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The Effects of Autism Disclosure on Coworker Attitudes

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Poster Presentation P22

THE EFFECTS OF AUTISM DISCLOSURE ON COWORKER ATTITUDES

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People with autism, despite their potential to be successful employees, face high levels of under- and unemployment. Further, once employed, people with autism tend to have difficulties with the social relationships in the workplace, which are a crucial aspect to maintaining employment. In this study, we investigated whether disclosure of an autism spectrum disorder could be used to improve adults' attitudes toward a potential coworker with autism. Participants (93 college students, 93 working adults) read a vignette describing an interaction with a potential coworker. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three disclosure conditions (No Disclosure, Basic Disclosure, Basic Disclosure plus Tips). As hypothesized, participants in both disclosure conditions, in comparison to participants in the no disclosure condition, reported significantly more positive attitudes (i.e., less nervousness, less avoidance, and more positive thoughts), as well as significantly greater willingness to work with the coworker. In contrast, disclosure had varied effects on social judgments of the coworker's qualities. Disclosure led to increased positive judgments of warmth, but had no significant impact on judgments of competence. This research indicates that disclosure of autism condition to coworkers may be beneficial as it improved their attitudes toward the person with autism which could ultimately improve people with autism's working relationships.