



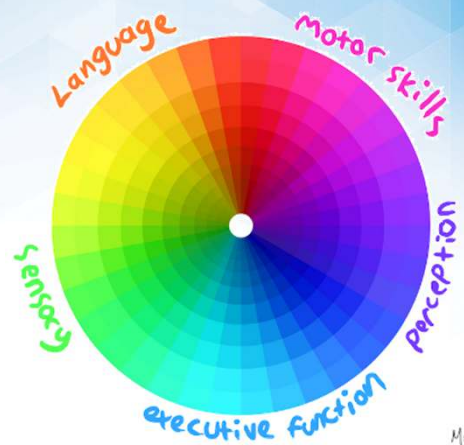
Autism and Neurodiversity at Work: Lessons Learned from a National Perspective

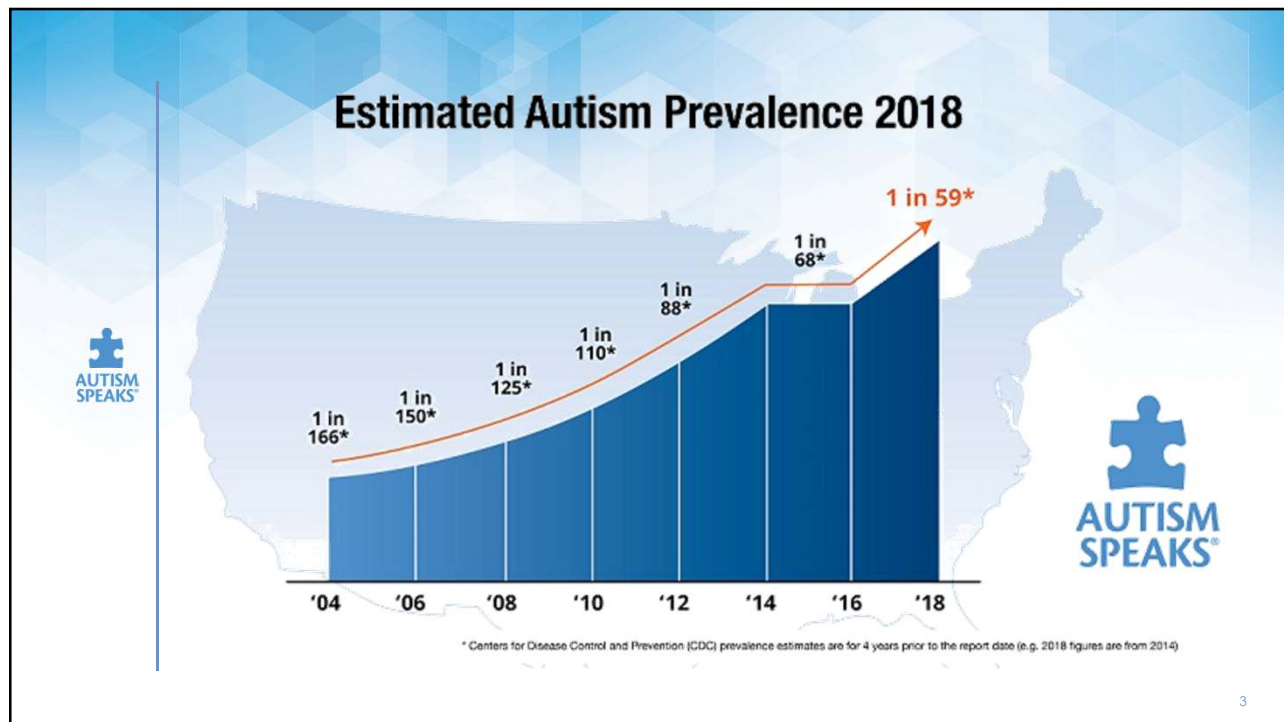
Presented by: Dave Kearon

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





3

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.

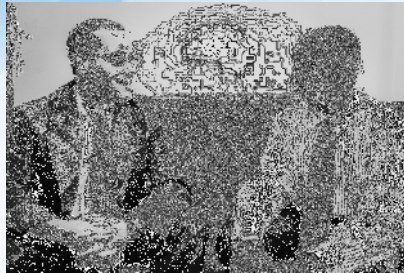
“What is attractive about the **neurodiversity model** is that it doesn't pathologize and focus disproportionately on what the person struggles with, and instead takes a more balanced view, to give **equal attention to what the person can do**. In addition it recognizes that genetic or other kinds of 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)

4



What does neurodiversity look like in adults?



5

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.



6

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**.



7

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

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



From Employers: Opportunities that Employees with ASD Present



Excel at repetition	Lower turnover
Identifying with customer base	Good performance
"Out of the box" thinking	Large/Untapped labor pool
Committed and consistent	Fewer absences
More time on task; not interested in office gossip!	Universal design / accommodations for all

9

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).

sidekicks



10

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!

11

Learning Social/Soft Skills




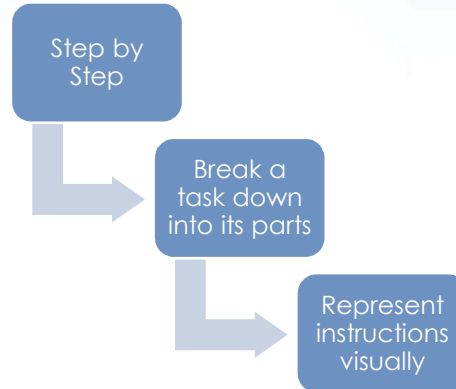
- What are appropriate and inappropriate topics of conversation in the workplace?
- How does social time (lunch, breaks) differ from work time? How do you know which is which?
- Appropriate dress
- Different rules for different people?
- Celebrations and special (different) days
- Office gossip and politics



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



13

(Some) Success Stories: Corporations



14

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

15

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

16

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



17

Lessons learned from the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable

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



18

Lessons learned from the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable

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)



19

Lessons learned from the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable

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

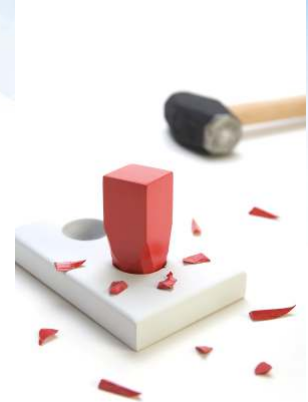


20

Lessons learned from the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable

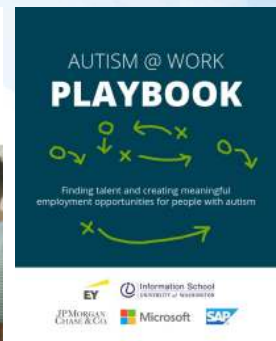
SAP's "Puzzle Analogy"

- 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.



21

What help is out there?



22

What help is out there?



23



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24

THE SPECTRUM CAREERS

A collaboration between Autism Speaks and Rangan 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.**



25



Thank You!

26