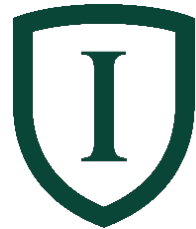




Ivey



**THE IVEY
ACADEMY**



UNLOCKING NEURODIVERSITY

A LEADERSHIP MINDSET

Rob Austin, Professor, Ivey Business School

The “Neurodiversity Employment Movement” is well underway

Example: Microsoft’s Neurodiversity Hiring Program

Link to video: https://youtu.be/XUAsU_zQVMo?si=5d9LAoX7FRUGWg40

Neurodiversity – What is it?

- “Neurodiversity refers to the idea that neurological differences, such as those seen in autism or ADHD, reflect normal variations in brain development.” – *Psychology Today*
- “[P]eople experience and interact with the world ...in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits. – *Harvard Health Publishing*
- “[M]any individuals who embrace the concept of neurodiversity believe that people with differences do not need to be cured; they need help and accommodation instead...When 99 neurologically identical people fail to solve a problem, it’s often the 1% fellow who’s different who holds the key. Yet that person may be disabled or disadvantaged most or all the time. To neurodiversity proponents, people are disabled because they are at the edges of the bell curve; not because they are sick or broken.” – John Elder Robison
- The Social Model of Disability vs. The Medical Model – Deficits are not in the individual, but in the organization’s inability to accommodate differences
- We estimate that 15% to 20% of the world population could be neurodivergent, and statistics suggest that they are un- or under-employed at an 85% to 90% rate, despite having valuable skills and talents
- *The reality that many firms have now accepted:* “There are unintended biases built into hiring and employment processes that prevent us from hiring deserving people who have talents we urgently need.”

Origins of the Movement:

Thorkil Sonne starts Specialisterne (“The Specialists,” in Danish)

- Founded in 2004 in Denmark
- Mission: Employ autistic people in good paying jobs, mostly in the tech industry (software testing)
- Motivation: A father trying to make a better future for his son
- A for-profit company – “hire us because we’re good, not because it’s a ‘good cause’”



SPECIALISTERNE

Passion for details



*Dear Mr. Sonne,
You don't know me. I am crying as I write this. You recently hired my son. And he is happy again for the first time since he started school...*

The idea begins to achieve scale...

SAP's Announcement in May 2013

Link to video: https://youtu.be/k4aZpcsJPq8?si=J2SeyZICl44c_ZnN

SAP Press Release and its interesting rationale...

“We share a common belief that innovation comes from the ‘edges.’ Only by employing people who think differently, and spark innovation will SAP be prepared to handle the challenges of the 21st century.”



JPMORGAN CHASE & CO.



FOUNDING EMPLOYER ROUNDTABLE MEMBERS

At the beginning of 2024, there are now 475 roundtable members

<https://disabilityin.org/who-we-are/corporate-partners/>



Benefits documented as programs have scaled

- Jobs filled in areas of skill shortage that would have gone unfilled
- Access to higher levels of talent than would have been possible via conventional hiring approaches
- Marketing benefits from favorable perceptions of firm activities
- Employee engagement, morale, meaningful work benefits that improve productivity and quality of work
- Innovation capabilities improved by “accessing outliers” – potentially valuable ideas, points of view, ways of thinking different from what is available otherwise
- Process improvements that arise from the abilities of neurodistinct employees to spot irregularities and inefficiencies, and their willingness to point out problems

“Spillover” Benefits

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 to make communications more clear, direct, and unambiguous
- Improvements in supervisory practices as a result of thinking about supervising neurodistinct people
 - “Managing in this programs has made me a better manager of all my people.”
- Improvements in employee supports that end up improving productivity overall
 - Example: Concerns about need to provide support for depression for neurodiversity programs end up helping all employees (reducing absenteeism, etc.)

A follow-on effect...inclusivity leads to wave of ND disclosure

- Companies like Microsoft, SAP, and EY, who have hired hundreds into their ND employment programs, have also seen dramatic growth of their ERGs related to ND
- Employees who identify as ND, who were not disclosed, have been not only coming forward but also organizing, and requesting training for their supervisors
 - The work done on neuro inclusivity around these programs appears to shift the benefit/cost calculation for employees who identify as ND, leading many more to disclose and work actively to spread benefits
- Numbers of people in ND ERGs in these companies now dwarf the number of people who have been hired into ND hiring programs

“Pulling the ND red thread and benefits across the rest of the organization” – Neil Barnett, program lead, Microsoft



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**HOW LEADERS CAN HELP
UNLOCK
NEURODIVERSITY**

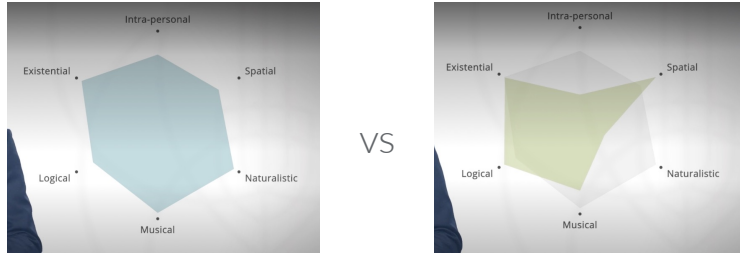
Culture

- Executive Support
 - Our research shows clearly that organizations that succeed at neuro inclusion have senior executive sponsors and committed champions at the operational level
 - Those that don't tend to stall at some point
- Changing ideas about fit, job definition, and hiring
 - “The question to ask is not ‘does this person fit?’ but rather ‘Is this person additive to our culture?’”
 - “We must work very hard to remove the unintentional, implicit biases from our processes, especially those used in recruiting, hiring, and career development.”
 - “Job crafting” – the idea that jobs are not standardized roles, slots into which people must jam themselves...rather, job roles and conditions can be adjusted to fit and magnify the abilities of the person in the job
 - A “coaching culture”

Process

- *Showing* rather than *telling* based assessment
 - More internships, project-based hiring exercises...less interviewing
 - Anti-bias training for assessors

- The problems with checklists
 - “Spiky skill profiles”

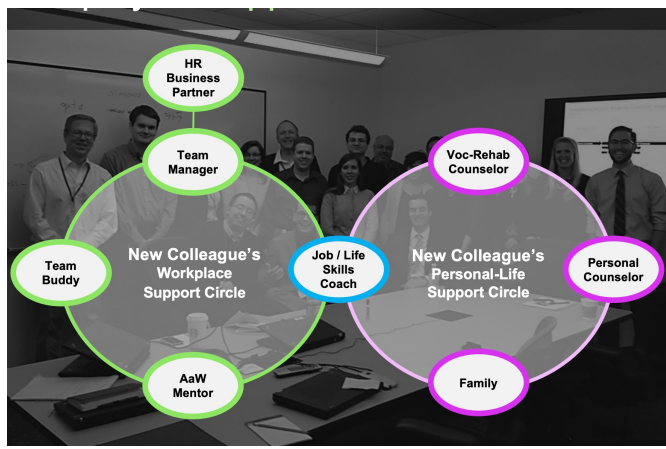


- Re-examining tacit practices
 - Meeting and communication protocols
 - Communicating more visually
 - Universal design – “does this approach work for all our team members?”
 - One ND employment program lead: “We no longer assume...we ask”



Process (cont'd)

- Accommodations...for all employees
 - Research: these are usually not very expensive
 - Most common: quiet seating area, headphones
- Support circles
 - Help and coaching on the job, and support after work
 - Awareness training for all employees
- Performance management – “the bar is the bar”
- Career management, career progression



Management/Supervision Approach

- Neuro inclusion as capability building
 - “Participating in this program has made me a better manager”
 - The apparent mechanism: ND employment program require managers to think about how to put ND people into conditions in which they can add maximum value...but this turns out to be a pretty good question to ask about all employees
 - What if you could manage in a way that resulted in 5% more value from all a company’s employees?...10%? 15%? What would that add up to?
- Managing people as individuals
 - Silvio Bessa (formerly SAP, now Microsoft), chats with one of his hundreds of employees each day, during his commute
 - Technology makes this more feasible



Changing the paradigm

“The phrase ‘human resources’ suggests that there’s valuable “human stuff” that companies just happen to keep stored in containers called “people.” This is kind of like referring to the contents of a famous art museum as “paint resources.”

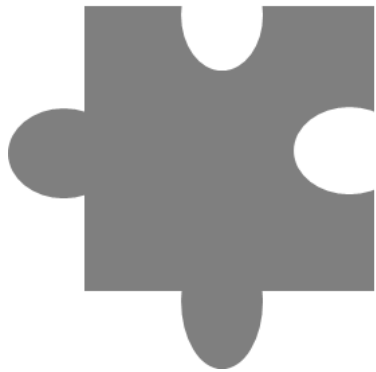
- Austin and Sonne, 2014, *MIT Sloan Management Review*

Our vision is to create an inclusive environment where people can bring their uniqueness to the table. The corporate world has mostly missed out on this. Historically, we've asked people to tailor themselves to fit. But when you do that, people have to leave part of their authentic selves behind, which is too bad because those parts are potentially valuable to us, to SAP. Innovation is most likely to come from those parts of each us that we don't all share. [This] program is broadly valuable because it has forced us to adjust our processes to our colleagues' uniqueness. This teaches us, as managers, something about how we will need to access talent in the future.

-- Anka Wittenberg, former SAP Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer

SAP's "Puzzle Analogy"

PEOPLE ARE LIKE
PUZZLE PIECES...



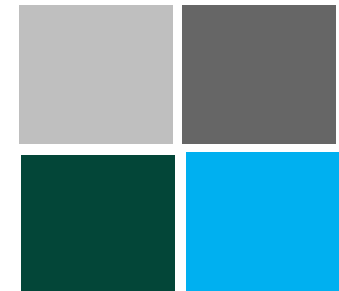
ALL DIFFERENTLY
SHAPED

SOME MANAGERS
UNDERSTAND PEOPLE STRENGTHS
INTIMATELY AND ADAPT ROLES TO PEOPLE...
THEY PIECE THE PUZZLE TOGETHER,
ACCESSING PEOPLE'S VARIED TALENTS



...WHILE OTHER MANAGERS
REQUIRE PEOPLE TO CUT THEMSELVES TO FIT
STANDARD, FIXED ROLES.....

.....RESULTING IN ACCESS TO A LIMITED SET
OF CAPABILITIES FROM TALENTED
PEOPLE WHO LEAVE THE PARTS OF
THEMSELVES THAT ARE DIFFERENT AT HOME



Resources

Disability:IN WHO WE ARE WHAT WE DO RESOURCES NEWS & EVENTS CEOs ARE IN INVESTORS ARE IN

Neurodiversity at Work Playbook: Employee Engagement & Growth Series

Home / Resources / Neurodiversity at Work Playbook: Employee Engagement & Growth Series

Employee Engagement & Growth Series Playbooks

- Cultivating a Neuroinclusive Culture
- Neuroinclusive Organizational Change Management
- Neuroinclusive Transition to a New Manager

Categories

- Accommodations
- Affiliates
- Announcements
- Awards
- Business Case
- Business Resource Group
- COVID-19
- DEI Best Practices
- Digital Accessibility
- Etiquette
- Events
- Global

<https://disabilityin.org/resource/neurodiversity-at-work-playbook-employee-engagement-growth-series/>

Ivey's Neuro Inclusion Maturity Model – will be distributed with these slides

Harvard Business Review

Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage

Why you should embrace it in your workforce
by Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano

THE IVEY ACADEMY INDIVIDUALS ORGANIZATIONS EVENTS INSIGHTS

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Home / Individuals / Individual Programs / Neurodiversity and Belonging ...

ONLINE WORKSHOP

Neurodiversity and Belonging at Work

Learn essential strategies to unlock better communication, creativity, and performance. Lead people as individuals and empower your team through understanding and inclusion.

REGISTER NOW CONTACT AN ADVISOR

<https://www.ivey.uwo.ca/academy/individuals/individual-programs/neurodiversity-and-belonging-at-work/>

Now available on Execonline's on-demand learning platform

Unlocking Team Neurodiversity

Learn how to shift your mindset to leverage diverse perspectives and unlock innovation on your team.

Faculty Lectures Create Action Plan Interactive Activities

Robert D. Austin
Prof. of Information Systems

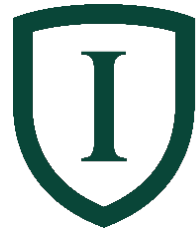
Martha Maznevski
Prof. of Organizational Behavior

execonline

<https://www.execonline.com>



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See also the Ivey Neurodiversity Employment website:

<https://www.ivey.uwo.ca/neurodiversity-employment-research-project/>

Supplemental Slides

The Huge Remaining Opportunity: Widening the Impact

According to our estimates, there are between 800 million and 1.2 billion people in the world who could identify as neurodistinct

The progress so far, while it should be celebrated, probably impacts only tens of thousands of people, primarily those with high skills levels and low support needs

The good news: There has been a proliferation of social enterprises working on “dipping deeper into the spectrum”

Why we *cannot not* do this...

- Work provides individuals with economic security and a context within which they can contribute to society, anchoring them in a social role (Saleh & Bruyere, 2018).
- Having a job is an important determinant of self-esteem and provides a critical link between an individual and society (Doyle et al., 2005).
- Employment provides social contact, social identity, and regular activity, and allows people to engage in collective effort with purpose, which are all essential factors in maintaining a healthy human condition (Flower et al., 2019; Hedley et al., 2018).
- Moving people off public support and into jobs where they become tax-payers represents a huge per person per year swing from cost into revenue
- In addition...the world needs all the skills and talent it can get to address the grand challenges facing societies and the world – Let's not leave talent unused!

A Brief History of Our Neurodiversity Employment Project (2007 to present)

2007	Harvard case "Specialisterne: Sense and Details" (Austin, Wareham, Busquets) published	2017	"Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage" (Austin and Pisano) published by <i>Harvard Business Review</i>
2008	Taught Specialisterne case, with Thorkil Sonne as guest, in Harvard Business School's executive program for Chief Information Officers (approximately 60 execs present) Two articles about Specialisterne (Sonne, Wareham, Austin, Busquets) published in <i>MIT Innovations</i>	2018	Ivey case "Hart Schaffner Marx: Neurodiversity at a Classic American Suitmaker" published
2012	<i>Harvard Business Review</i> "The Insight" video on the issue of autism employment	2019	"The Advantages and Challenges of Neurodiversity Employment in Organizations" (Krzeminska, Austin, Bruyère, Hedley) published in the <i>Journal of Management & Organization</i>
2014	"The Dandelion Principle: Redesigning Work for the Innovation Economy" (Austin and Sonne) published by <i>MIT Sloan Management Review</i>	2020	Harvard case "Saying Yes to Accessibility and Inclusiveness: A Podcase on Microsoft's Autism Hiring Program" published "Don't Leave Talent on the Table: Discerning Best Practice in Neurodiversity Employment" research project funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
2015	Presented at landmark UN Autism Employment event (in connection with World Autism Awareness Day); other speakers from Specialisterne, SAP, HPE, Microsoft	2022	Ivey case "EY: Neurodiverse Centers of Excellence" published
2016	Harvard case "SAP SE: Autism at Work" (Pisano and Austin) published Harvard case "Hewlett Packard Enterprise: The Dandelion Program" published	2023	Current status: 19 longitudinal case studies, including for profit companies, not-for-profit organizations, and supporting organizations (social partners); data being analyzed (within case, cross case, cross group analysis)