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Article

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Mitigating the Golem effect and fostering inclusion: strategies for organizations to support autistic adults in the workplace

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to address workplace discrimination faced by autistic adults and proposes the Inclusive Support for Autistic Adults in the Workplace (ISAAW) framework to foster inclusion. Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory, Organizational Support Theory and the Neurodiversity Paradigm, the framework aims to mitigate the Golem Effect – a self-fulfilling prophecy where low expectations lead to reduced performance. ISAAW integrates strategies to build self-efficacy, enhance perceived organizational support and adopt a strength-based approach to neurodiversity, creating an environment where autistic employees can thrive while organizations benefit from their unique talents and perspectives.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper presents a theoretical framework. The methodology involves synthesizing three established theories – Social Cognitive Theory, Organizational Support Theory and the Neurodiversity Paradigm – to create the novel ISAAW framework. The authors conducted a comprehensive literature review examining self-fulfilling prophecies (particularly the Golem Effect), autism in the workplace and inclusion strategies. They developed their framework by identifying theoretical intersections and practical applications, resulting in a model that combines building self-efficacy, enhancing organizational support and adopting a strength-based neurodiversity approach to combat workplace discrimination against autistic adults.

Findings – The paper finds that autistic adults face significant workplace discrimination, with only 22% labor force participation compared to 81% for neurotypical individuals without disabilities. The authors determine that the Golem Effect (where low expectations lead to reduced performance) negatively impacts this population. Their ISAAW framework addresses this by integrating three theoretical approaches to create supportive workplace environments. Key findings suggest that organizations implementing this framework can expect increased workplace performance, stronger retention, reduced discrimination and higher job satisfaction among autistic employees. The authors note that implementation requires organizational commitment to all framework components rather than selective adoption.

Originality/value – The paper offers originality through its novel ISAAW framework, which uniquely integrates three established theories to address workplace discrimination against autistic adults. Unlike previous research that focused on isolated accommodations, this framework provides a comprehensive, practical approach to mitigate the Golem Effect specifically for autistic employees. The value lies in its holistic



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strategy that benefits both employees and organizations by transforming workplace culture to celebrate neurodiversity rather than merely accommodating it. By addressing the significant employment gap for autistic adults (22% vs 81% participation rate), the framework provides actionable strategies for organizations to tap into the unique strengths and perspectives of this underused talent pool.

Keywords Neurodiversity, Golem effect, Self-fulfilling prophecy, Inclusive workplace, Autism

Paper type General review

Introduction

For nearly two decades, organizations have seen a dramatic rise in conversations around inclusion and equity in the workplace (Rezvani & Gordon, 2021). In recent history, the global COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street highlighted different aspects of inclusion and equity. However, one lesser-known and growing population in the USA still suffers from persistent discrimination and bias in the workplace: autistic adults (Cleary, West, Kornhaber, & Hungerford, 2023; Pryke-Hobbes et al., 2023; Wen, van Rensburg, O'Neill, & Attwood, 2024). This fear of blatant discrimination is what has caused many autistic employees to fear self-disclosing their condition to employers (Santuzzi, Waltz, Finkelstein, & Rupp, 2014).

Recent research by Cooper & Mujtaba (2022) shows employers are hesitant to hire known autistic individuals. Additionally, those they hire are not provided with adequate support and accommodations. Regarding the US labor force participation rate, neurotypical non-disabled individuals participated at 81%, while neurotypical disabled individuals participated at 51%. However, for neurodiverse autistic adults, the labor force participation rate is 22% as of 2022 (Doyle, McDowall, & Waseem, 2022). While meaningful employment is not fully achievable for all individuals with autism, a recent longitudinal study of over 20,000 autistic individuals found that of those with autism, approximately 73% of individuals are identified as having “non-profound” autism, meaning they may not have an intellectual disability and may be capable of working (Hughes et al., 2023). By contrast, 27% of individuals are labeled as having profound autism, meaning they are non-verbal, have an intellectual disability and may exhibit behaviors that jeopardize their safety and well-being (Hughes et al., 2023). Within the USA, there is a significant population of autistic adults who can be employed and are not currently employed. One significant factor leading to unemployment is discrimination by employers towards this population (Cleary et al., 2023; Cooper & Mujtaba, 2022; Pryke-Hobbes et al., 2023; Wen et al., 2024), some of which is attributed to an employer not understanding this diagnosis or the discrimination associated with this diagnosis (Santuzzi et al., 2014).

As of 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that over 5 million adults in the USA (2.2% of the US population) have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Centers for Disease Control, 2024a, 2024b). There is much to be gained through employing adults with autism in the workplace. Research by Solomon (2020) demonstrates that autistic adults in workplace settings often exhibit notable strengths as employees, including high levels of trustworthiness, reliability and efficiency for their organizations. These positive attributes highlight the potential value that autistic individuals can bring to diverse work environments. Given these benefits, this paper seeks to identify the best possible ways to support these individuals in the current American workplace to maximize results and experience for both the individual and the organization.

The field of organizational psychology has shown the impact a leader's perception of the follower can have on the follower's performance. The concept of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy is introduced to explain the Golem Effect, the concept of negative beliefs and expectations of a leader towards a follower that results in lower performance from the follower.

This theoretical paper explores how organizations can mitigate the Golem effect and foster inclusion for autistic adults in the workplace using the Inclusive Support for Autistic Adults in the Workplace (ISAAW) framework.

We believe this paper makes three significant contributions to literature and academia. First, the Neurodiversity Paradigm (NP) has been influential in advocating for a shift in perspective on autism, but its practical application in organizational settings has been less defined. This paper makes a significant contribution by operationalizing the paradigm's principles through the more established frameworks of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Organizational Support Theory (OST). Second, while the Golem effect has been studied in various management and educational contexts, this paper is among the first to explicitly apply it to the experiences of autistic employees. By centering the Golem effect, this paper highlights a critical, yet often overlooked, mechanism of discrimination: the power of low expectations. The paper posits that supervisors' conscious or unconscious biases can create a self-fulfilling prophecy of underperformance for autistic individuals. Finally, The ISAAW framework moves beyond a singular focus on either individual deficits or organizational shortcomings. It proposes a dynamic interplay between building an autistic employee's self-efficacy (drawing from SCT), cultivating a supportive and accommodating environment (rooted in OST) and fundamentally reframing neurological differences as strengths (as advocated by the NP). This integration provides a more robust and actionable model for researchers and practitioners, acknowledging that successful inclusion is a shared responsibility between the individual and the organization.

As a working framework, this paper reviews the constructs of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies, SCT, OST and the NP. This paper will also review pertinent literature, propose a new theoretical framework and strategies for mitigating the Golem effect, address challenges and limitations and recommend future research directions.

Background

Since the 1940s, theorists and academics alike have pondered whether or not an individual's expectation can influence subsequent behavior. First theorized by [Merton \(1948\)](#), self-fulfilling prophecies (SFP) have proven to be a critical area of research for both psychologists and management scholars alike. Merton defines SFP as "a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the original false conception come true" (1968, p. 477). [Merton \(1948\)](#) tells a story about a financially healthy bank to demonstrate that concept. A person started spreading a rumor that the bank would shut its doors and dissolve. As word spread in the community, local customers began running to the bank to remove all of their funds. As more and more individuals did this, the bank's financial position began to deteriorate. Eventually, the bank was forced to close its doors due to a run on the bank, thus fulfilling the prophecy.

The concept of SFPs stayed relatively dormant until the 1970s when research on individual components within SFPs began to take off ([Jussim, 1986](#)). [Romney, Harrison, and Benson & Benson \(2024\)](#) argue that SFP has four embedded components: The Pygmalion effect, The Galatea effect, The Eeyore effect and the Golem effect. The Pygmalion and Galatea effect both reference positive effects on the follower. In contrast, the Eeyore and Golem effects reference adverse effects on the follower. The most widely known and researched of these four components is the Pygmalion effect.

The Pygmalion effect involves a person or group acting according to each other's expectations. They then internalize these expectations and modify their behavior to act in ways that fulfill those expectations ([Kierein & Gold, 2000](#)). In this component of SFP, the context is positive. The expectations placed on a given individual or group are positive and reflect goodwill towards that individual. The concept proposed is cyclical in nature. As a leader initiates positive or higher expectations upon the follower and the follower

reciprocates to meet those expectations, the initial belief of the leader is then confirmed. This behavior starts the cycle over again. Leaders begin the process of the Pygmalion effect (Romney et al., 2024). Overt or subtle cues could communicate this influence. However, for the effect to generate positive results, there must be some element of trust and respect between the leader and the follower (Romney et al., 2024).

It has been shown that organizations have much to gain from using the Pygmalion effect. Followers have demonstrated more job enjoyment, increased communication with superiors, more flexibility and increased responsiveness to globalization (Romney et al., 2024). When paired with a transformational leadership style, it seems the Pygmalion effects are amplified (Duan, Li, Xu, & Wu, 2017). This amplification resulted in stronger leader–follower relationships and a better understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Very similar to the Pygmalion effect, the Galatea looks at the behavioral result of increased expectations of an individual. However, in this case, it is the individual or follower themselves that place the increased expectations. Referred to as the interpersonal expectancy effect, Eden (1990a) first identified this trait during a study of the Israeli military. This effect is closely tied to the psychological concept of self-efficacy. Bandura & Wessels (1997) argue that “self-efficacy is a belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). When the Galatea effect is in effect, self-efficacy is raised.

Across numerous industries and vocations, a wide range of evidence supports the concept that the Galatea effect is real. From the medical field to education, to athletics and the military, all instances demonstrated significant results stemming from the Galatea effect (Romney et al., 2024). Evidence has clearly shown that when the individuals themselves raise their level of expectations for self-performance, it results in increased output and productivity.

First coined by Romney et al. (2024), the Eeyore effect is the first of two negative effects under the umbrella of SFP. In their work, they theorize that within the scope of SFP, each of the four effects is either reflective of intrinsic or extrinsic stimulus. In many ways, the Eeyore effect is the inverse of the Galatea effect. Named after Milne’s fictional character, Eeyore is known for his self-deprecating and negative perspective on everything. The Eeyore effect occurs when the individuals themselves set low expectations for themselves and, in turn, perform at lower levels (Romney et al., 2024). In this way, they are living out a negative SFP. While there is a paucity of empirical evidence for the Eeyore effect, given its relatively recent identification, theoretical support exists for the concept as a whole.

The Golem effect and autism

The fourth aspect of SFP is referred to as the Golem Effect. This construct is the second of the negative consequences of SFP. The Golem effect occurs when the subordinate realizes the leader’s low expectations and acts in a manner accordingly (Eden, 1990a). This is the inverse of the Pygmalion effect. Golem, meaning “formless thing” in Hebrew, refers to a Hasidic legend describing clay-like creatures that were monsters of destruction (Romney et al., 2024). Jezek (2018) conducted an observational study that identified the students who had a negative teacher performed in a negative way as their teacher expected, much like in the legend of the Golem. Another observational study identified that stereotype threats of minorities play a key role in the Golem effect (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Leaders have been observed to hold preconceptions regarding minorities and then subsequently change their behavior toward them in some way. In other words, when leaders hold followers to a low standard of expectation, followers will only perform to this level, not believing that they have the ability or power to achieve greater heights. This preconception elicits a response from the follower confirming the previously held belief. The Golem effect has been studied theoretically through the lens of what not to do. Studying this effect intends to help leaders avoid this

situation by bolstering relationships and interpersonal communication. Additionally, the work of [Leung & Sy \(2018\)](#) identified that group-level beliefs towards an individual or a follower can also negatively affect the individual's cognitions and behaviors. The intention is for organizations to mediate these observed effects and create an atmosphere of positive expectations about group members.

Research has shown that clear and high expectations from a manager to an autistic employee is a key to success. [Martin, Flanagan, Vogus, & Chênevert \(2022\)](#) underscores that a lack of clear expectations from supervisors can lead to misunderstandings and poor performance, which aligns with the mechanics of the Golem effect. Their research supports the underlying principle that leader expectations are a powerful driver of employee outcomes. Similarly, [Schall, Wehman, Avellone, & Taylor \(2020\)](#) suggests that supportive supervision, which would inherently include holding positive and realistic expectations, is a key factor in the successful employment of autistic individuals. Lacking the positive support would likely lead to the employees' detriment. In a key study on individuals with disabilities, [Chen \(2015\)](#) was among the first researchers to explicitly apply Merton's self-fulfilling prophecy framework to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, creating a theoretical bridge between social psychology and disability employment research. Chen's work also demonstrated how internalized expectations about societal acceptance can become self-fulfilling prophecies. This provides support for the argument that the golem effect has a negative effect on autistic employees in the workforce.

Autism spectrum disorder

ASD is a condition that refers to a wide range of challenges regarding social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech, non-verbal communication and intellectual disabilities ([Autism Speaks, 2024](#)). Formerly thought to be multiple conditions, in 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) released an updated version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). In the updated version, there were three distinct disorders, Autism, Asperger's Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder, now grouped under the umbrella term of ASD ([American Psychological Association, 2024](#)). The latest version of the DSM, DSM-V-TR, was released in 2022 and updated the language to put greater emphasis on all manifestations of their given diagnosing criteria. The rates of diagnosed individuals with Autism in the USA have risen steadily since the year 2000. In 2020, [Dietz, Rose, McArthur, & Maenner, 2020](#) estimated that nearly one in 45 adults in the USA have autism. Additionally, they estimate that one in 36 children in the USA have autism. In 2000, the [Centers for Disease Control \(2024a, 2024b\)](#) observed that only one in 150 children in the USA were diagnosed with ASD; a decade later, in 2010, that number rose to one in 68. While the exact reason for the dramatic rise in diagnosis is unknown, it is believed that greater awareness of the condition has led to increased inquiries and, thus, diagnoses.

Autistic individuals often face challenges in navigating the subtleties of social interaction, including difficulty interpreting non-verbal cues, understanding sarcasm and maintaining typical conversational patterns. Common characteristics among this population include highly focused interests, a strong preference for predictability and routine and significant challenges adapting to changes in their environment or expectations. Many autistic individuals also experience heightened sensory sensitivities, which may involve atypical responses to various stimuli such as sounds, lights, tastes, textures or touch ([Autism Speaks, 2024](#)). These traits can significantly impact their experiences and interactions in workplace settings, potentially influencing how they are perceived and supported by colleagues and supervisors.

Prior research on the topic of autistic adults in the workplace has shown that autistic adults feel a strong need to mask their behaviors in an attempt to minimize potential discrimination and lowered expectations (Ellestad, Beymer, & Villegas, 2023). Autistic adults rely heavily on routines to go through their everyday lives. These routines can appear rigid, inflexible or arbitrary to others (Jack, 2022). Additionally, the social and communication challenges autistic adults have can lead to struggles forming relationships and friendships in the workplace. The behavioral result is often isolation from social groups (Jack, 2022). These types of workplace experiences can lead to leaders and supervisors creating stereotypes of autistic employees. While autistic employees often excel in areas like attention to detail, pattern recognition and creative problem-solving, they may struggle with social nuances leading to unfairly low expectations from neurotypical supervisors and their fellow employees; the literature is clear that “image norms about employees with autism may be held by coworkers, managers, and other organizational stakeholders” (Hurley-Hanson, Giannantonio, & Griffiths, 2020, p. 71). This can result in these individuals being placed in roles that do not match their abilities or, worse, excluded from higher responsibility tasks, which directly impacts their motivation and performance (Baldwin, Costley, & Warren, 2014). When expectations are low, autistic employees may internalize these views, leading to poorer outcomes at work creating a clear manifestation of the Golem effect.

Theoretical framework

As managers embrace the Golem Effect of setting low expectations for a uniquely skilled autistic population, they negatively impact employee morale due to the perceived encouragement of low expectations (Manzoni & Barsoux, 1998). This issue leads to the necessary understanding of how managers can mitigate the Golem Effect and foster inclusion for autistic employees. Though many approaches can be taken to combat these real organizational issues, most of what has been proposed in research varies from environmental considerations, noise reduction and possible staff support (Khalifa et al., 2019). However, a singular practical managerial framework has yet to be proposed. To accurately limit the adverse effect caused by managers who communicate expectations differently to autistic and neurodivergent employees than to their neurotypical peers, this paper proposes a theoretical framework that integrates the seminal constructs provided through SCT, OST and the NP. The symbiotic relationship of these theories ultimately creates a comprehensive approach to mitigating the Golem Effect to foster the inclusion of autistic adults in the workplace. This new model called the ISAAW framework, acknowledges that organizational environments and individual capabilities are interactive and emphasizes both the organizational responsibility and individual agency in supporting autistic workers. Exploring the tenets of each theory shows that when integrated, the results benefit both the organization and the employee.

Building self-efficacy through social cognitive theory

SCT emphasizes the dynamic interaction between personal factors, behavior and environmental influences. When applied to workplace settings for autistic adults, this theory supports the idea that self-efficacy, behavioral modeling and outcome expectations shape individual behavior and performance. According to Schunk & Usher (2012), the confidence that autistic employees have in their ability to succeed in specific tasks can be directly influenced by the expectations placed on them. High self-efficacy mitigates the Golem Effect by counteracting low expectations through positive reinforcement and appropriate task structuring. Based on the work by seminal theorist Bandura (1986), behavioral modeling will allow this population the opportunity to observe role models within the organization who

succeed despite neurodivergent challenges. These observations can then reinforce the belief that success is attainable. Regarding outcome expectations, autistic employees are more likely to engage in meaningful behaviors when they expect positive outcomes from their efforts. Within the constructs of the ISAAW framework, SCT is applied to ensure that organizations foster positive self-efficacy, provide appropriate role models and create clear links between actions and positive outcomes for autistic workers.

Enhancing perceived organizational support via organizational support theory

OST advances the idea that employees who feel supported by their organization are more engaged, satisfied and committed to their organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). This support becomes even more critical for autistic employees who may face unique challenges in the workplace. This theory suggests that organizational behaviors, policies and practices signal the organization's commitment to the well-being and success of its employees.

Within the ISAAW framework, certain elements are derived from OST, including perceived organizational support and customized accommodations (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Past research has shown that employees who perceive that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being will be more motivated and productive (Ahmed, Nawaz, Ali, & Islam, 2015); it is assumed that autistic employees would also be more motivated when they feel valued within their organizations. This belief aids in reducing the Golem Effect, as supportive actions communicate high expectations. A key point derived from this theory is the idea of providing customized accommodations for employees. Support systems and structures created for autistic employees, including flexible work environments, sensory-friendly spaces and clear communication practices, demonstrate the organization's commitment to the success of autistic employees (Scott, Falkmer, Girdler, & Falkmer, 2015). Finally, precise feedback mechanisms that provide consistent and constructive feedback are crucial to ensure autistic employees understand how their work is valued and where improvements are needed (Nicholas, Attridge, Zwaigenbaum, & Clarke, 2015). This can also help create a reciprocal relationship between the organization and its employees (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). With the proposed ISAAW framework, OST is leveraged to design policies that support autistic employees through personalized accommodation plans and continuous feedback that affirms their value within the organization.

Adopting a strengths-based approach via the neurodiversity paradigm

Unlike SCT and the OST, the NP challenges the medical concept of disability, including autism and other neurological differences. Based on the research of Singer (1999), this theory instead frames these issues as natural variations of human cognition by promoting the recognition and appreciation of diverse cognitive styles, strengths and challenges. In taking a more inclusive approach to employee abilities, the NP advocates for an inclusive organizational culture that values all employees' differences, ensuring that autistic adults feel a sense of belonging and inclusion rather than isolation based on a diagnosis (Walker & Raymaker, 2021). This sense of community, of course, is predicated on the need for managers to challenge stereotypes of employees with autism. The framework actively combats stereotypes and low expectations that contribute to the Golem Effect by normalizing neurodivergent perspectives and highlighting the value autistic individuals bring. Instead of focusing on deficits, the ISAAW framework emphasizes the unique strengths autistic employees bring to the workplace (Kapp, Gillespie-Lynch, Sherman, & Hutman, 2013), such as attention to detail, pattern recognition and creative problem-solving. The ISAAW

framework uses the NP to create a workplace culture where neurodiversity is embraced and the strengths of autistic employees are recognized. The resulting outcome dismantles low expectations and promotion of high performance.

Strategies for mitigating the golem effect

The ISAAW Framework operationalizes these three theoretical approaches through practical strategies that organizations can implement to mitigate the Golem Effect and foster inclusion for autistic adults in the workplace using the following model (Figure 1).

This model creates a practical framework based on the intersectionality of building self-efficacy (SCT), enhancing perceived organizational support (OST) and adopting a strength-based neurodiversity approach (NP). When combined with practical managerial applications, the goal of creating a positive environment to combat the Golem Effect is expected. This model functions by bridging these three theories into practice.

First, looking at the construct of building self-efficacy, which is derived from SCT, this paper posits that to support this gifted population, leaders should provide mentorship

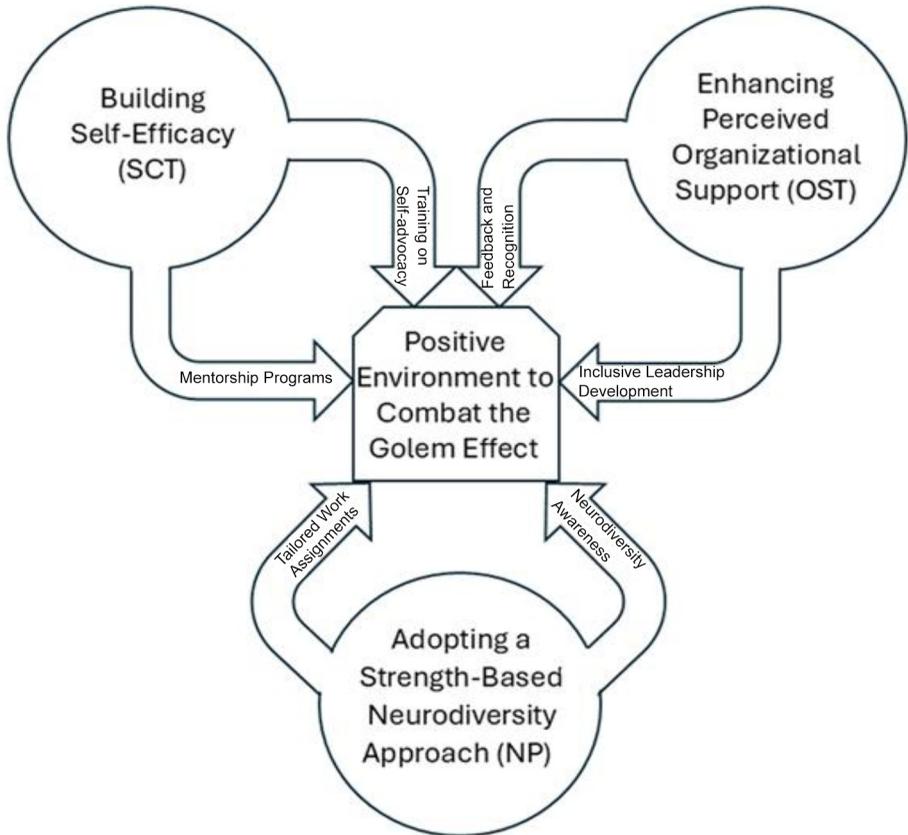


Figure 1. Inclusive support for autistic adults in the workplace (ISAAW) framework

Source: Authors' own work

programs within their organizations where they pair autistic employees with mentors who can provide guidance, positive feedback and examples of success in similar roles in real time (Astrove & Kraimer, 2022). Additionally, there should be intentional training on self-advocacy to empower autistic employees to communicate their needs and advocate for workplace adjustments (Singer, 1999; Walker & Raymaker, 2021). Second, by incorporating the tenants of enhancing perceived organizational support, which is rooted in OST, actionable behaviors include inclusive leadership development, which trains managers to recognize and support the strengths of autistic employees, addressing biases that may lead to low expectations (Brock & Huber, 2017). In concert with training is the need for effective feedback and recognition systems. Autistic employees receive consistent, specific feedback that ties their contributions to organizational success, reinforcing their value (Hutchison & Garstka, 1996). The last major contributing element of this framework comes from the idea of adopting a strength-based neurodiversity approach originating from the NP. This paper asserts there is a need for tailored work assignments that match autistic employees with tasks that align with their cognitive strengths, such as detail-oriented projects or structured problem-solving roles (Kapp et al., 2013). This managerial action would pair with intentionally creating a culture of neurodiversity awareness to foster a workplace culture that values neurodiversity through awareness campaigns, workshops and autistic employee resource groups (O'Dell, Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Ortega, Brownlow, & Orsini, 2016).

Framework rationale

When developing the ISAAW Framework, the SCT, OST and the NP were selected as the primary mitigating forces against the Golem Effect for specific and deliberate reasons. These three frameworks, when combined, uniquely capture the psychological, organizational and sociocultural dimensions necessary to understand and counteract the low expectations that define the Golem Effect, particularly as it applies to autistic individuals in the workplace. While there are a number of theories in the disciplines of management, leadership and psychology that could have been included in the ISAAW framework, there is specific reasoning and rationale for prioritizing these three over other possible theories.

SCT (Bandura, 1986) is fundamental to understanding how expectations shape individual performance through the mediating role of self-efficacy. The Golem Effect operates through a similar fashion and mechanism. When supervisors hold low expectations, they often directly or subtly communicate these expectations, leading individuals to internalize them and underperform. Other alternative cognitive-behavioral models such as Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) or Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) explain motivation and performance in isolated contexts but do not offer the triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 2006) meaning the dynamic interplay between personal, behavioral and environmental factors that SCT provides. This is a crucial element that is necessary when analyzing how expectations influence autistic employees both internally and externally.

OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986) explains how employees' perceptions that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being directly influence engagement, motivation and loyalty. In the context of the Golem Effect, perceived organizational support can buffer the negative impacts of low expectations by providing affirmations that counteract stigma and build psychological safety. While other managerial theories such as Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975) or Psychological Safety theory (Edmondson, 2018) could contribute to the conversation, OST was selected because it directly addresses how structural and cultural organizational signals influence motivation and inclusion. Perceived organizational support

is empirically linked to outcomes highly relevant for autistic employees including retention, performance and well-being.

The NP (Singer, 1999; Walker & Raymaker, 2021) shifts the narrative from a deficit-based view of autism to one that sees neurological differences as natural human variations. This paradigm is critical for breaking down assumptions that underlie the Golem Effect, such as the belief that autistic individuals are less capable or less suited for certain roles. Though many individuals with autism have led organizations to be highly successful, this is not generally the case with this population, many of whom struggle to find gainful employment. Traditional diversity and inclusion theories tend to focus on race, gender or cultural identity, often without addressing the cognitive and sensory differences that are central to those on the autism spectrum. The NP uniquely provides the ethical and philosophical foundation necessary to argue that autistic individuals should not merely be accommodated, rather this population should be actively valued and included for their diverse perspectives.

Together, these three theories were chosen not just for their individual strength but also for their synergistic alignment. SCT addresses how internalized expectations shape behavior (individual dimension), OST addresses how organizational structures and climates influence those expectations (organizational dimension) and the NP reframes the entire discourse from one of deficit to one of empowerment and respect (sociocultural dimension). These dimensions are all necessary to meaningfully mitigate the Golem Effect in modern workplaces, particularly when addressing the systemic challenges faced by autistic employees. Other theories could possibly add minor value to this framework, but these three offer the strongest theoretical foundation and practical alignment with the goals of the ISAAW Framework. When the combined outcomes of ISAAW Framework are realized, the ultimate goal of creating a positive environment to combat the Golem Effect can be realized.

Discussion

By mitigating the Golem Effect and fostering an inclusive environment, the framework seeks to enhance both the well-being and performance of autistic employees, ensuring that neurodiversity is not only accepted but celebrated. The primary result of implementing this practical framework is the Creation of a Positive Environment to Combat the Golem Effect. This result can be accomplished through multiple directives, including adjusting organizational performance metrics to reflect individual strengths and challenges and avoiding one-size-fits-all metrics (Eden, 1990b). Though each of these theories on their own provide theoretical understanding with practical attributes, when combined within the ISAAW framework, the results are significantly greater than the sum of its parts. Naturally, with the adjustment for performance metrics, there needs to be an internal emphasis on expectation management for organizational leaders to set realistic but challenging expectations, avoid the trap of low expectations and promote a growth mindset among autistic employees (Babad, Inbar, & Rosenthal, 1982; Eden, 1990a).

When implementing this theoretical model, the ISAAW Framework provides organizations with a robust strategy for supporting autistic adults in the workplace. Past research has found that when leaders provide this population with proper support, training and customized accommodations, the entire organization benefits (Nicholas et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2015). By mitigating the Golem Effect and fostering an inclusive environment, the framework seeks to enhance the well-being and performance of autistic employees, ensuring that neurodiversity is not only accepted but also celebrated. This framework focuses on mitigating the Golem Effect by advocating for structured mentorship (Astrove & Kramer, 2022), positive reinforcement and skills-based work assignments rather than tasks that limit an employee from rising to their true potential. By integrating these theoretical

perspectives, ISAAW not only promotes equitable treatment of autistic employees but also fosters a work culture where inclusion leads to engagement and higher performance.

From a practical standpoint, the ISAAW framework provides organizations with a structured approach to accommodating and leveraging the strengths of autistic employees. Research has shown that employees' engagement and productivity increase when they perceive strong organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986). ISAAW operationalizes this by encouraging customized accommodations, such as flexible work arrangements, sensory-friendly workspaces and structured communication protocols. Customized accommodations refer to individualized workplace adjustments designed to support an employee's unique needs, ensuring that they can perform their job effectively while minimizing challenges. These accommodations can be tailored to address cognitive, sensory, social or physical needs and are particularly beneficial for autistic employees (Hendricks, 2010). Unlike standard accommodations, customized accommodations are flexible, employee-centered and designed in collaboration with the individual to align with their strengths and work preferences (Scott et al., 2015). Customized accommodations are essential for fostering an inclusive and productive workplace for autistic employees. Precedent has demonstrated that tailored support, job flexibility and sensory adjustments significantly improve job satisfaction, retention and overall performance (Nicholas et al., 2015). By implementing individualized accommodations, organizations not only comply with disability rights laws (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008) but can also enhance workplace diversity and innovation.

Flexible work assignments can take various forms, including adjusted job tasks, modified work schedules, alternative communication methods and remote or hybrid work options (Hendricks, 2010). Flexible work assignments are particularly beneficial for autistic employees, including autistic individuals, as they allow for customization of work to align with strengths while minimizing challenges such as sensory overload, social demands or rigid deadlines (Lorenz, Frischling, Cuadros, & Heinitz, 2016). Research consistently shows that workplace flexibility improves retention, reduces stress and enhances overall performance for autistic employees, benefiting both individuals and businesses. Sensory-friendly workspaces are designed to accommodate the needs of individuals with sensory processing differences by minimizing environmental stressors and providing an optimal setting for focus and productivity. These workspaces consider sensory sensitivities to light, sound, touch, and spatial layout, creating an environment that reduces distractions, stress and sensory overload. Adjustments could include the use of natural lighting, providing quiet zones, offering private work areas and the ability to communicate in written rather than verbal interactions when necessary (Hillman, 2024).

Though this framework provides significant emphasis on providing support for the benefit of the individual employee, organizations can also benefit by reducing turnover, enhancing team collaboration and boosting innovation, as autistic employees often excel in areas requiring deep focus, attention to detail and creative problem-solving (Scott et al., 2015). Research shows that neurodivergent employees, including those with autism, can contribute unique skills such as exceptional attention to detail, strong pattern recognition and innovative problem-solving, which can drive organizational innovation and performance (Austin & Pisano, 2017). Implementing ISAAW ensures that autistic employees are not merely accommodated but actively empowered to contribute to the organization's success. Empowerment and strength-based approaches have been found to foster greater engagement and productivity among neurodivergent employees (Robertson, 2010). Beyond business efficiency, the ISAAW also promotes a long-term cultural shift towards inclusion and diversity. Traditional corporate environments have often marginalized autistic employees

due to rigid performance metrics and social expectations. However, as companies recognize the value of diverse cognitive styles, frameworks like ISAAW serve as a strategic blueprint for sustainable inclusion, ensuring that all employees, regardless of neurotype, have equal opportunities for career growth. Furthermore, legal compliance with disability rights regulations is strengthened when organizations adopt structured inclusion programs. Structured programs help organizations fulfill obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and similar legislation, reducing legal risk and promoting workplace equity (Santuzzi et al., 2014). By integrating ISAAW into corporate policies, businesses can enhance workplace equity while benefiting from the unique strengths autistic individuals bring to the workforce, ultimately creating a more innovative, engaged, and high-performing organization.

This framework predicts that when organizations embrace this model, there will be greater workplace performance and self-efficacy from autistic employees, a stronger relationship between workplace accommodations and retention, a more accepting workplace culture with lower instances of discrimination and increased job satisfaction from this growing population. However, leadership will need to be committed to implementing the entirety of this framework rather than cherry-picking a few key constructs to see the systematic benefits. The goals of this framework lend to the aspirations of past research to build a long-term supportive ecosystem for this population so that they may thrive in work and quality of life (Nicholas & Klag, 2020).

Framework challenges and limitations

Though the ISAAW Framework provides a comprehensive approach to supporting autistic employees, particularly autistic adults, its implementation in organizations can face several challenges and limitations. This framework effectively predicts workplace performance, engagement, inclusion outcomes, and the reduction of the Golem Effect through supportive policies. The ISAAW Framework provides a strong starting point to combat the Golem Effect, however, there are additional factors including individual variability, external factors, long-term career growth and mental health challenges which could impact the utility this framework provides as some situations cannot be controlled. This paper posits that some organizations may have difficulty implementing this framework into actionable behaviors due to a variety of reasons, including organizational resistance and cultural shifts (Baldrige & Veiga, 2001; Foster & Fosh, 2010), inadequate managerial training (Hagner & Cooney, 2005; Nicholas et al., 2015), difficulty in customizing individual support systems (Hillier et al., 2007; Lorenz et al., 2016); possible stereotyping and biases in the workplace (Jones, DeBrabander, & Sasson, 2021) and fear of disclosure among autistic employees (Santuzzi et al., 2014).

While the predicted benefits of implementing this construct on both the employee and organization, there are still several limitations that this model cannot predict. With the fear of disclosure being a serious and prevalent issue (Santuzzi et al., 2014), this framework assumes that autistic employees will disclose their neurodivergence to receive accommodations. However, research shows that many employees choose not to disclose due to fear of stigma (Santuzzi et al., 2014). Second, Neurodiversity is a spectrum, meaning that some employees may need significant accommodations and others may not to be successful, meaning that results could vary based on individual needs. While the ISAAW framework can predict improved job retention, it does not guarantee career progression or promotion rates for autistic employees. For example, even with a neurodiversity-friendly environment, bias in leadership could still be prevalent, limiting upward mobility. While this model assumes that neurodiversity-

friendly policies will benefit workplace culture overall, some non-autistic employees may perceive accommodations as favoritism or resist changes, creating a hostile environment and lower morale.

As with many managerial frameworks, a serious limitation would be the true implementation and long-term commitment from organizations and their respective leaders to sustain the programming necessary for this population to demonstrate their true potential within the workplace. Organizations must be prepared to invest in training, policy adaptation and continuous support to ensure successful execution. Addressing these challenges requires a deep organizational commitment to neurodiversity, ongoing leadership involvement and the flexibility to adapt strategies based on employee feedback and evolving needs. Even with these possible limitations and challenges, this framework provides managers with a plan of action to embrace the support of autistic adults in the workplace as this population generally possesses significant intellectual abilities, has high focus attention to detail and is generally considered highly productive compared to their neurotypical counterparts (Hayward, McVilly, & Stokes, 2019).

Future research directions

As a theoretical model, future research directions for a study on the ISAAW framework can focus on several areas to deepen understanding, improve implementation and expand the framework's applicability. Some potential courses of action would be longitudinal studies on the practical outcomes of this framework in action, the impact of leadership styles on ISAAW implementation, best practices of effective training with this population, including managerial training programs and the measurement of impact on overall organization performance. Future research on the ISAAW framework should refine its effectiveness, adaptability and inclusivity across diverse workplaces and cultures for both neurotypical and autistic employees alike. While many autistic employees are subject to discrimination based on the Golem Effect, the integration of artificial intelligence into the American workplace and its impact on this population should significantly be studied in the future due to many entry level positions now being displaced by artificial intelligence. By addressing these research gaps, scholars can provide actionable insights to enhance the framework and promote a more inclusive work environment for autistic adults looking to be productive members of the American workforce.

Conclusion

As this paper has laid out, a practical and straightforward approach to supporting and developing autistic employees in the workplace exists. The Golem effect can have serious effects on minority populations or individuals with disabilities, whether conscious or unconscious. However, ISAAW provides a practical and robust strategy for developing an inclusive culture and supporting autistic individuals. SCT was introduced to demonstrate the effect of building self-efficacy in autistic adults. OST demonstrates a path for individuals to feel engaged, satisfied and committed, and the NP shows how valuing all employee's differences can lead to a sense of belonging rather than isolation. These three components come together to form the ISAAW framework.

The model takes a practical approach to emphasizing the importance of building self-efficacy, enhancing organizational support and adopting a strength-based neurodiversity approach to empower autistic employees. Proper implementation of this model in the workplace ensures that the contributions of this growing population are recognized and valued. While challenges such as organizational resistance and inadequate managerial

training persist, the framework offers actionable strategies to overcome these barriers, fostering a workplace culture that celebrates neurodiversity.

This paper attests that if applied properly, the ISAAW can work to mitigate the Golem effect, foster inclusion and tap into the unique strengths and perspectives of autistic adults. Given the dramatic shift in autism diagnosis in the USA, organizations will need a working framework to develop and support their Autistic employees when that time comes. Organizations like the Neurodiversity Roundtable that bring the topic of neurodivergent employees' needs to the forefront of corporate America should be applauded. Together, society can improve the lives of millions of Americans working today.

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