manager).

Gratification from managing an autistic employee

Pride was visible in the discourse of all managers who felt that they had successfully integrated their autistic employee into their

team. They were proud of their employee's achievements: "what impressed us was that we brought out his strengths" (Alex's manager). They also mentioned their pride about their contribution to the community: "I think everyone is proud of that at the end of the day. Even my employees. We help a little in our community" (Travis's manager). In addition, the managers who witnessed their employee flourish as the consequence of being employed were more engaged with their employee. Jeremy's manager saw his employee move out of his mother's home and develop a social life, and he felt respect for Jeremy as a person, being able to create a life for himself.

Furthermore, many managers believed they had grown as a manager as a result of supervising an employee on the autism spectrum. They learned their managerial role at an accelerated pace, they improved the way they trained all employees (e.g., being more structured and specific), and they became more patient with their team. Jeremy's manager felt that he was transformed by this experience: "it was super enriching from a human point of view and above all, I think that from now on I will not direct or manage things in the same way". Other managers felt that their efforts were recognized in their workplace or in their personal life. Martine and her manager were featured in an event with the European head office: "Our director said it is you who made Martine what she is today [...]. If Martine is now comfortable and she now knows how to work, it's thanks to you" (Martine's manager). Felix's manager got accolades from her family "My daughter-in-law is a psychologist working with autistic children. And, from the start, she found it extraordinary when I told her about this".

In contrast, when their effort did not lead to the expected results, managers experienced disappointment. The entire management team that had been very proud of Felix's accomplishments were disappointed when he started spending an increasing amount of time compiling sports statistics during work hours:

We were ready to keep him, to give him a permanent job [...]. Even if we knew he had some problems being punctual [...]. But the rest of his attitude, that lack of motivation, and the fact that he really, really started focusing on other things at work. But that, there is no employer who can accept that (Felix's manager).

The job coach as relational mediator between supervisor and employee

The job coach had an important part in supporting the relationship between the supervisor and the employee on the autism spectrum and mediated the quality of this relationship (see Figure 1). At each stage of the employment cycle, when performing various interventions, the job coach facilitated communication between the employee and the employer, helping them develop the mutual understanding about expectations, which are foundational to a high-quality relationship. In many of our cases, the job coaches had approached businesses to propose an autistic candidate, discussing current openings or crafting a job that would fit the candidate's skills. The job coaches made sure that there was an appropriate match between a candidate's interests and skills and the needs of the employer. This fit could be evaluated during a short trial period: "we did a trial internship, basically to find out if Travis would like that, [...] does Travis meet expectations, what the supervisor wants" (Travis's job coach). Job coaches were also mostly present during the hiring process, to reassure the supervisors about the skills of the candidate: "We talked a lot with [the integration counselor] about everything that is psychological. His profile. For sure. At the same time, his limitations, his personality"

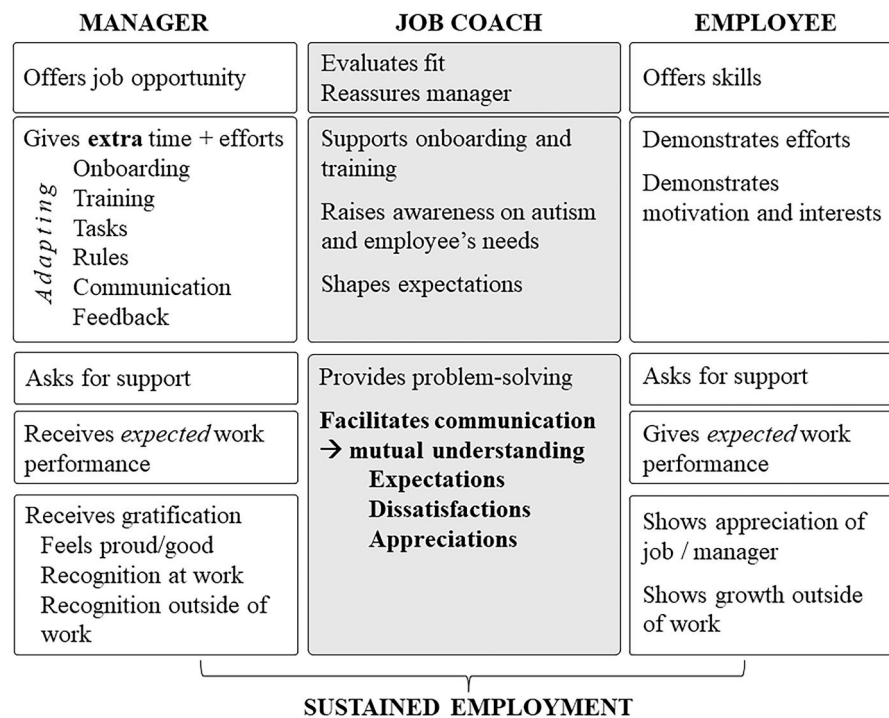


Figure 1. Development of quality leader-member relationship leading to sustained employment for an employee on the autism spectrum.

(Alex's manager). Job coaches' presence would also reassure the job candidate during the interview: "I knew he was very anxious, it didn't show up in the interview at all" (Gabriel's job coach). They could also shape the managers' expectations about the job tasks that their new employees could perform "During the first two weeks, we were accompanied by [the job coach] as well. Then, the objective was also to determine [...] the workload that Travis could do" (Travis's manager).

Raising awareness of managers and other employees about autism and the specific profile of the employee was a crucial component of the job coach's role. It helped adjust expectations regarding atypical behaviors that a specific autistic employee might display. Travis's manager could understand why his employee would freeze when an unforeseen event arose, even if the situation seemed simple. He was then able to anticipate his employee's need: "every new thing causes a question, causes a need to explain" (Travis's manager). Not understanding the meaning of some behaviors could also lead to discomfort from coworkers:

We are eating in the cafeteria, we start to discuss, people don't know what to do because Martine will say the same thing 10 times, "The pasta is good, the pasta is good, it is good." [...] I felt that there was a little reluctance about interacting with Martine. (Martine's manager)

Job coaches, however, helped managers to develop more positive views about employee behavior by demonstrating constructive ways to engage it. Specifically, during the on-boarding and the training period the job coach, as part of providing support in the workplace, job coaches would model how to communicate with their autistic employee. Martine's manager was previously uneasy with correcting the mistakes of her employee because she thought it would be too stressful for her. The intervention of the job coach changed her perception: "when I saw how [the job coach] was taking care ... spoke to Martine, the way she behaved with her, in the three days, well it allowed me a little ... you know, too, loosen up, to be more ... now it's natural" (Martine's manager). Jeremy benefited from the job coach's help to explain

some difficulties he faced "[she] allowed me to write a nice explanatory email" (Jeremy). Martine, although reluctant to have a job coach at first saw that her support was beneficial "I didn't like it when someone came to help me. But now, I know that I need some help moving forward [...]. You know, if I have no help, there are things that I may not be able to move forward." (Martine).

In contrast, Arnaud's first day on the job was disorganized as no one welcomed him or his job coach: "First day, I'm coming to work on integration. They all knew, everyone knew I was going to come, and nobody welcomed me. I didn't know who to turn to" (Arnaud's job coach). Unlike Martine's coach, Arnaud's job coach could not show managers or colleagues examples of effective interaction, training, and supervision. Thus, Arnaud's manager interpreted his employee's attitude as not being able to follow directions and being unhappy at his job. Arnaud's manager's belief that employees with disabilities should not get reprimanded when they make mistakes, deprived Arnaud of the task-specific feedback and subsequent support needed to improve job performance. Neither Arnaud nor his manager asked for support from the job coach.

A key limitation to job coaches fostering higher quality relationships between supervisors and autistic employees was that job coaches were often enlisted reactively. That is, job coaches were typically asked to provide support when challenges arose, meaning their focus was on getting task performance to baseline levels. Additionally, their role in evaluating the level of a wage subsidy by assessing additional supervision needed or reduced productivity compared with other employees was often in tension with creating a positive impression of employee capability. Job coaches needed to counteract these impressions of deficits by discussing what was going well and the strengths of the employee. They tried to redirect problem-solving efforts to redesign job tasks in ways that increased and enhanced the tasks that the employee did well rather than only devising *post hoc* ways to compensate for difficulties. For example, Jeremy's coach

explained: “He’s good when it’s black and white, he’s very efficient. He’s very quick for clear and precise things. Can we [laugh] just give him those tasks and delegate those other tasks to someone else who is going to be able to deal with the gray rules?” (Jeremy’s job coach).

Job coaches also helped strengthen the relationship between supervisor and employee by shaping expectations as well as developing tools and otherwise modifying the job or work environment, while meeting the manager’s needs. Job coaches augmented managerial coaching and training by developing tools to help the autistic employee organize and perform tasks including, for example, providing a picture cookbook to illustrate how to cut vegetables or a list of prioritization rules when confronted with multiple demands. In such ways, the job coaches aided the supervisor-employee relationship by helping enhance the work performance of employees. Task performance also increased supervisor motivation to invest time and effort to support their employee, their trust in the employee, and their appreciation of their contribution to the organization and, in turn, the quality of the relationship.

Job coaches also played a role in resetting relationships that were deemed problematic by a manager, coworkers, or both. Alex had restricted linguistic communication skills and his face did not show emotion in the ways his coworkers expected. For Alex’s manager and her team, this last feature was disconcerting: “For my team of cooks, it was difficult. Because they did not know. They didn’t know if he was happy to be there, if he was not happy, if he was tired. Nothing. He had no emotion on his face, not a smile”. Colleagues who gave him instructions felt they had no way of knowing if he understood and felt uneasy around him. The job coach helped set expectations for Alex, tailored the job to his skills, and created a mechanism through which he could communicate with his manager and colleagues (i.e., a communication board with pictograms). Jeremy had no noticeable limitations in communication. Jeremy’s manager labeled him insubordinate because he was asking “too many” questions or raised all possible issues with a project during meetings. The job coach helped the manager better understand Jeremy’s approach to his work (and meetings), which the manager experienced as confrontational, but originated in a need for clear instructions to minimize the risk of being blamed and fired for mistakes. This knowledge enabled the manager to put himself in “Jeremy mode” (Jeremy’s manager) and anticipate how his instructions would be interpreted in order to reformulate clearer instructions. The job coach suggested a 4 day a week schedule that allowed Jeremy to manage his energy and stress and his manager to have a day without interruptions from Jeremy’s questions.

Other factors facilitating integration of autistic employees

Additional factors not directly related to the manager-employee relationship were also described as contributing to employment outcomes of the autistic employees. In each case, these factors were shaped by the actions and/or words of the manager. The extent to which coworkers had positive (or at least neutral) attitudes about the employee on the autism spectrum aided the socialization process. However, managers both set expectations regarding interactions with colleagues and model how to do so effectively. Managers also set or implemented policies and practices regarding modifications to workplace rules, routines, and roles. For example, as the owner, Travis’s manager was able to construct the job description as he saw fit. Gabriel, who had significant sleep issues, benefited from his manager adhering to flexible scheduling.

The importance of the motivation, decisions, and daily actions of the supervisors were seen as more influential in our cases than other organizational or policy dimensions irrespective of organizational size. Martine, in the same organization, had three different jobs with three different managers, but was fired by the manager who did not ask for support in evaluating fit, awareness about autism, or problem solving. The job coach helped Jeremy’s manager understand his behaviors so well that he went from firing him to fighting to get him a substantial pay raise. Those relationships were built over time with support from the job coach and contributed to sustained employment.

Discussion

Employees on the autism spectrum generally experience stigma in the workplace and research has highlighted the complex personal, environmental, and work-specific needs of autistic adults [18]. Individualized support and accommodations in the workplace have also been shown to be important [18]. Still, few studies have unpacked the process of organizational socialization, the important role played by leaders in it, and its influence on employment outcomes of autistic employees or of employees with disabilities in the workplace [52]. Our research on the socialization experiences and employment outcomes of autistic employees affirms that the quality of the supervisor-employee relationship corresponded with the positive or negative employment outcomes and extends it to a new context. Consistent with prior research of neurotypical employees and managers, we find that the quality of the relationship between neurotypical managers and autistic employees was influenced by employee characteristics, leader characteristics, interactional variables (e.g., expectations, appreciation, personality), and contextual variables (e.g., workplace policies) [53]. Specifically, previous knowledge of autism [31,33,54] or experience with employees (or people) with disabilities [55,56] corresponded with what managers considered higher quality relationships. Employer’s previous knowledge might also have made their employee appear less different from other employees or themselves, perceived similarity being an antecedent of LMX relationship quality [57]. General open-mindedness, another established antecedent of LMX relationship quality, might have predisposed managers to like their autistic employees [40].

Managers engaged in an intuitive cost-benefit analysis of the time and efforts they had to invest in their autistic employee relative to the job performance they received from their employee. In our study, managers made clear that they incorporated socioemotional and relational factors as well as task performance in their assessment. Early positive performance built manager trust in the employee [61]. However, all managers that felt their experience of supervising an autistic employee was positive underlined that they received some form of moral or social benefit from their experience. They valued the improved team climate, their improvement as a manager, their pride and the recognition they got from their organization or from external sources, which incited them to continue investing in the relationship. In contrast, when efforts for their autistic employee led to results that they considered disappointing, the quality of relationship was low, consistent with research on neurotypical employee-manager dyads [58]. This suggests that the manager’s emotional experience of the interaction and work with the employee plays a key role in employment outcomes beyond the quality of task performance.

Prior research on the “double empathy problem” [59], where autistic and neurotypical individuals have difficulty understanding each other’s perspective, can outline how lack of mutual

understanding between the autistic employee and manager created lower quality LMX and less managerial investment in the employee typically followed by correspondingly worse employment outcomes. LMX is typically thought to vary in terms of its quality (i.e., high or low). In the context of autistic employees and neurotypical managers, we found evidence that autistic employees and their managers might have differing conceptions of what defines good performance and being a “good employee”. Autistic employees tended to describe specific, often discrete, work tasks and expressed less awareness of their interpersonal relationship with their manager. Neurotypical managers placed greater emphasis on interpersonal relationships, sometimes conflating their autistic employee’s interpersonal style with task performance (e.g., William’s apparent disinterest, but actual high performance above). This suggests that LMX and relationships that cross neurotypes necessitate more deliberate and systematic intervention to clarify expectations and guide behavior and interactions than previously conceptualized. When these deliberate steps were done well, we found evidence of benefits for the employee and the manager. Our research also shows the fragility of LMX between autistic employees and neurotypical managers. When managers (e.g., the case of Felix) or key job tasks (e.g., Jeremy) changed, it was disruptive for LMX and task performance. As such, these changes require greater intervention to re-establish expectations and norms than suggested in prior work.

Our findings also reveal that job coaches were able to proactively address behavioral and performance expectations by providing background information about autism, the employee, and otherwise offering adaptations to the job and the workplace to smooth socialization and enhance performance [32,34,57]. We observed that the job coaches contributed to the employees’ job performance by shaping the job description to focus on their strengths, supporting or requesting adaptations to help employees perform, and by contributing to the training and providing tools to organize work. The job coaches also influenced the perception of the manager by (re)setting expectations for performance and increasing the likelihood that the manager would invest in a higher quality relationship with the employee. After relationship breakdowns, job coaches also offered strategies and tools to reconcile expectations and repair relationships. With this role, the job coaches engaged in a form of mediated sensemaking [60], where they helped the manager to think differently about their autistic employee by creating the time to think about employee behaviors and the corresponding needs by pointing to specific cues. In doing so, they altered the cost-benefit calculation for managers regarding their efforts toward their autistic employees.

Conceptually, these findings both affirm and extend research on LMX and organizational socialization. We thus identified an important extension to LMX theory for employees on the autism spectrum - the quality of the relationship was also influenced by the actions taken by the job coach to support the relationship. The type and level of support varied with the specific circumstances of each employee, notably regarding challenges in communication and social interactions as well as “fitting in” with organizational norms and expectations. Still, the job coach played a significant role in mediating this relationship by providing information, role modeling, and specific tools.

Implication for rehabilitation

Our findings add to extant knowledge on supported employment. Program curricula typically include employment preparation, finding a job tailored to the autistic individual, and workplace support

[45]. Having a close connection with the employer is also a determinant of success for supported employment [61]. Job coaches can play an important role in building a mutual understanding between supervisors and employees grounded in employee strengths and their contribution to the team. This support is also important for individuals who have good conversational skills but struggle with decoding the workplace norms regarding social interactions as these challenges can be invisible to the manager. We show that the job coach facilitating communication and shared expectations is important because it clarifies the importance of interpersonal relationships that autistic employees might miss as a job requirement and it sensitizes employers to the need to clarify all their expectations of what it entails to be a “good employee” [62]. Doing so, strengthens the quality of LMX that lead to greater organizational integration and positive employment outcomes for the employee. Our research also highlights the heightened importance of these supports during the socialization process, when expectations and norms are conveyed whether that is when entering the organization or acclimating to a new manager.

Autistic individuals can be high-performing employees and there is a growing business case for hiring them [62]. That said, our analysis shows that managers perceive high personal costs of extra time and effort that they are reluctant to give in the absence of evidence that the benefits outweigh the costs. This is partly a function of managers focusing on the short-term financial return on investment and missing the longer-term benefits for the effectiveness of all employees as well as the socioemotional value to managers, team members, and the organization. Job coaches should continue to articulate and emphasize the broader benefits to managers in order to help strengthen the inclusion of the autistic employees in organizations. The job coaches can also aid further inclusion by recognizing and amplifying to people inside and outside their organization the efforts of managers who invest in building high quality relationships and provide needed supports to their autistic employees.

Public policies on employment for individuals on the autism spectrum need to recognize the importance of facilitating high quality relationships between managers and employees beyond the early stages of employment. Everyday life in organizations can present challenges for autistic employees including high social demands and regular organizational change (e.g., turnover of personnel especially managers, shifting project requirements, increasing performance expectations). Therefore, longer-term support is an essential component of quality employment services to employees on the autism spectrum.

Limitations

Although the contributions of this work can help to advance the field of employment of people on the autism spectrum, there are some notable limitations. We explored a small number of cases, which combined with the qualitative approach of our work limits generalizability [51]. However, we have taken steps to increase the likelihood of the transferability of the findings to other sites and situations: we provided rich data from multiple perspectives on the core phenomenon (organizational socialization and employment outcomes); we collected data across multiple sites to expand the range of jobs and organizations considered; and we studied a phenomenon at the leading edge (i.e., the deliberate attempt to attract and retain autistic employees has dramatically increased in recent years) [51]. These conditions should allow for the transferability of our findings to understanding organizational

socialization and LMX quality for autistic employees and/or manager-employee dyads receiving services from job coaches (or related supports). As we aimed to focus particularly on organizational and leadership factors, we believe that cases relying only on managers' interviews were relevant for our analysis as they present insights regarding our research aim. Still, our cases including data from autistic employees reveal that more richness is to be gained regarding the consequences from differences in expectations and mental models of being a "good employee", the quality of the LMX, and employment outcomes that are only revealed when the employee view is present. In addition, there might be systematic differences between managers accepting to participate in a one-hour interview and managers in general. The managers that we interviewed may be more inclined to want to help others and willing to reflect on their actions. They may have felt less constrained by time, a dimension that is also associated with higher quality LMX between a supervisor and their supervisee [63].

The interviews with two of the autistic employees provided us with limited usable information. Other interview formats (e.g., doing more than one meeting, providing written questions beforehand, giving the possibility to read previous answers to provide additional information or suggest a different interpretation, using a written format) might have elicited richer information. Nonetheless, our research involved people having greater communication difficulties, a group less included in studies, especially related to employment [22]. Observing the employee in their workplace and interactions between managers and employees might also have provided us with richer information and counteracted possible social desirability bias or recall bias. Still, most interviews with the managers were done in their office, allowing us to get an impression of the workplace. For five cases, we considered information coming from the notes of the job coaches, which related the events as they happened. Finally, to minimize socially desirable or overly positive responses during the interviews, we actively encouraged interviewees to relay their full set of experiences both positive and negative.

Future research

Future research should build on our qualitative data suggesting LMX quality is consequential for autistic employees' organizational socialization and employment outcomes. Quantitative studies of the factors (including job coaches) that contribute to LMX quality in dyads of autistic employees and neurotypical managers as well as the relationships between LMX quality and employment outcomes could be based on a larger sample of autistic employees as well as the neurotypical managers. It would also be helpful to explore these dynamics, including experience of job coaches in supporting the relationship between the manager and the employee, over time. Engaging in this quantitative research may require methodological refinements, including ensuring the psychometric appropriateness of existing measures of LMX for autistic individuals [64].

Developing and evaluating interventions designed to develop, sustain, and repair LMX in the workplace is another promising direction for additional research [40]. Given our findings and prior research suggesting divergent expectations between autistic employees and their neurotypical managers, active intervention seems essential to bridging the double empathy problem [65]. The role of the supervisor-employee relationship in sustaining employment for autistic employees also highlights the importance of studying what happens when there is a change in managers,

the resulting impact for autistic employees, and ways to best support them in this transition. Our data suggest that absent intervention, there is a drop-off in performance, sometimes resulting in negative employment outcomes (e.g., termination).

Research on employment of adults on the autism spectrum is growing. Our study demonstrates how concepts from organizational research such as organizational socialization and LMX enhance our understanding of what contributes to positive employment outcomes. In addition, by directly examining the socialization process between autistic employees and neurotypical managers we illustrate how the double empathy problem necessitates deliberate and recurring intervention (e.g., through job coaches) to reconcile divergent understandings of what the job entails and what constitutes good performance. Doing so refines and extends our understanding of the organizational socialization process and the conditions under which high-quality LMX emerges. We hope this contributes to furthering how to create and sustain positive employment outcomes for autistic individuals.

Acknowledgments

This paper was written in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Ph.D. degree in Psychoeducation at the Université de Montréal by the first author. The authors are grateful to Marc J. Lanovaz (University of Montreal) for the support and supervision offered as director to the first author during her doctoral research. The authors thank the anonymous referees for valuable comments that improved the quality of the paper.

Disclosure statement

The authors of this paper declare no conflicts of interest in the completion of the study or the preparation of this manuscript. Authors have no relevant financial relationships to disclose.

Funding

The preparation of this manuscript was supported in part by a doctoral research scholarship from the Fonds de Recherche du Québec – Société et Culture to the first author.

ORCID

Valerie Martin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2558-6912>

Tara D. Flanagan  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9450-9072>

Timothy J. Vogus  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3164-8104>

Denis Chênevert  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2464-2836>

References

- [1] American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders. 5 ed. Arlington (VA): American Psychiatric Association; 2013.
- [2] Public Health Agency of Canada. Autism spectrum disorder among children and youth in Canada 2018. A report of the national autism spectrum disorder surveillance system. Ottawa (ON): Government of Canada; 2018.
- [3] AQICESH. Statistiques concernant les étudiants en situation de handicap dans les universités québécoises - 2013-2014 [statistics on students with disabilities in Quebec

- universities - 2013-2014]. Québec (QC): Association québécoise interuniversitaire des conseillers aux étudiants en situation de handicap, 2014.
- [4] Roux AM, Rast JE, Anderson KA, et al. National autism indicators report: Vocational rehabilitation. Philadelphia (PA): A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, Drexel University; 2016.
 - [5] Black MH, Mahdi S, Milbourn B, et al. Perspectives of key stakeholders on employment of autistic adults across the United States, Australia, and Sweden. *Autism Res.* 2019; 12(11):1648–1662.
 - [6] Hendricks D. Employment and adults with autism spectrum disorders: Challenges and strategies for success. *J Vocat Rehabil.* 2010;32(2):125–134.
 - [7] Hayward SM, McVilly KR, Stokes MA. Autism and employment: what works. *Autism Spectrum Disord.* 2019;60:48–58. doi:
 - [8] Richards J. Examining the exclusion of employees with asperger syndrome from the workplace. *Personnel Rev.* 2012;41(5):630–646.
 - [9] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevalence of autism spectrum disorders — autism and developmental disabilities monitoring network, 14 sites, United States, 2008. Atlanta (GA): U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2012.
 - [10] Howlin P, Magiati I. Autism spectrum disorder: outcomes in adulthood. *Curr Opin Psychiatry.* 2017;30(2):69–76.
 - [11] Croen LA, Zerbo O, Qian Y, et al. The health status of adults on the autism spectrum. *Autism.* 2015;19(7):814–823.
 - [12] Hagner D, Cooney BF. I do that for everybody”: supervising employees with autism. *Focus Autism Other Dev Disabl.* 2005;20(2):91–97.
 - [13] Dreaver J, Thompson C, Girdler S, et al. Success factors enabling employment for adults on the autism spectrum from employers’ perspective. *J Autism Develop Disord.* 2019; 50(5):1657–1667.
 - [14] Kirchner J, Ruch W, Dziobek I. Brief report: character strengths in adults with autism spectrum disorder without intellectual impairment. *J Autism Dev Disord.* 2016;46(10): 3330–3337.
 - [15] Krzeminska A, Austin RD, Bruyère SM, et al. The advantages and challenges of neurodiversity employment in organizations. *J Manage Organ.* 2019;25(04):453–463.
 - [16] Austin RD, Sonne T. The case for hiring “outlier” employees 2014. Available from: <https://hbr.org/2014/01/the-case-for-hiring-outlier-employees/>
 - [17] Hurley-Hanson A, Giannantonio CM, Griffiths A-J. Autism in the workplace. Creating positive employment and career outcomes for generation A. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; 2020.
 - [18] Harmuth E, Silletta E, Bailey A, et al. Barriers and facilitators to employment for adults with autism: a scoping review. *Ann Inter Occup Ther.* 2018;1(1):31–40.
 - [19] Scott M, Milbourn B, Falkmer M, et al. Factors impacting employment for people with autism spectrum disorder: a scoping review. *Autism.* 2018;23(4):869–901.
 - [20] Lorenz T, Frischling C, Cuadros R, et al. Autism and overcoming job barriers: Comparing job-related barriers and possible solutions in and outside of autism-specific employment. *PLoS One.* 2016;11(1):e0147040.
 - [21] Nicholas DB, Zwaigenbaum L, Zwicker J, et al. Evaluation of employment-support services for adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism.* 2018;22(6):693–702.
 - [22] Nicholas DB, Hodgetts S, Zwaigenbaum L, et al. Research needs and priorities for transition and employment in autism: considerations reflected in a “Special Interest Group” at the International Meeting for Autism Research”. *Autism Res.* 2017;10(1):15–24.
 - [23] Hurlbutt K, Chalmers L. Employment and adults with asperger syndrome. *Focus Autism Other Dev Disabl.* 2004; 19(4):215–222.
 - [24] Ohl A, Grice Sheff M, Little S, et al. Predictors of employment status among adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Work.* 2017;56(2):345–355.
 - [25] Bölte S, de Schipper E, Robison JE, et al. Classification of functioning and impairment: the development of ICF core sets for autism spectrum disorder. *Autism Res.* 2014;7(1): 167–172.
 - [26] Scott M, Falkmer M, Falkmer T, et al. Evaluating the effectiveness of an autism-specific workplace tool for employers: a randomised controlled trial. *J Autism Dev Disord.* 2018; 48(10):3377–3392.
 - [27] Hayward SM, McVilly KR, Stokes MA. Sources and impact of occupational demands for autistic employees. *Res Autism Spect Disor.* 2020;76(101571):101571.
 - [28] Hedley D, Uljarevic M, Cameron L, et al. Employment programmes and interventions targeting adults with autism spectrum disorder: a systematic review of the literature. *Autism.* 2017;21(8):929–941.
 - [29] Khalifa G, Sharif Z, Sultan M, et al. Workplace accommodations for adults with autism spectrum disorder: a scoping review. *Disabil Rehabil.* 2020;42(9):1316–1331.
 - [30] Bauer TN, Bodner T, Erdogan B, et al. Newcomer adjustment during organizational socialization: a Meta-analytic review of antecedents, outcomes, and methods. *J Appl Psychol.* 2007;92(3):707–721.
 - [31] Vogus TJ, Taylor JL. Flipping the script: bringing an organizational perspective to the study of autism at work. *Autism.* 2018;22(5):514–516.
 - [32] Parr AD, Hunter ST, Ligon GS. Questioning universal applicability of transformational leadership: examining employees with autism spectrum disorder. *Leadership Q.* 2013;24(4): 608–622.
 - [33] Parr AD, Hunter ST. Enhancing work outcomes of employees with autism spectrum disorder through leadership: Leadership for employees with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism.* 2014;18(5):545–554.
 - [34] Bury SM, Hedley D, Uljarević M, et al. If you’ve employed one person with autism ...: an individual difference approach to the autism advantage at work. *Autism.* 2018; 23:1362361318794937.
 - [35] Graen GB, Uhl-Bien M. Relationship-based approach to leadership: development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *Leadership Q.* 1995;6(2): 219–247.
 - [36] Blau PM. Exchange and power in social life. New York (NY): John Wiley & Sons; 1964. p. 95–99.
 - [37] Cropanzano R, Mitchell MS. Social exchange theory: an interdisciplinary review. *J Manage.* 2005;31(6):874–900.
 - [38] Dienesch RM, Liden RC. Leader-member exchange model of leadership: a critique and further development. *Acad Manage J.* 1986;11:618–634.
 - [39] Dulebohn JH, Bommer WH, Liden RC, et al. A Meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of leader-member

- exchange: integrating the past with an eye toward the future. *J Manage.* 2012;38(6):1715–1759.
- [40] Martin R, Epitropaki O, Thomas G, et al. A review of leader-member exchange research: future prospects and directions. In: Hodgkinson GP, Ford JK, editors. *International review of industrial and organizational psychology* Vol. 252010. 2010. p. 35–88.
- [41] Colella A, Varma A. The impact of subordinate disability on leader-member exchange relationships. *Acad Manage J.* 2001;44(2):304–315.
- [42] Boehm SA, Dwertmann DJG. Forging a single-edged sword: facilitating positive age and disability diversity effects in the workplace through leadership, positive climates, and HR practices. *Work Aging Retire.* 2015;1(1):41–63.
- [43] Colella A. Organizational socialization of employees with disabilities: critical issues and implications for workplace interventions. *J Occup Rehabil.* 1994;4(2):87–106.
- [44] Colella A, DeNisi AS, Varma A. Appraising the performance of employees with disabilities: a review and model. *Hum Res Manage Rev.* 1997;7(1):27–53.
- [45] Nicholas DB, Attridge M, Zwaigenbaum L, et al. Vocational support approaches in autism spectrum disorder: a synthesis review of the literature. *Autism.* 2015;19(2):235–245.
- [46] Martin V, Lanovaz MJ. Program evaluation of a community organization offering supported employment services for adults with autism. *Autism Spectrum Disord.* 2021;82: 101741.
- [47] Miles MB, Huberman AM, Saldaña J. *Qualitative data analysis. A methods sourcebook.* 3 ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publication; 2014.
- [48] Langley A. Strategies for theorizing from process data. *AMR.* 1999;24(4):691–710.
- [49] Patton MQ. *Qualitative research & evaluation methods.* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications; 2015. p. 805.
- [50] Lloyd V, Gatherer A, Kalsy S. Conducting qualitative interview research with people with expressive language difficulties. *Qual Health Res.* 2006;16(10):1386–1404.
- [51] Lincoln YS, Guba E. *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park (CA): Sage Publication; 1985.
- [52] Colella A, Bruyère SM. Disability and employment: new directions for industrial and organizational psychology. In: Zedeck S, editor. *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology 1: Building and developing the organization.* Washington (DC): American Psychological Association Press; 2011. p. 473–503.
- [53] Liden R, Sparrowe R, Wayne S. Leader-member exchange theory: the past and potential for the future. *Res Person Hum Resources Manage.* 1997;15:47–119.
- [54] Whelpley CE, Banks GC, Bochantin JE, et al. Tensions on the spectrum: an inductive investigation of employee and manager experiences of autism. *J Bus Psychol.* 2020;36: 283–297.
- [55] Cavanagh J, Bartram T, Meacham H, et al. Supporting workers with disabilities: a scoping review of the role of human resource management in contemporary organisations. *Asia Pac J Hum Resour.* 2017;55(1):6–43.
- [56] Schur L, Colella A, Adya M. Introduction to special issue on people with disabilities in the workplace. *Inter J Hum Res Manage.* 2016; 27(14):1–6.
- [57] Erdogan B, Bauer TN. Leader-member exchange theory. In: Wright JD, editor. *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Elsevier; 2015. p. 641–647.
- [58] Maslyn J, Uhl-Bien M. Leader-member exchange and its dimensions: effects of self-effort and other's effort on relationship quality. *J Appl Psychol.* 2001;86(4):697–708.
- [59] Milton DEM. On the ontological status of autism: the 'double empathy problem. *Disab Soc.* 2012;27(6):883–887.
- [60] Strike VM, Rerup C. Mediated sensemaking. *AMJ.* 2016; 59(3):880–905.
- [61] Mawhood L, Howlin P. The outcome of a supported employment scheme for high-functioning adults with autism or asperger syndrome. *Autism.* 1999;3(3):229–254.
- [62] Austin RD, Pisano GP. Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage. *Harv Bus Rev.* 2017;96–103.
- [63] Kinicki AJ, Vecchio RP. Influences on the quality of supervisor-subordinate relations: the role of time-pressure, organizational commitment, and locus of control. *J Organiz Behav.* 1994;15(1):75–82.
- [64] Nicolaidis C, Raymaker DM, McDonald KE, et al. Creating accessible survey instruments for use with autistic adults and people with intellectual disability: lessons learned and recommendations. *Autism Adulthood.* 2020;2(1):61–76.
- [65] Patton E. Autism, attributions and accommodations. *PR.* 2019;48(4):915–934.