

# **Inclusive Interpersonal Communication Education for Technology Professionals**

## *Completed Research*

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## **Introduction**

The U.S. economy continues to compete for talented IT professionals. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of IT jobs will grow 11% between 2019 and 2029, faster than the average for all other occupations (BLS, 2020). It is expected that in 2030 there will be a global shortage of 85 million tech workers (da Costa, 2019). IT companies struggle to meet their talent needs. Increasingly, more firms such as SAP, IBM, and Microsoft, inspired by the initial success of the Danish IT consulting firm Specialisterne, are taking notice of the untapped technology talents and skills of individuals with autism to address the industry's significant unmet demand for employees (Annabi and Locke, 2019). Scholars from various fields recognize the proclivity of individuals on the autism spectrum to pursue technology-oriented employment (Mazurek et al., 2012; Wei, et al., 2013). Industry champions of such programs point to the opportunity for such programs to have a greater social impact (Shattuck et al., 2012; Hedley et al., 2018). Autism employment programs provide meaningful employment opportunities for the growing number of IT-oriented individuals with autism who have been severely unemployed or underemployed. It is difficult to estimate the unemployment rate of adults on the spectrum due to limited research and limited disclosure (Austin and Pisano, 2017). Some estimate that the unemployment rate among individuals with autism (including those with severe intellectual disabilities) is 80% (Austin and Pisano, 2017). Roux, et al. (2017) suggest that only 14% of adults with autism in the US work for pay.

Autism at Work initiatives offer potential business benefits, including meeting the rising demand for IT workers, as well as capitalizing on the unique cognitive style and talents of employees with autism, namely, systems thinking, attention to detail, high level of focus, comfort with doing repetitive behavior, and ability to visualize problems (Austin and Pisano, 2017; Baldwin et al., 2014; Morris et al., 2015; Annabi and Locke, 2019). Despite their potential, early studies of autism employment in IT reveal that technology workers with autism experience challenges and isolation in the workplace (Hedley, et al. 2018). These experiences often are attributed to 1) limited understanding of the talents of IT workers with autism (Annabi et al., 2017; Austin & Pisano, 2017); 2) suboptimal environmental and task design accommodations (Rebholz, 2012); and 3) and the social and behavioral disconnect between autistic employees and their neurotypical managers and co-workers with whom they directly work (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Morris et al., 2015; Rebholz, 2012). This raises questions about the readiness of the IT workplace to welcome and effectively engage individuals with autism in tasks as well as social processes at work.

## **Research Gap**

The emphasis of autism employment research has largely been on preparing the autistic employee for the workplace and the development of vocational training (e.g., Burke et al. 2010; Seaman & Cannella-Malone, 2016) and supported employment (Schall et al., 2015). There is limited research that addresses challenges and successes in the organizational setting to better support autistic employees in the workforce (Wei et al. 2015; Roux et al. 2015), particularly in the IT industry, where many individuals on the autism spectrum work (Hedley, et al., 2017; Annabi and Locke, 2019). Most of the research and practice place the onus of

change on the autistic person, rather than challenging the normative ideas about how professionals should be and behave. Therefore, our work, consistent with Annabi and Locke (2019), focuses on building the capacity of organizations and teams to work effectively in diverse teams of neurotypical and autistic employees. In this study, we focus our attention on social and behavioral disconnect between employees on the autism spectrum and their neurotypical managers and co-workers with whom they work (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Morris et al., 2015; Rebholz, 2012). This research focuses on interpersonal communication, a key barrier identified in the literature below. To this end, we address the following research objective:

*How can we help neurotypical workers interact more effectively with their autistic colleagues?*

In the remainder of this paper, we review the relevant literature to explain the nature of autism employment in IT and reveal the key challenges that autistic employees face at work. Our literature review will transition to the design and assessment of our communication intervention, whose goal is to raise awareness of and knowledge of how to effectively communicate between neurotypical and autistic employees. The paper will report on the design of our communication intervention and the results of a formative pilot study to evaluate the design of the intervention and assess its effectiveness.

## **Autism Employment in the IT Industry**

Employing individuals on the autism spectrum in the technology industry is not new. In fact, many in the popular press (e.g., Silberman, 2015) and those doing empirical research (e.g., Rebholz, 2012; Morris et al., 2015) note that the IT workforce employs a significant number of individuals on the spectrum. However, autism-specific employment programs in prominent IT firms or in IT departments of prominent firms is a relatively new and a growing phenomenon in the US worthy of attention (Austin and Pisano, 2017; Annabi and Locke, 2019). Firms such as SAP, Microsoft, IBM, Google, JPMorgan Chase, EY, Dell, SAS, WB, and others have developed autism-specific initiatives to recruit and interview autistic job candidates in order to meet the high demand for IT talent. Autism employment programs deploy various methods and practices to include individuals on the spectrum in the workplace. These include nontraditional interview processes that focus on 1) relaxed and casual interactions with candidates over a period of days; and 2) hands-on skills assessments. Programs also include training and support for co-workers and managers to help them understand and appreciate the talents of their colleagues on the spectrum. In addition, some programs offer customizable career management and development processes (Austin and Pisano, 2017). These programs are growing in size and impact. At Microsoft, over 130 autistic employees have been hired in software development and data analytics roles in the last five years, and over 3000 employees have gone through autism coworker training. SAP has hired more than 200 people in 16 countries, with a goal to reach 1% representation of their employees to reflect the portion of autistic people in the broader population. JPMorgan Chase has hired 225 in 90 countries in 40 different roles. The potential of these programs is great but can only be achieved if autistic people are included equitably and have a sense of belonging in the workplace. There has been little specific research that assesses the effectiveness of the autism hiring programs mentioned above. Early research on autism employment across various industries suggests that autistic people face considerable barriers and challenges once they are hired.

### ***Challenges that autistic employees experience at work***

Societal notions of desirable employees and organizational processes are designed to value and emphasize social skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, and teamwork (Austin and Pisano, 2017; Annabi et al., 2017). Individuals with autism may have marked social communication differences and restricted interests that affect their interpersonal interactions and ability to relate to neurotypical managers and coworkers. These normative notions result in autistic individuals being deemed unqualified or undesirable for jobs and collaborations that they are intellectually capable of doing well (Oliver, 2013, Austin and Pisano, 2017). Research suggests that autistic individuals are viewed with stigma and disclosing an autism diagnosis in the workplace can have detrimental consequences (Johnson and Joshi, 2016). In a study of vocational experiences among autistic individuals, some reported tolerating the experience of being socially “different” while others reported “a certain sort of stigmatization” (Müller et al., 2003). Therefore, it is no surprise that individuals on the autism spectrum often feel isolated from and have few informal meaningful interactions and relationships with their colleagues (Morris et al. 2015; Austin and Pisano, 2017). Those that report being “scorned” by co-workers say that their social impairments often led to isolation and alienation in the workplace (Müller et al., 2003). This is due, in part, to a significant disconnect

in interpersonal communication between neurotypicals and those on the spectrum (Scott et al., 2015). Furthermore, autistic employees sometimes require environmental accommodations to manage stimulus in their physical surroundings or limited travel, which may attract negative attention from colleagues who view these accommodations as unfair, due to their limited knowledge of autism (Austin and Pisano, 2017).

In their review of autism employment in IT, Austin and Pisano (2017) determined that managers and leaders play an important role in including individuals on the spectrum on their teams and setting the right tone. Unfortunately, transformational leadership styles emphasized in industry, which utilize abstract forms of communication such as metaphors, may lead to challenges for autistic employees because they induce more stress and anxiety (Parr et al., 2013). Managers and leaders often fail to communicate in ways that many autistic people prefer. For example, individuals on the spectrum may prefer explicit communication and the use of literal language (Tager-Flusberg, 1997). The use of idioms, metaphors, and sarcasm may be confusing and lost in translation for many (Happé, 1995). Further, individuals on the spectrum also may prefer logic-based problem solving (Grandin, 1995), sameness and routinized behavior (APA, 2013), and structured environments (Mesibov and Shea, 2010). The dynamic, ambiguous, fast-paced, and often critical events (e.g., new releases, malfunctions) characteristic of IT work can present challenges to individuals on the spectrum (Morris et al., 2015). These events, if not properly managed, can increase stress and anxiety for individuals on the spectrum and prevent them from completing their work effectively and efficiently (Austin and Pisano, 2017). Similarly, the reliance of IT firms on computer-mediated work communication, which has increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbates stressors that affect autistic workers, such as sensory sensitivities, cognitive overload, and anxiety, requiring them to apply sensory, cognitive, and social coping strategies which may reduce trust in and increase their social isolation from neurotypical coworkers (Burke et al. 2010, Zolyomi et al., 2019).

This review of challenges that autistic employees face emphasizes the importance of challenging normative expectations of social behavior and developing effective communication practices in diverse teams. Essential to doing so is not only understanding and changing the knowledge and attitudes neurotypical coworkers and managers have of autism, but also building capacity and know-how of effective communication practices (Annabi and Locke, 2019; Hedley et al., 2018).

### ***Changing attitudes is important, but know-how is too!***

The limited knowledge and negative attitudes neurotypical individuals often hold of autism are the cause of many of the barriers in the workplace discussed above (Maroto and Pettinicchio, 2015). The general public, including neurotypical IT workers, often have limited knowledge of the talents and needs of individuals on the autism spectrum. The misconceptions are based in normative social expectation about the talents and needs of individuals on the spectrum and create difficulties in interactions and employer decisions to hire, promote, or retain employees with autism (Gould et al.; 2015; Austin and Pisano, 2017). These attitudes influence organizational culture and policies and either facilitate or prohibit the inclusion of individuals with autism in the workplace (Gould et al. 2015). Attitudes refer to the perceived advantages and disadvantages of performing a behavior (the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of a specific behavior; in our case, communication differences of individuals on the autism spectrum). Studies have documented the relevance of attitudes in accounting for intentions (Hagger et al., 2002; Armitage & Conner, 2001) and demonstrated that intentions account for a considerable amount of the variation in specific behaviors (Armitage and Conner, 2001). Attitudes present a malleable determinant of behavior that can be targeted to promote better inclusion of individuals with autism in the workplace. Thus, a lot of training relevant to autism focuses on understanding autism in order to change people's attitudes (Morrison et al. 2019). Progress with autism acceptance training shows that increasing autism knowledge can help reduce explicit bias and stigma towards autistic individuals (though with less success in reducing implicit bias) (Morrison et al. 2019, Bast et al. 2020, Dickter et al. 2020, Jones et al. 2021).

Changing people's attitudes is not sufficient, however. Our early discussions with many neurotypical workers in IT revealed that their biggest challenges lay in know-how. They often want to be more effective, but they find it difficult to communicate effectively. Unfortunately, most training stops short of presenting strategies for effective communication, i.e., the know-how. There is limited empirical work in practical guidance for communication strategies in the context of employment. To encourage neurotypical IT workers' behaviors to be more welcoming and inclusive in their interactions with coworkers on the spectrum, we need to not only understand and change neurotypicals' understanding of and attitudes

towards autism, but we must also improve their readiness to use effective communication strategies (their know-how). To this end, we developed an educational module addressing effective communication. We asked, “Does this education module improve the self-efficacy regarding learners’ abilities to communicate effectively with their autistic colleagues?” The next sections describe the design of our module and a formative study to assess its design and effectiveness.

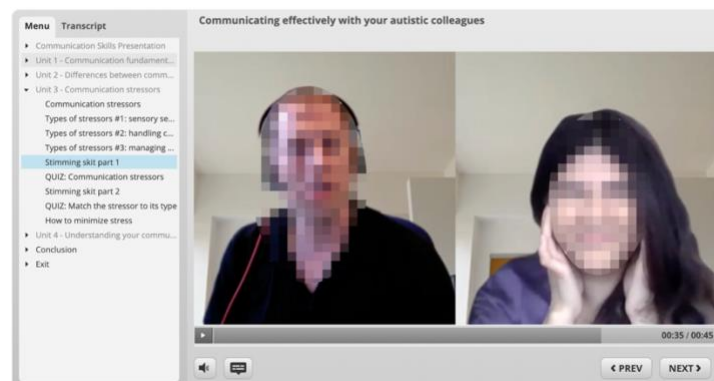
## Method

We built an online course to teach neurotypical employees communication skills to work more effectively with their autistic coworkers. The online version was adapted from an in-person course we developed in a series of workshops held with IT workers at large USA-based technology firm. We provided this course online to increase flexibility of access and scale it to a greater number of learners who live in diverse geographic locations. The course’s goals are to teach learners three lessons: 1) understand the fundamentals of communication, 2) understand and appreciate the diversity of communication styles and preferences of autistic (and non-autistic) people, and 3) develop effective ways to communicate with autistic coworkers.



**Figure 1. The introduction slide to the online course. On the left is the course outline.**

The 15-minute course, divided into 4 units, employs video skits, quizzes, audio narrations, and charts to explain core concepts. The title screen of the course is shown in Figure 1. The video skits and quizzes are designed to reinforce the concepts discussed in the section, promote empathy and understanding between neurotypical and autistic people, and introduce concrete skills that can be used to improve communication. Each video portrays a scenario in which a communication issue occurs between an autistic person and their neurotypical colleague. We quiz the learner to identify the error, and then show them a follow-up video demonstrating how the issue can be resolved using the communication skills taught in the course. A screenshot from one of the course’s video skits is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Two coworkers talking to one another in a video about stimming. The autistic coworker on the right is overwhelmed after her colleague on the left calls out her hair twirling.**

## Course Outline

Our communication skills course is divided into four modules: communication fundamentals, differences between communication styles of autistic and neurotypical people, communication stressors, and understanding communication preferences.

**Communication Fundamentals.** The first module briefly explains the fundamentals of communication. Our goal is to help learners understand their own communication preferences. It defines *communication* and explains both the transmission and feedback phases in the communication process. We then define *noise* and explain how it can introduce misunderstandings in communication. The unit concludes with a communication skills self-assessment, encouraging the learner to reflect on their own behavior.

**Differences between communication styles of autistic and neurotypical people.** The second module defines *autism* as a neurological condition impacting the way a person experiences the world. It illustrates the differences between the communication preferences of neurotypical and autistic people through 20 examples of typical reactions to common behaviors. A brief video skit demonstrates restricted interests as a communication preference that can be common among autistic people. In the skit, a neurotypical worker unsuccessfully tries to talk about work, while their autistic colleague, missing their coworker's subtle hints to change the topic, talks about bees and honey. The skit is followed by a quiz asking the learner to identify the cause of the miscommunication. A follow-up video skit demonstrates how more direct and straightforward communication can help them avoid these issues and get their work done. A final quiz in the unit explores the different preferences in small talk between autistic and neurotypical people.

**Communication stressors.** The third module focuses on communication stressors faced by autistic people: sensory sensitivity, cognitive overload, and anxiety. Examples of stressors include managing multiple tasks in conversations, listening to too many people talking at the same time, and feeling the need to adhere to neurotypical social norms. A video skit in this unit features an autistic worker who feels extreme anxiety and loss of focus when they are called out for twirling their hair, a kind of "stimming" (or self-stimulating) behavior that autistic people tend to exhibit. The skit is followed by a quiz that asks the learner to identify the communication stressors they saw. A follow-up video skit then teaches the learner how to minimize these stressors in future meetings. A final quiz asks learners to match communication stressors with actions that can be taken to minimize their impact on autistic coworkers.

**Understanding communication preferences.** The final module of the course contains a three-part, 12 question self-assessment quiz. The questions ask learners to reflect on their own communication preferences and compare them to preferences commonly preferred by autistic people. The first part focuses on cognitive load in face-to-face interactions, offering examples about eye contact and displaying emotion to conversational partners. The second part concerns conversational dynamics, asking learners to assess their comfort with talking to more than one person at a time, or with multitasking during conversations. The third part focuses on the content of conversation, including questions on reviewing the meeting agenda in advance and talking about "uninteresting" conversation topics. The module concludes with an actionable list of steps to help learners negotiate their communication preferences with their coworkers, helping them to minimize miscommunication.

The course concludes with four takeaways:

1. Communication is effective only when a common understanding is reached. Noise hampers the communication process.
2. Autistic people have a wide range of abilities, characteristics, and communication preferences that may differ from and are very noticeable to neurotypical people. However, we stress that these differences should *not* be considered deficits.
3. Three types of communication stressors faced by autistic people are sensory sensitivities, cognitive overload, and anxiety. These stressors may be minimized by setting clear expectations and discussing one's communication preferences in advance of important conversations.
4. To be effective communicators, we must seek to understand and adjust to others' styles and preferences.

Resources are provided at the end of presentation in the form of books, web pages, and academic articles that can be read to gain a deeper understanding of the material covered in the course.

## **Intervention Pilot Assessment**

To assess the effectiveness of our course, we conducted a pilot study with 19 information workers at a large, USA-based technology firm. These were recruited via open invitation by members of an autism inclusion working group at the firm to anyone at the firm. We asked participants to take a pre-survey to assess their familiarity with autism, their understanding of their own communication preferences, and their knowledge of how to negotiate communication preferences with colleagues. Participants then took the online course. Afterwards, a post-survey measured the change in autism knowledge, their attitudes towards autistic individuals, and their ability to synthesize appropriate strategies in response to novel hypothetical communication scenarios with autistic coworkers. The experimental methodology was approved by our IRB.

The pre-survey contained 13 questions: 5 assessing one's own communication preferences and comfort, 3 assessing prior experience with autism or disability, 2 measuring communication-related autism knowledge, and 3 evaluating how well they knew how to react to novel scenarios involving conversations with autistic colleagues. The post-survey contained 12 questions: 3 repeated from the pre-survey to assess understanding one's own communication preferences and knowledge of autism, 5 evaluating recall of course content, 1 assessing change in attitude towards autistic coworkers, and 3 evaluating their reaction to novel scenarios. Knowledge and reaction questions were intended to reveal whether our participants retained the information presented in the course (in the short term) and were able to apply this knowledge in real-world scenarios. The attitude question helped us learn whether our course helped reduce explicit bias that our participants may have held against autistic people.

### **Results**

Of the 19 participants, most (68%) personally knew an autistic person, but only 1 had received any disability training (not specific to autism) prior to the course. 12 (63%) reported they had experience negotiating their communication preferences with colleagues prior to the course. All participants reported being somewhat or extremely comfortable with written, professional communication, however 2 (11%) said they were somewhat or extremely *uncomfortable* with oral, professional communication, whether in-person or virtual.

Evaluating the participants' knowledge gain of communication fundamentals, we found that 18 out of 19 participants understood that communication is only effective when a common understanding has been reached. All the participants understood that effective communication requires understanding and adjusting to another's communication style. 6 participants improved their understanding of their own communication styles, but 2 participants realized that they now did not know as much as they had thought.

Before taking the course, participants started out with a reasonably good knowledge of autism. Out of the 18 respondents, 3 said reported that they knew a lot about autism, while 6 knew a moderate amount, and 8 only knew a little. 7 out of 18 participants reported that the course increased their knowledge of autism by one rating on a 5-point Likert scale.

18 out of 19 participants said that they understood the bottom-up, detail-oriented style that autistic individuals tend to prefer. After the course, one participant improved their understanding of this style, but another participant's understanding decreased. 5 out of 18 participants improved their attitudes towards accepting the tendency of autistic people to offer unsolicited advice or correct their facts, however one participant's attitude worsened.

While 18 participants understood that explicit communication is an effective way to change the topic of conversation with an autistic colleague, 3 thought that subtle, indirect means could work as well. After taking the course, 1 of the 3 recognized that indirect approaches would be unlikely to be effective.

18 out of 19 participants could identify the kinds of stressors autistic people face during video conference calls. After the course, all the participants correctly recalled these stressors. Before the course, 12 of 18 participants could identify four appropriate ways to minimize stress in communication. 5 could identify three appropriate ways and 1 could only identify two. After the course, 17 out of 18 could identify four ways to minimize stress, while 1 participant who had identified three ways now believed there were only two. Finally, while all participants could identify various techniques to minimize sensory sensitivities

experienced by autistic coworkers during video conference calls, only 11 out of 19 participants could correctly recognize the stressors that could be felt by an autistic coworker in a novel, hypothetical communication situation.

Overall, we were impressed that many of the learners did as well as they did on the pre-survey assessment. We checked to see if this knowledge on the pre-survey or post-survey correlated with any prior relationships with autistic people or disability training they reported on the pre-survey. However as this was a formative assessment with just 19 participants, we did not find any statistically significant correlations with knowledge change, attitude change, or ability to use the information in novel situations.

Beyond the quantitative assessment, we asked participants to offer qualitative feedback to help us improve the course. One said, “This was a useful training on working with autistic colleagues.” The course helped another recognize the limits of their own previous understanding of communication preferences. “It made me realize I needed to learn more, including about myself.” Others described pedagogical aspects of the course that they felt were particularly effective. “Overall, the course was incredibly informative and insightful... The examples are great! e.g., when going through the types of stressors.” The participant continued, referencing the directness and effectiveness of the video skits, “The videos are also helpful – both seeing examples of ‘what not to do’ followed by ‘what to do’ to communicate more effectively.” Another reinforced the value targeting how-to knowledge, “I would like more video examples of interactions and also around negotiating communication styles I think would be helpful (e.g., are there mistakes neurotypicals might make even in up-front negotiation or less vs. more effective ways to come to the best solution for all parties?).” A third said, “I learn better when I see examples played out.” Two participants said they felt the course was effective enough to want to see it rolled out more broadly.

### ***Limitations of this Assessment***

Our study was designed for the working conditions of an active IT firm. As such, the course and formative assessment were designed to take a short amount of our IT workers’ schedules. Study designs used in some prior research offer control lessons, but ours could not, in order to minimize the time requirements. In addition, much prior work employed standardized instruments to measure autism knowledge and explicit and implicit bias. In our work, we have a different evaluation goal in mind, aiming more at evaluating knowledge gain and the ability to apply knowledge in novel situations that are specific to the lessons offered in the course. Standardized instruments can be less appealing to professional audiences who have less time available for training. In previous studies, trainings required about twice the amount of time (1 hour) than we had available (30 minutes) (Morrison et al., 2019, Jones et al. 2021).

Our study had a small sample size of only 19 participants. This fits in with our goal of formatively assessing our efforts. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling by members of an autism inclusion working group and self-selected into the study. This could explain their better-than-expected performance on the pre-survey, demonstrating a greater sense of engagement than the average IT worker. Future studies in this line will incorporate more random sampling methods to engage with a wider, more diverse employee population. We believe that the results are encouraging enough to continue designing several additional autism-related courses on intra-team social dynamics and expectation management.

### **Implications**

The formative pilot study to assess the communication intervention revealed interesting findings about the knowledge participants acquired, their preferences for how knowledge is presented, and the applicability of that knowledge to their communication with autistic and neurotypical coworkers alike. Furthermore, the study raised interesting questions about the preconceived notions of communication abilities participants measured in the pretest.

Participants suggest that the communication course helped think about their communication style and effectiveness more broadly. Some stated that they found the reflective exercises were valuable not just for learning about the communication preferences of autistic people but learning about their own communication preferences and behavior. It became clearer to them that effective communications strategies have broader applicability. This is a common theme reinforced in the literature that training

focused on collaboration or management of differences relevant to autism has a spillover effect to both neurotypical and autistic employees (Krzeminska, et al., 2019).

Furthermore, our results and qualitative data suggest the universal applicability at work and home of the interpersonal communication knowledge in the course. Our participants revealed the pervasiveness of neurodiversity in their life where this can be applied. Our findings suggest that even participants who had prior knowledge of autism and relationship with a person on the spectrum *and* had prior communication knowledge can still benefit from the course. “This is great thank you. I have a [child] who we diagnosed at [a young age] and I still am learning about him and how he thinks, and this gave me some insights.”

Last, the results revealed that some participants understood communication stressors (per their post-survey and perceptions in qualitative comments), but when assessed in a novel situation through scenarios, were unable to reach the preferred communication strategy. One might conclude that participants may have inaccurate assumptions of effective communication and overestimate their ability to address situations appropriately. This reinforces that the nuances complexity of communication between autistic employees and their coworkers and motivates the need for deeper learning. First, the nuances of communication preferences, how they surface in video scenarios, and how they may be interpreted is complex. This requires more focus on developing frameworks or strategies to better guide the student to determine these nuances and define appropriate signals. Second, it suggests the need for more practice in the course through more scenarios and perhaps a collaboration component through an asynchronous discussion mode to fully discern patterns of behaviors and provide more opportunity to internalize strategies.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we presented a formative study in which we assessed the design and impact of a communication course aimed at improving interpersonal communication between autistic technology workers and their neurotypical coworkers. This work is unique from other efforts to prepare autistic employees for the workplace in that it shifts the onus of learning and adaptation onto the neurotypical employee rather than expecting the autistic employee to adapt. In doing so, we challenge normative expectations of social behaviors dominating our workplaces which have historically led to the exclusion and marginalization of talented technology professionals on the spectrum. Efforts such as ours begin to change the paradigm of our workplace and pave a way for challenging broader structures of exclusion and discrimination grounded in ableism. This is not only relevant for autistic employees — it is applicable to all employees who may have been excluded from the workplace due to normative expectations that stigmatize social and communication behaviors grounded in ableism.

Future work will focus on refining our online course and addressing communication knowledge gaps revealed in the Results section. In particular, our work will explore pedagogy that focuses more deeply on application of communication strategies to scenarios that reveal the nuances and complexity of interpersonal communication between autistic technology workers and their coworkers. The next iteration of the course will also elaborate on intersectionality and the implications diversity of identity may have on the preferences of autistic people, as well as the preferences of their neurotypical coworkers and their intersecting identities. Future research could look at the implications of our work on the efficacy of neurotypical employees using these strategies, as well as employees’ effectiveness as to how they are perceived by autistic colleagues. This work will utilize both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to develop holistic understanding of the impact of these interventions on neurotypical and autistic employees and the organization overall. Lastly, our work will continue to expand to include additional courses on teamwork strategies.

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