# Finding a More Inclusive Workplace: Engaging Those with Low and High Functioning Autism

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## Introduction

With the rising rate of Autism Spectrum Diagnoses (ASD), the need for jobs well suited for both high functioning individuals with ASD and low functioning individuals with ASD are ever present. In fact, "One in 68 children in the United States is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and over 500,000 young adults with the diagnosis will be entering the workplace in the next 5 years" (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Practices need to change to allow for a more autism-friendly workplace in order to allow for this influx of individuals with ASD to be accepted in the workforce.

Most organizations are rightfully concerned with profitability. However, there are also organizations that feel a sense of obligation to improve their place in society, otherwise known as Corporate Social Responsibility (Muchinsky & Howes, 2019). In efforts to become more socially responsible, organizations can change a small part of their typical recruiting, hiring, and onboarding processes to allow for individuals with ASD diagnoses to be gainfully employed and contribute to an organization's bottom line. This ultimately could lead to high job performance, lower turnover rates, and higher job satisfaction and work engagement for all workers in the organization.

Specifically, we aim to work with a technology company in the Southeast U.S. to, 1) identify specific jobs that individuals with a high and low functioning ASD diagnosis could excel at, 2) change recruiting for those jobs by focusing on a more diverse range of individuals with ASD, and 3) work to educate the entire organization on creating an Autism-friendly workplace (e.g., technological support for those with ASD, paired mentors, workshops on Autism education).

After our Autism-Friendly initiative has been implemented, we will compare pre- and post- initiative levels of turnover intentions (1-item; I am seriously thinking about quitting my job; Allen, 2001), job satisfaction (3-items; e.g., All in all I am satisfied with my job; Spector, 1997), and engagement (Schaufeli, et al., 2002), to determine if such an initiative is related to these important organizational outcomes.

## Method

### Participants
The participants of this study will be current employees at a local technology company, as well as recruiting new employees diagnosed with both high and low functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

### Measurements
- Autism-Friendly Business Initiative based off the third step in the *Autism Friendly Business Initiative* (Autism Friendly Business Initiative, 2018).
- Turnover intentions will be measured with a 1-item measure (I am seriously thinking about quitting my job; Allen, 2001).
- Job satisfaction will be measured with a 3-item measure as found in Spector (1997) (example item: "All in all I am satisfied with my job").
- Levels of engagement/dedication to the current company position (Schaufeli, et al., 2002)

### Procedure
The first step in implementing an Autism-Friendly workplace is through finding jobs that individuals with ASD can excel at. We propose to pair with a local technology company that has already made strides in accommodating for those with disabilities but is willing to accommodate their current positions farther to fit the needs of the individuals in the current study.
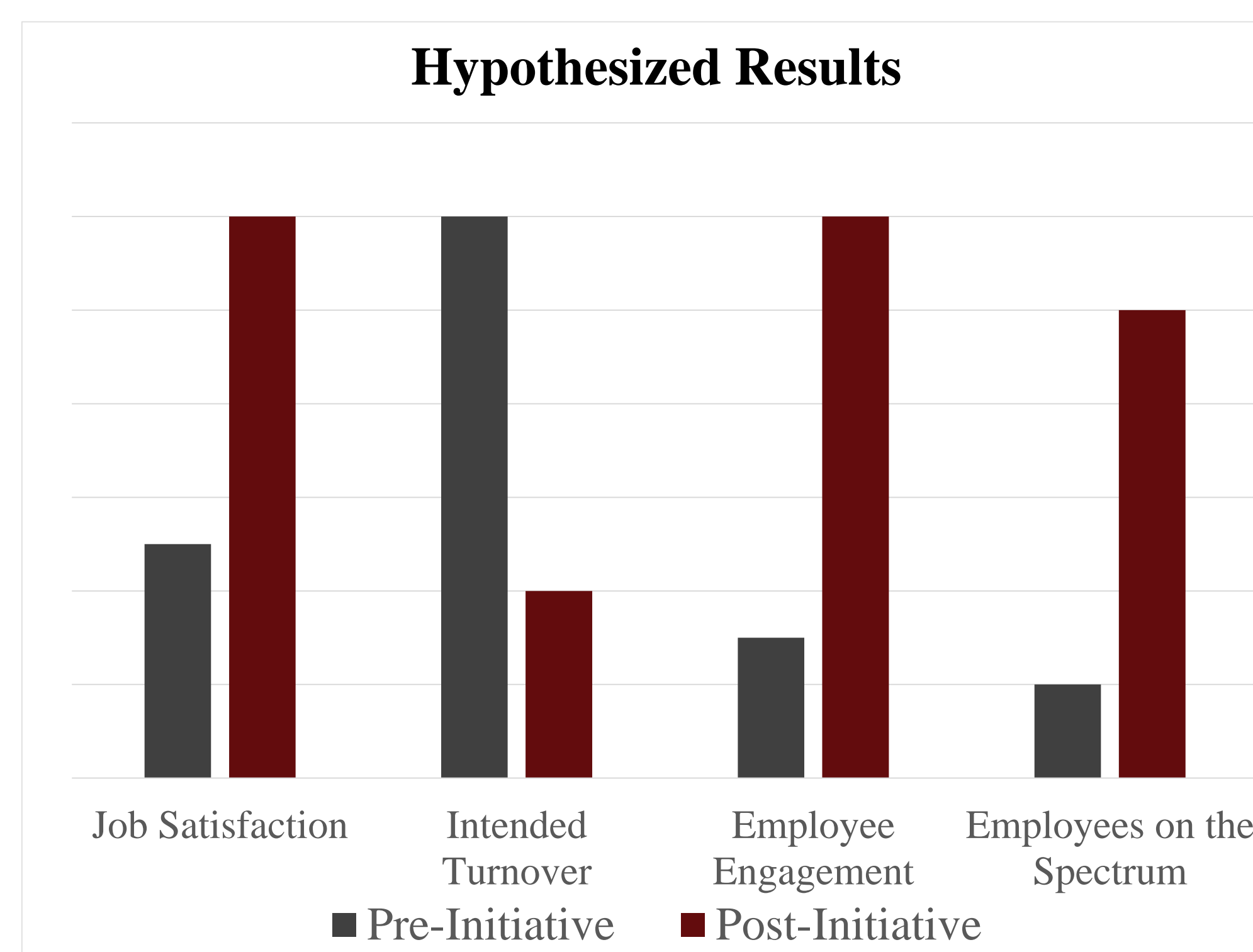
In order to implement the acceptance of those with ASD we propose there needs to be a larger variety in the way companies recruit. We propose that companies should recruit those on the spectrum by reaching out to local non-profits as well as posting flyers in mental health and occupational health settings.

Finally, we propose the need for an education component for ALL employees. For this component we are focusing on Families for Effective Autism Treatment (FEAT)'s third stage of the Autism Friendly Business Initiative. We propose to implement this third stage because it focuses on hiring strategies (whereas stages one and two focus on those with ASD as customers). This educational component may include technological support for those with ASD, paired mentors, and workshops on Autism education in the workplace.

## Hypothesized Results

We expect that our hypotheses will be supported. Specifically:

- We predict that job satisfaction will increase after the Autism Friendly Business Initiative is implemented within the company.
- We predict that levels of intended turnover in employees will decrease once the Autism Friendly Business Initiative is implemented within the company.
- We predict that employee engagement will increase after the Autism Friendly Business Initiative is implemented within the company.
- We predict that an increased number of individuals will self-identify with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) due to the resources and acceptance that the Autism Friendly Business Initiative provides.

### Hypothesized Results



Pre-Initiative · Post-Initiative

Job Satisfaction · Intended Turnover · Employee Engagement · Employees on the Spectrum

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## Discussion

We anticipate that our hypotheses will be supported and indicate that:
- Employee engagement, retention, and satisfaction would all increase due to the implementation of helping an individual with ASD
- When companies change their recruitment policies they would have a much more diverse population from which to recruit and ultimately hire.
- Additional career support would be more readily available to those identifying with ASD
- Those that identify with the ASD will be more likely to be open with their employers about their diagnosis due to the decrease in stigma and unfamiliarity.

In all, this research can encourage a more inclusive environment that promotes the well being and equal opportunities for all people.

## Citations

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