Coaching Autism Traits in Tech

2024 // Dennie Declercq
https://ware.ddsoft.be
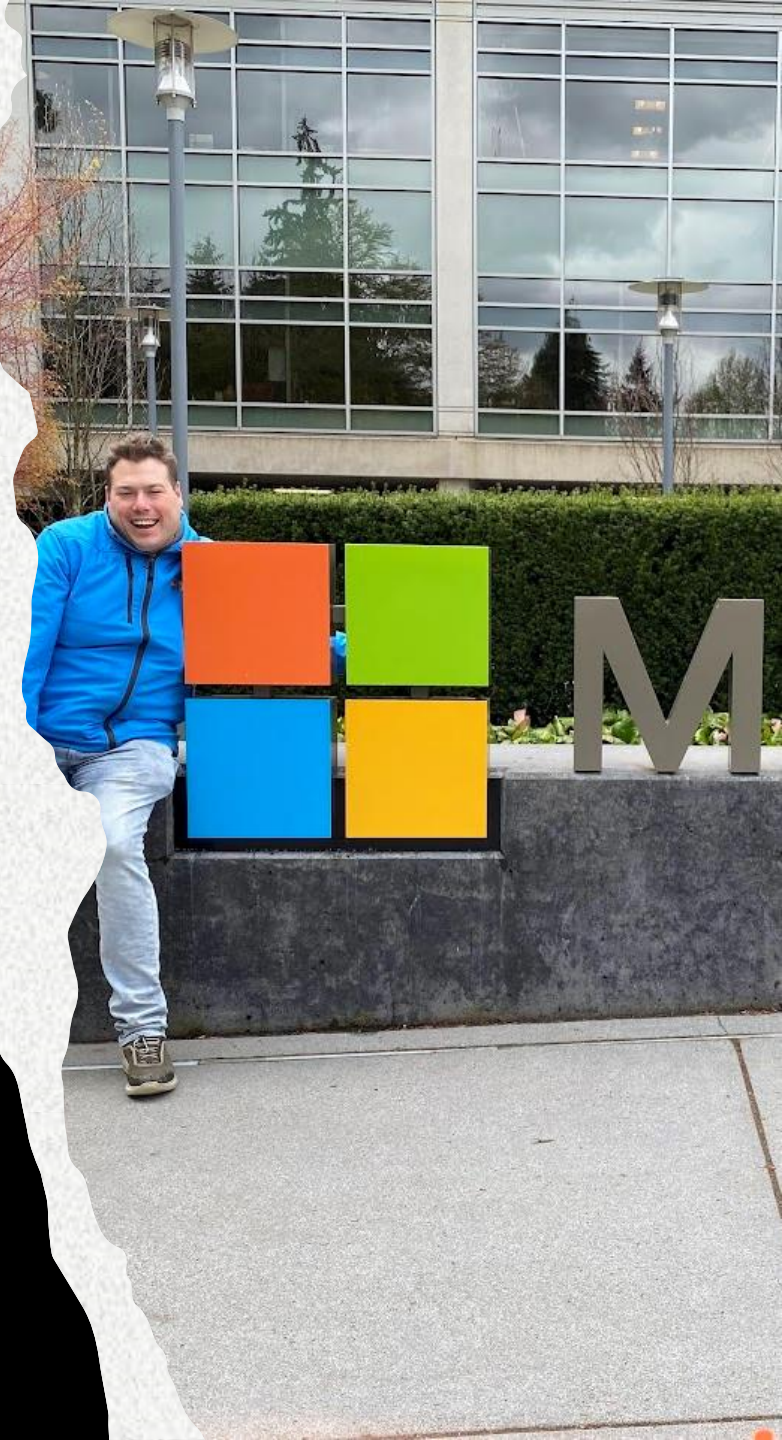
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Content

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Autism

Wired Different

Underlaying Theories

Theory of Mind

Central Coherence

Context Blindness

Leading to (differences):

Executive Functioning (& Rigidity)

Communication

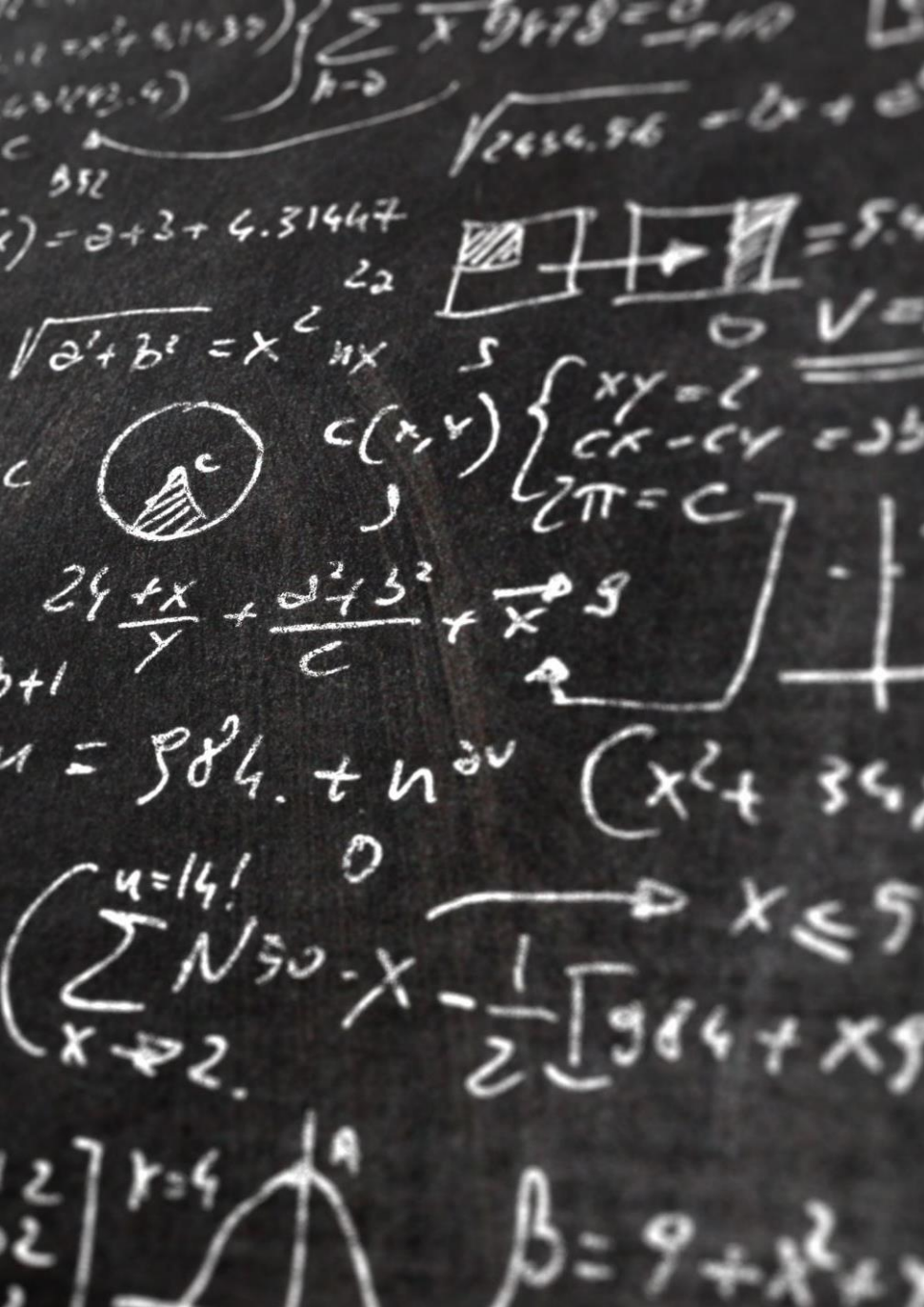Stimuli-Response system/ Sensory Deficiencies

Theory of Mind

- Understanding the WHY
- Seeing which behavior causes which outcome
- Imagine the other

Central Coherence

- Coherence of situations, things, tasks, words
- Seeing the global picture

Context Blindness

- Everything people do: Broader Context

- Employer (Business Responsibilities, Customer Needs & Private Life)

- Employee/co-worker(Tasks & Requirements & Private Life)

- Autistic Individuals are known as Blind for this broader Context

Missing Theory of Mind, Missing Central Coherence and Context Blindness is Leading to..
Difficulties with

Executive Functioning (& Rigidity)

- PLANNING: Everything that you need in daily living or in a working environment.

- CHANGING THE PLAN

- Examples:
  - Planning a timeslot
  - Deciding which task to pick
  - Planning which sessions, you want to see

Communication
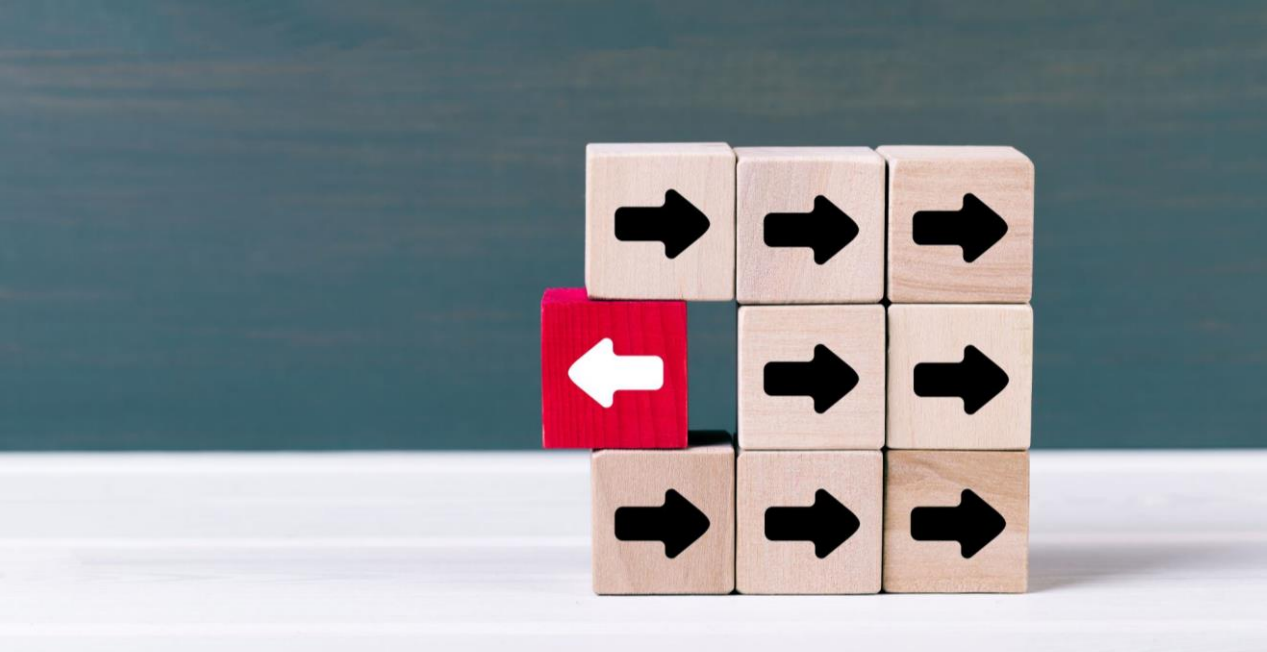
- Different question-asking behavior
- Unexpected mental blocks (a.k.a shutdown)
- Different way of starting/ ending conversations
- Unwanted interruptions in communication

Stimuli-Response System/ Sensory Deficiencies

Difficulties when energy is in **disbalance**

Disbalances in **Sensory System**

Disbalance is **hyper** or **hypo**

Auditory (sound, noise & conversations)

Visual (seeing, visual distractions)

Tactile (clothes, hard chair, touches)

Taste (food, drinks, presents)

Smell (others food & drink)

Vestibular (balance)

Proprioception (muscles & joints)

Interoception (organs ex: stomach & bladder)

Thermoception (temperature)

Nociception (pain)

Coaching

Position

- Coach **NEXT TO** person to be coached

- Coach **NOT ABOVE** person to be coached

- Coach has strengths, person to be coached has strengths

- Coach has weaknesses, person to be coached has weaknesses

Not Curing

- Person to be coached doesn't have to be:
  - Cured
  - Cared
  - Removed from all responsibilities
- Person to be coached has a choice:
  - Topic of being coached on
  - Intensity of coaching
  - Exclusion of topics

Quality of Life

- Schalock

- Eight Dimensions of Quality of Life

- Emotional well-being

- Personal relationships

- Material well-being

- Personal development

- Physical well-being

- Self-determination

- Social integration

- Rights and legal protection

Asking Questions

- Coaching methodology
- Self reflection
- Deep questions
- Asking for reasoning
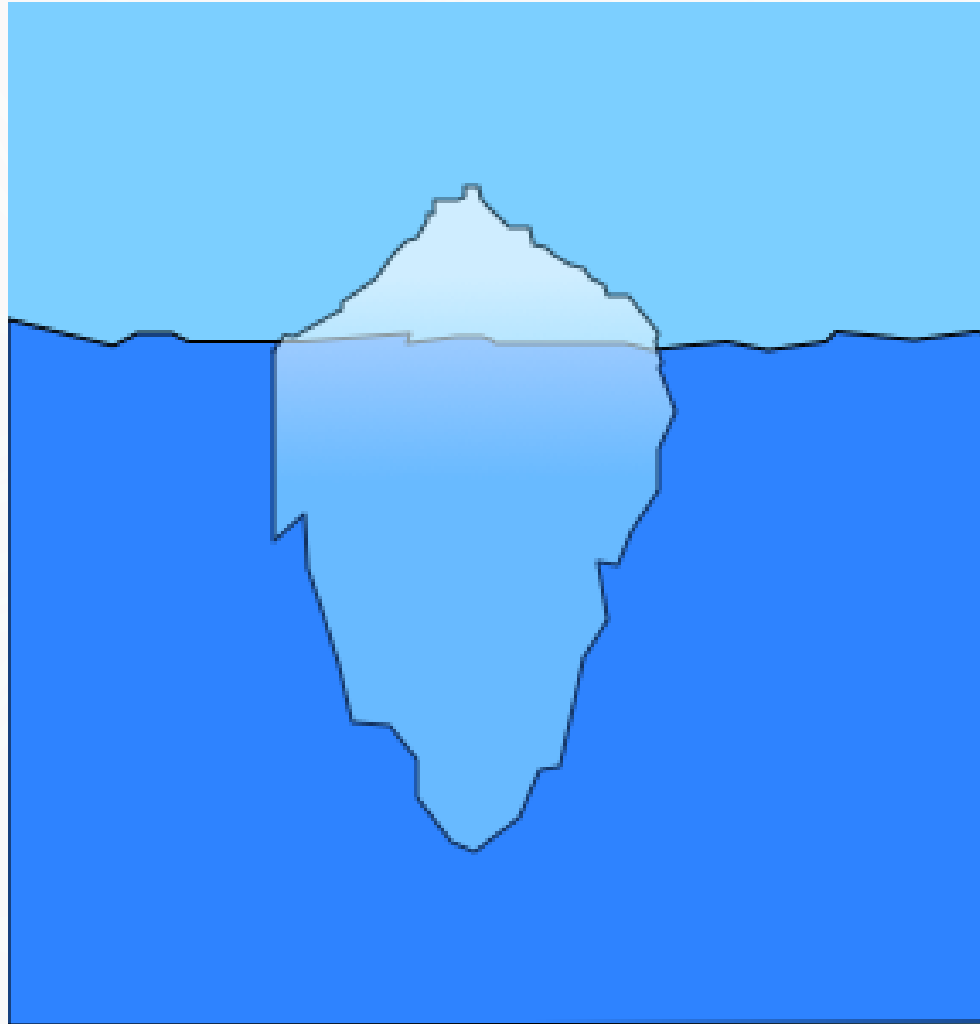- Ask for formulation and reformulation

- "Why is task Y difficult?"
- "Which similar task is less difficult?"
- "What's the difference for you between both tasks"?
- "What would you do different?"
- "Why will Y have a different impact?"

Goalsetting

- Coaching Methodology
- Timeboxed
- Short timebox
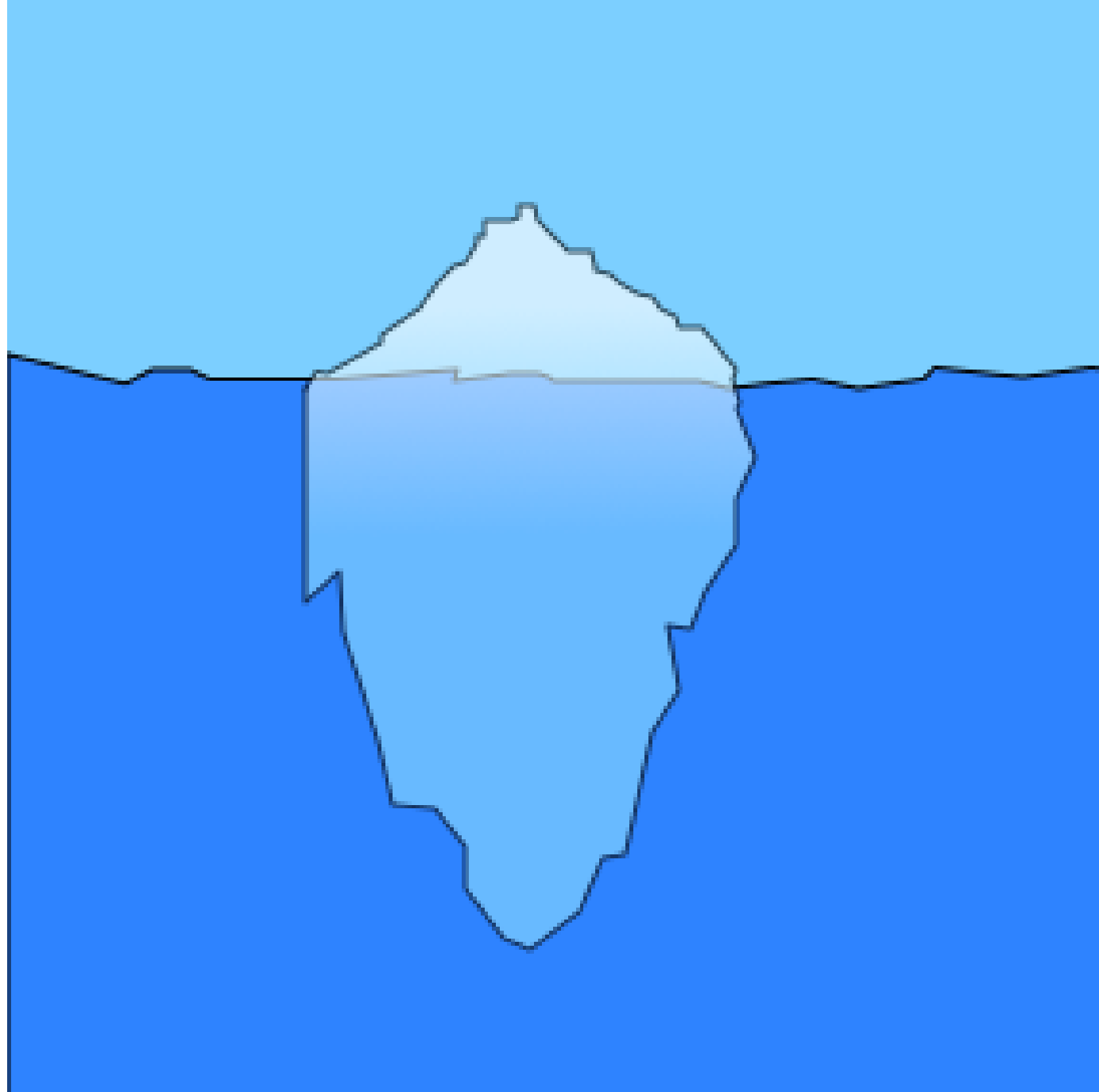- Within possibilities
- "The Edge" of possibilities
- Rewards
- (Personal) Growth

The Iceberg Theory

Introducing the Iceberg Theory

- Only the top is visible
- The biggest part is the bottom
- Bottom is invisible
- Stuff from the bottom is driving visible part
- Change the bottom for wanted top

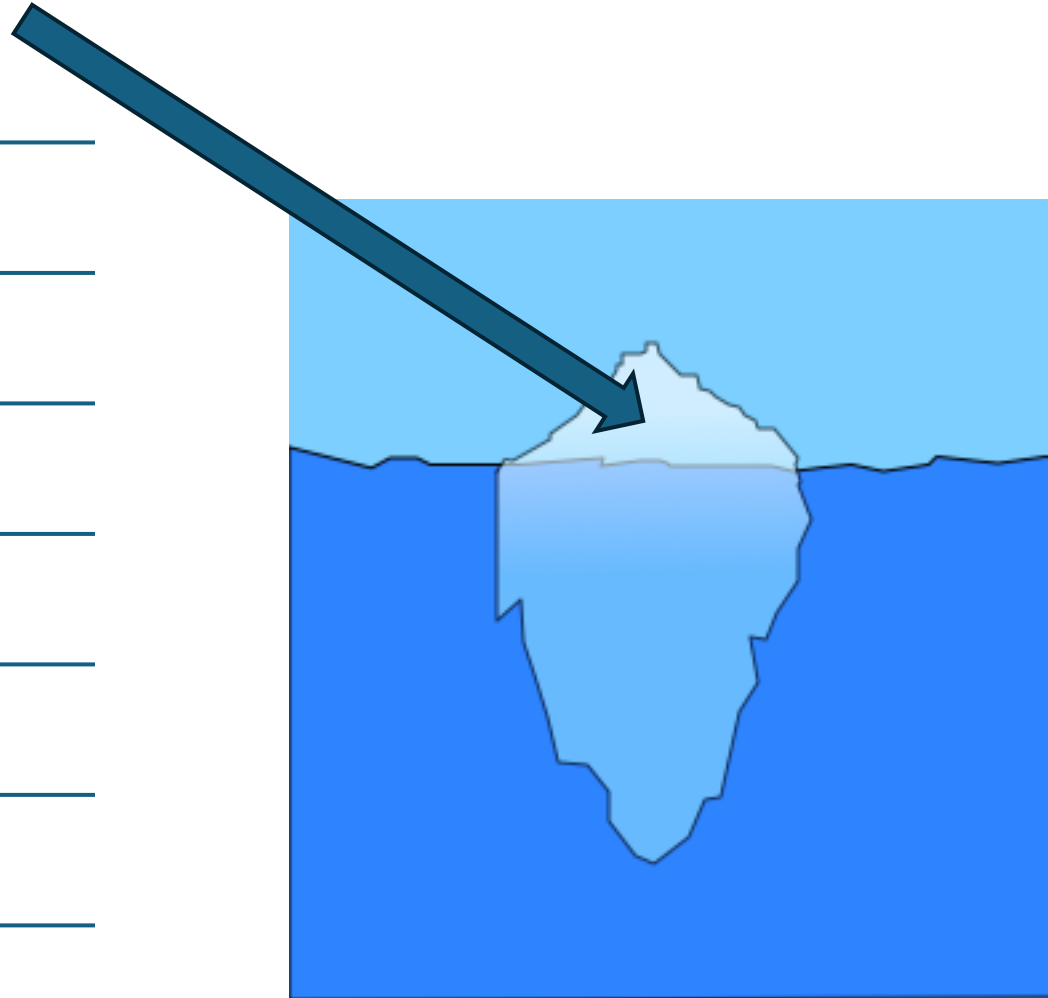# Above the surface

Behavior

Performance

Speed

Agility

Prestation

(Sickness) leave

Communication

Beneath the surface

Tension

Stress

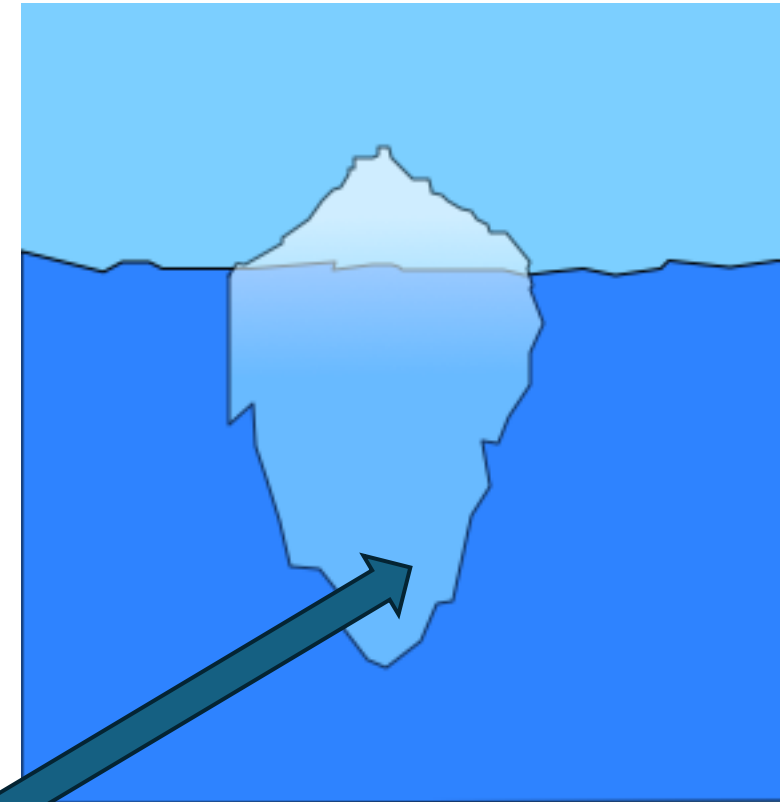'Mental Backpack'

Personal life
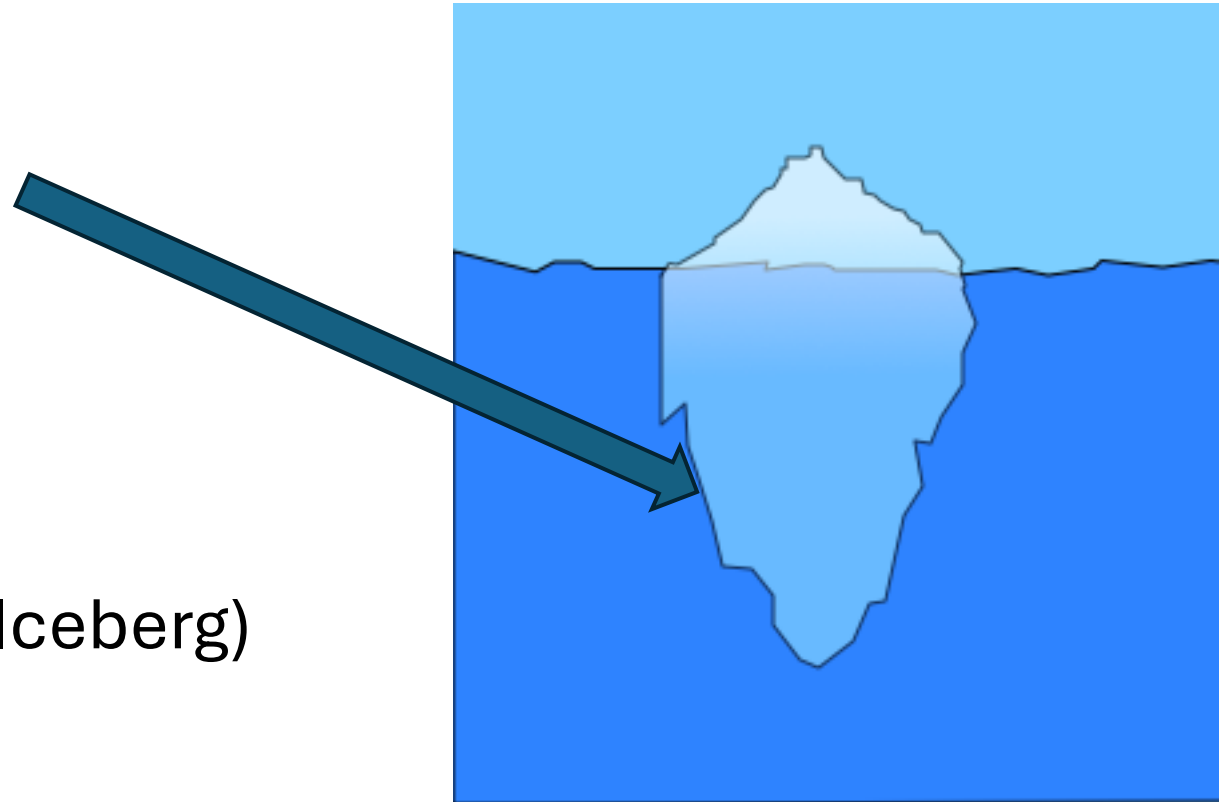
Past experiences

Physical Health

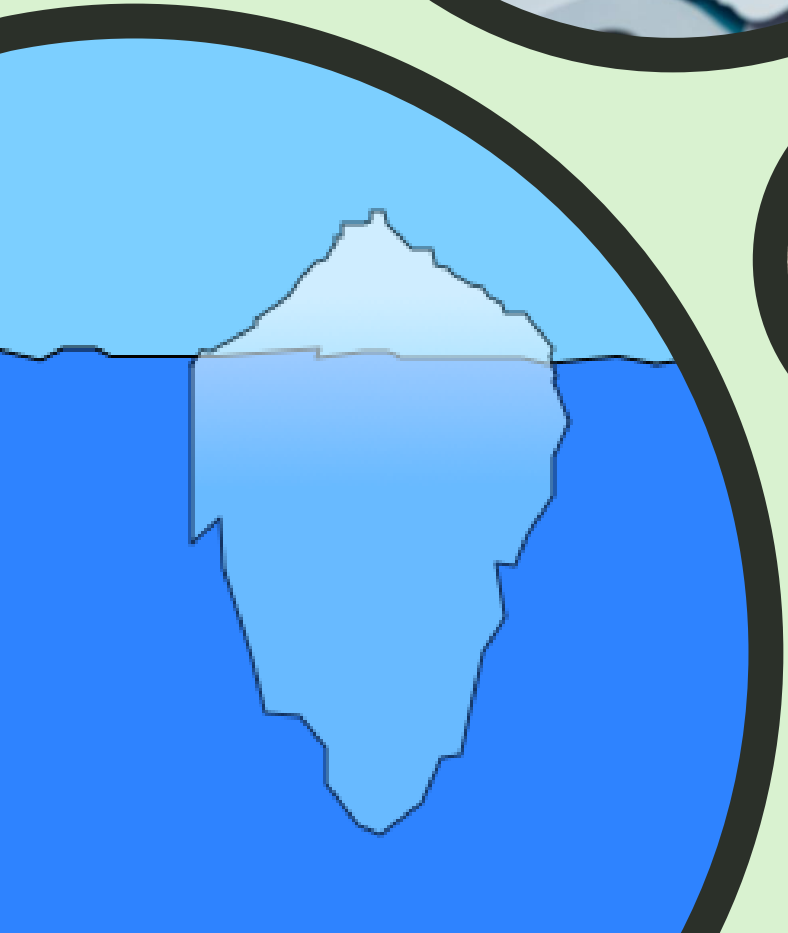Mental Health

Burden (from competition)

Figuring out the Beneath

- Provide safety feeling

- Build up trust

- Ask questions
    - GOAL: Get to the Beneath

- Change the Beneath

- Get wanted result (Top of the Iceberg)

Coaching Via The Autism Iceberg

Goal: Finding wins for ALL based on the Autism Iceberg

- Changing the beneath of the autistic coworker
- Positive impact autistic individual
- Coworkers
- Productivity
- Business Profit

Executive Functioning: Learning New Methodology

Top

➤ Rigid

➤ Don't want to learn

➤ Don't want to adapt

➤ Fanatic

➤ Progress is under average
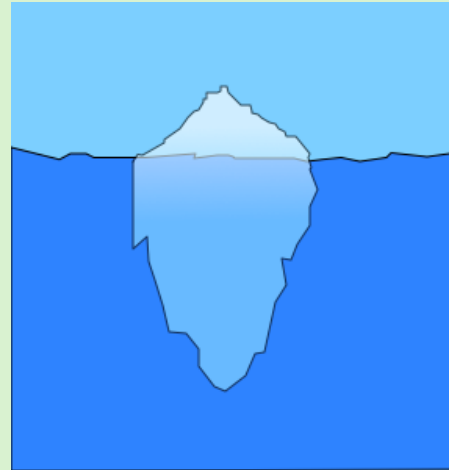
Beneath
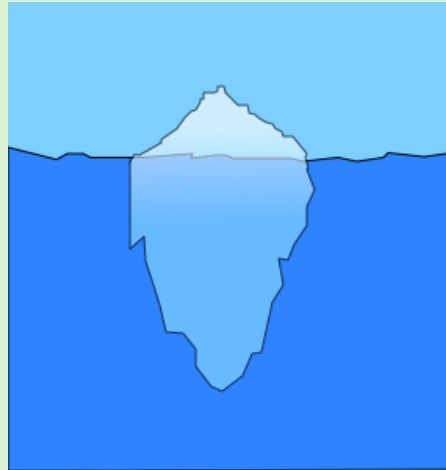
β Learning new technology asks a lot of brain power

β Anxiety for past failure

β Knock hard to achieve something in current methodology

Executive Functioning: Missing Deadlines

Top

➢ Too slow

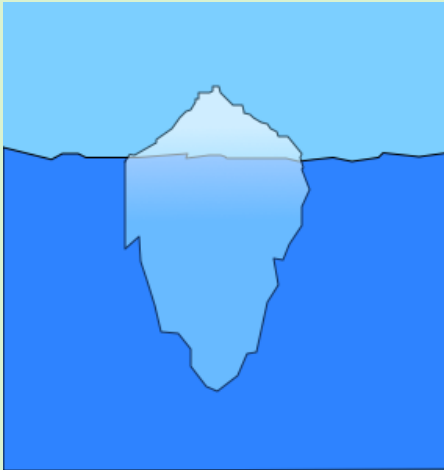➢ Panics before deadline/ launch

➢ Absence before delivery

Beneath

β Don't understand impact of own work

β Difficult to understand team synergy

β Afraid to ask help (on time)

Executive Functioning: Planning & Structure

Top

➢ Often too late at work

➢ Different code -commit timeline during sprint

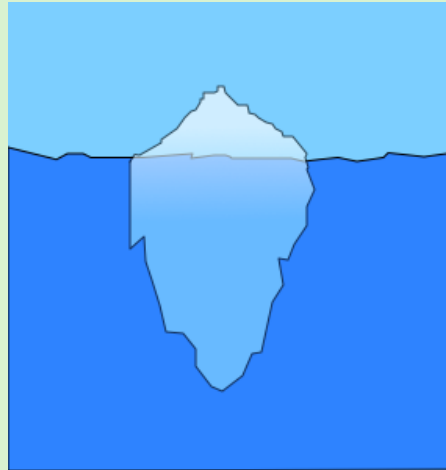➢ Code-commits on different hours

➢ Being stuck on specific part

Beneath

ß Difficulties with transport

ß Being too stressed at night

ß Troubles in personal environment

ß Anxiety to ask for help

Communication: Team Meetings

Top

➤ Asking too many questions

➤ Being silent all the time

➤ Can't answer questions

➤ (Don't) wants to sit on specific place

Beneath

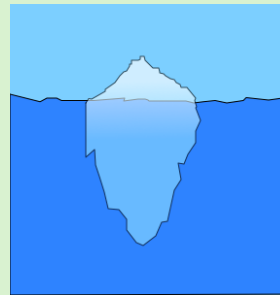β Individual has impostor syndrome

β Introversion

β Anxiety (being bullied/ rejected in the past)

Communication: Customer Meetings

Top

➤ Person is stressed before customer meeting

➤ Unexpected absence

➤ Customers have feeling needs are not done

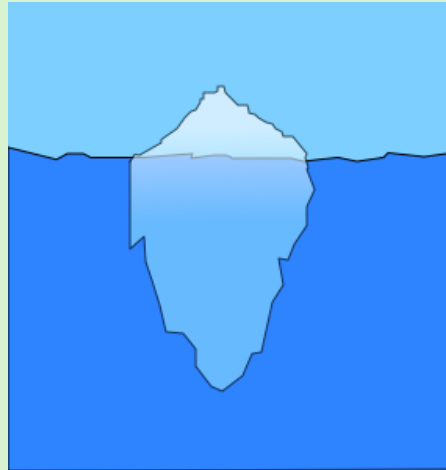➤ Coming back from meeting with feature creep

Beneath

β Customer is inconsistent

β Customer don't adapt communication to autism needs (While in company you do)

β The voice-tone of customer triggers

β Person is not trained to speak to a lot of people

Communication: (Chit Chat) Conversations with Coworkers

Top

➤ Coworkers can't connect

➤ Individual talks too much
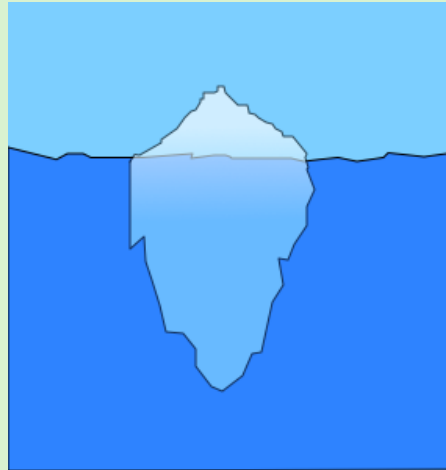
➤ Specific topic causes extreme emotion

Beneath

β Topics are not interesting

β Person has special interest

β Topics are hard due to mental backpack

Stimuli & Sensory: Desk Location

Top

➢ Person wants to sit close to toilet

➢ Person don't want to sit close to the window

➢ Person don't want to sit close to coffee machine
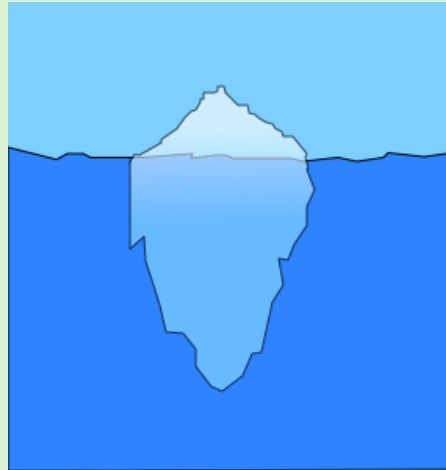
➢ Flex desks are a problem

Beneath

β Bladder hypersensitivity

β Hypersensitivity to light

β Hypersensitivity for audio

Stimuli & Sensory: Toilet Usage
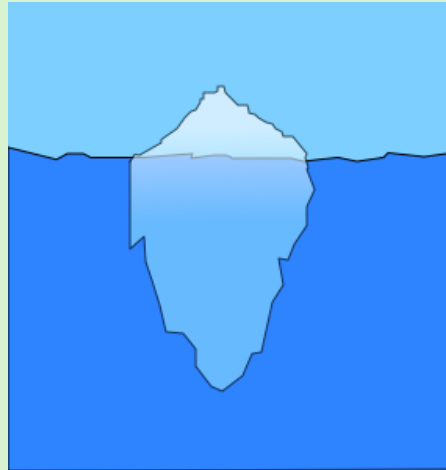
Top

➢Person uses
 Too much toilet

Beneath

β Bladder is hypersensitive

β Emotional meltdown

β Stomachache

Stimuli & Sensory: Lunch Breaks

Top

➤Person wants to sit alone

➤Person is less productive after lunch

➤Only person never joining group

Beneath

β Overstimulated

β Digestive problems

β Needs to recover

Thanks!

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