We must keep in mind the diversity of the autism spectrum

- Autism spectrum disorder
- Refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, communication and repetitive behaviors
- Wide range of intellectual abilities
- There is not one autism but many subtypes
- Often accompanied by medical issues such as GI disorders, anxiety, seizures, and sleep disturbances
Neurodiversity vs Autism?

Is autism a disability? A disorder? Or simply a difference?

Maybe all three can be true – even for a single person, in different contexts.

“What is attractive about the neurodiversity model is that it doesn’t pathologize and focus disproportionately on what the person struggles with, and instead takes a more balanced view, to give equal attention to what the person can do. In addition it recognizes that genetic or other kinds of biological variation are intrinsic to people’s identity, their sense of self and personhood, which should be given equal respect alongside any other form of diversity, such as gender. But to encompass the breadth of the autism spectrum, we need to make space for the medical model [disorder] too.”

- Prof. Simon Baron-Cohen, director of the Autism Research Center at the University of Cambridge, UK, and president of the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR)
What does neurodiversity look like in adults?

Employment – the Big Picture

- Adults with autism are employed at an alarmingly low rate. Global estimates of unemployment and underemployment range as high as 80-90%.
- Their employment is traditionally below their capabilities.
- They fare worse than people with other disabilities.
- Despite promising developments in recent years, this has not significantly changed for decades.
Why is it important to employ individuals with autism?

• It’s good for business! This is about unique skillsets, not charity.
• It drives innovation. People with autism think differently.
• Maximizing corporate diversity means including individuals with disabilities. Make it part of your company’s Board agenda.
• It demonstrates high ROI and aids in 503 compliance.

Focus on the Strengths

Attention to detail
• Thoroughness
• Accuracy

Deep focus
• Concentration
• Freedom from distraction

Observational skills
• Listen, look, learn approach
• Fact finding

Absorb and retain facts
• Excellent long term memory
• Superior recall

Visual skills
• Visual learning and recall
• Detail-focussed

Expertise
• In-depth knowledge
• High level of skills

Methodical approach
• Analytical
• Spotting patterns, repetition

Novel approaches
• Unique thought processes
• Innovative solutions

Creativity
• Distinctive imagination
• Expression of ideas

Tenacity and resilience
• Determination
• Challenge opinions

Accepting of difference
• Less likely to judge others
• May question norms

Integrity
• Honesty, loyalty
• Commitment

Harriet Cannon
Disability Services, February 2018
From Employers: Opportunities that Employees with ASD Present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excel at repetition</th>
<th>Lower turnover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying with customer base</td>
<td>Good performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Out of the box&quot; thinking</td>
<td>Large/Untapped labor pool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed and consistent</td>
<td>Fewer absences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time on task; not interested in</td>
<td>Universal design /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>office gossip!</td>
<td>accommodations for all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Shift in Thinking

- 2017 NYU Study: adults with autism see their 'special interests' as possible fields of study and career paths (as well as ways to mitigate anxiety)
- Traditionally seen restrictive problems or obsessions that interfere with social development.
- Now let’s recognize these as strengths that can lead to better outcomes (increased attention, engagement, careers).
What are the challenges for many adults with ASD?

- Traditional interviews
- “Soft skills” such as professional communication – these are the unwritten rules of the workplace.
- According to self-reports, vocational success relies not on the completion of job duties, but on the person’s ability to handle the social aspects of employment.
- Low expectations – particularly for those with intellectual disability and/or challenging behaviors
- Employers have limited understanding of autism spectrum disorders. We can all help!

Learning Social/Soft Skills

- What are appropriate and inappropriate topics of conversation in the workplace?
- How does social time (lunch, breaks) differ from work time? How do you know which is which?
- Appropriate dress
- Different rules for different people?
- Celebrations and special (different) days
- Office gossip and politics
What supports do some workers with ASDs need?

- Natural supports – strategies that we use on a regular basis to support all of our colleagues in the workplace, regardless of whether or not they have a disability.
- Technology – smart phones, tablets, AI
- Mentors
- Wait time (use silence)
- Visual supports
- Written instructions
- Formal accommodations
- Job coaches
Lessons learned from the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable

Recurrent benefits as programs scaled:

- Jobs filled in areas of skill shortage / high turnover
- Access to higher levels of talent
- Marketing benefits from publicity of hiring efforts
- Employee engagement, morale, meaningful work benefits that improve productivity and quality of work
- Improved innovation – new valuable ideas, different points of view and ways of thinking, problem solving
- Process improvements due to enhanced abilities of neurodiverse employees to spot irregularities and inefficiencies, and from their willingness to call them out

-Prof. Robert Austin, Ivey Business School, Harvard Medical School

Lessons learned from the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable

“Spillover” benefits occur when changes made specifically with neurodiversity programs in mind “spill over” into the organizational mainstream, yielding broad improvements:

- Improvements in organizational communication standards
- Improvements in supervisory practices (management)
- Improvements in employee support practices that end up improving productivity overall
  - Ex: Concerns about need to provide support for depression for neurodiversity programs end up helping all employees (and reducing absenteeism, etc.)

-derived from Prof. Robert Austin, Ivey Business School, Harvard Medical School
Lessons learned from the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable

Areas of great progress

• Developing recruiting and selection processes that emphasize “tryouts” as opposed to heavy reliance on interviews, or that adapt interview approaches to make them more “neurodiversity friendly”

• Design and operation of support networks for program employees, including support outside of work

• Establishing processes for placing neurodiverse employees in productive roles and managing their career progression

• Integration of program participants into organizational contexts and normalizing their involvement in the life of the organization (culture change)

- derived from Prof. Robert Austin, Ivey Business School, Harvard Medical School

Ongoing challenges

• Improve the talent pipeline

  • Universities must better match up neurodiverse talent with the growing number of opportunities

  • Demand for neurodiverse talent is there, but supply is still too “ad hoc”

• Better knowledge sharing in social support networks

  • Social partner support is very “local”

  • Variation in the support available from social partners (inconsistency)

  • Moving a program to another geography sometimes requires “returning to zero” on development of support networks

  → Autism Employment Alliance

- derived from Prof. Robert Austin, Ivey Business School, Harvard Medical School
Huge opportunity / need: We must broaden the impact

Examples:

• Rising Tide Car Wash (Parkland, FL)
• Spectrum Designs (Long Island, NY)
• Hart Schaffner Marx / Autism Workforce (Chicago, IL)

Big spillover benefits from dipping deeper into the pool of neurodiverse talent:

As was discovered true of the industrial safety movement, when we focus on process intently, so that we can provide detailed guidance, we often discover ways of improving processes.

• Signage, color coding, process documentation is valuable to all employees
• Eliminates errors due to ambiguities in instructions
• Facilitates analysis and improvement of documented processes
• The broad value of “universal design”

- derived from Prof. Robert Austin, Ivey Business School, Harvard Medical School
SAP’s “Puzzle Analogy”

- People are like puzzle pieces – all shaped differently.
- Some managers understand people’s strengths intimately and adapt roles to people. They piece the puzzle together, accessing people’s varied talents.
- But other managers require people to fit themselves into standard, fixed roles.
- This results in access to a limited set of capabilities from talented individuals. People leave parts of themselves at home, and we all miss out.

Lessons learned from the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable

What help is out there?
What help is out there?

HMEA
Reach for Independence

MRC

The Arc
Massachusetts

Disability:IN

Office of Disability Employment Policy

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY

SPECIALISTERNE
Passion for details

ADVICE
See The Future Of Inclusion

CO-FUNDED BY:

AUTISM SPEAKS

NEXT AUTISM
Always Innovating

POSES
Family Foundation

Inclusion Documents/Transitions
A collaboration between Autism Speaks and Rangam Consultants Inc. to promote inclusive employment of the autism community.

At www.TheSpectrumCareers.com, our mission is to connect employers with qualified individuals with autism and other disabilities – at no cost.

Think Monster.com or CareerBuilder.com, but designed specifically by and for job seekers with autism.

Thank You!