



# NEURODIVERSITY: TRANSLATE VISION INTO REALITY



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## #Diversityandinclusion

Diversity and Inclusion are among the most trending topics on social media and among the key performance metrics of leaders in every organization. Our society, people, and organizations are becoming more purpose-driven and responsible. Indeed, responsible organizations enjoy incredible respect and collateral business benefits. Therefore, organizations are realizing that the more diverse their workforce, the better equipped they are to innovate and handle complex problems.

Diversity and Inclusion go beyond gender diversity. The significance of Inclusion in the true sense lies in bringing people with different mindsets into a team while preserving team harmony. Gender diversity is the lowest hanging fruit and the most straightforward starting point. Though gender diversity incites the spirit of inclusiveness, the workforce of the future must really be The Neurodiverse Workforce.



*The world needs  
all types of minds."*

**Temple Grandin**  
Scientist,  
and Animal  
Behaviourist



## THE ESSENCE OF D&I: DOES IT INCLUDE NEURODIVERSITY?

A Harvard Medical School article describes Neurodiversity as the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one “right” way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and [differences are not viewed as deficits](#). The word neurodiversity, often used in the context of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as ADHD or learning disabilities\* refers to the diversity in all people.

People in the autism spectrum have distinctive attributes around attention to detail, visualization, ability to identify patterns, and the ability to do repetitive tasks effectively. They are both trustworthy and reliable. Despite that, we see a vast majority of autistic people being unemployed.

Studies estimate a staggering 50-75% of the 5.6 million autistic adults in the U.S. are unemployed or underemployed. Nearly 50% of 25-year-olds with autism have never held a paying job, despite having the skill sets and expertise

to excel in the workplace\*\*. This neurodiversity, a largely unaddressed area, is now gaining renewed attention.

Organizations worldwide are realizing that they are losing out on a talent pool and making attempts to understand the strengths of this pool so they can engage them as well. This is a disadvantage for the organizations struggling with a shortage of skilled resources.

But let us ask the fundamental question? What are the factors preventing an organization from hiring people with autism? The answer: their perceived lack of communication and social skills. People with autism also have sensory issues. Their communication is mostly visual in nature. They struggle when they work in an unstructured environment. And our organizational processes starting from interviews to meetings are mostly unstructured, verbal, in the QA format and don't have much respect for the sensory needs of people especially those with autism.









## WORKPLACE CHANGES GO A LONG WAY ...

To make our workplace more inclusive, we need to transform our organizational processes, including interviews. If we want people with autism to take interviews without discomfort to showcase their abilities, we need to make the interviews:

- **Predictable** - preferably using a visual schedule, such as what and when to expect during the interview process.

### Interview Process

#### ASHISH'S VISUAL CALENDAR ?

27 June		
		Breakfast
		ABAP code
		Lunch
		Interview



Interview Schedule



Interview Preference



Sensory Needs



Interview Topic



Interviewer



- **Specific** - We need to give specific tasks on which to evaluate candidates. For example, if you are testing the candidate's coding skills, the question may be as follows:
  - Fibonacci Numbers series are these: 0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21
  - Please write a code to display a Fibonacci number series.
  - Please write the code in the ABAP language.
  - You can / cannot take the help of Google search.
  - You have 30 mins to finish this code.
  - Once the code is completed, please press the "Finish" button.
  - If you need any help anytime, please press the "Help" button.
- **Social skills** - We must reduce the social skills aspects of the interview process. Asking questions like "tell me about yourself," or expecting eye contact as a sign of confidence should be discouraged.
- **Sensory needs** - We need to capture the sensory needs of the candidate prior to the interview as some of them aren't comfortable with eye contact or have issues with fluorescent lights or may be non-verbal. Accept stimming (a self-regulatory behaviour) as a process of self-regulation.
- **Take help** - Help from the families and from external experts should be continuously taken to ensure that people with autism get integrated within the organization without stress.
- **A meticulous plan** needs to be charted out to make people in the autism spectrum part of our workforce. This plan needs to be revisited and revised on a monthly basis, with proper feedback taken from the care givers and employee. This is because we have to be mindful of this quote by Dr. Stephen Shore\* - "When you meet one person with Autism, you've met one person with Autism." This highlights how diverse autism is.

\*Dr. Stephen Shore is a person on the autism spectrum and a professor of special education at Adelphi University.  
<https://drstephenshore.com/>



# EMPATHY MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

We must sensitize and train our existing workforce about people with autism. We must make efforts to ensure organizations understand that we all have different brains and different sensory needs and that each one has unique abilities and skills. It is also important for the current workforce to understand that including people with autism will bring great benefits to any organization. We must highlight the unique skills that people with autism bring.

By leveraging a group of empowered and empathetic managers, mentors, and buddies, we should ensure all fellow co-workers know, comprehend, and appreciate people with autism for the difference they bring along. Not only will this be an enriching experience for these managers and mentors, but they will also learn new social and communication skills and become more promising leaders.

Inside the organization, we must ensure the physical and emotional safety of people with autism. We must assign them specific and meaningful work. It is important to invest in their social skills training. We can encourage them further through a buddy who is fully sensitized and knowledgeable on this subject and from the same work location.

# SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES COMPLETE THE LOOP

Neurodiversity inclusivity for an organization starts from Recruiting, Onboarding, and Hire-to Retire-cycle. System Enablement is a significant aspect of the Human Resources Information System (HRIS) for an organization. HRIS helps companies manage and automate core HR processes. These HR software systems support benefits administration, time and attendance, payroll, and other workflows, as well as the storage of employee data, such as personal, demographic, and compensation information.

SAP SuccessFactors enables Neurodiversity hiring in the organization by marking jobs and positions as neurodiverse based on the tasks, such as data analyst or compensation executive.

The Recruitment process marks the vacancy with these attributes and candidates can view and can apply for the same internally or externally. A candidate's profile can also be tagged with such identification, which enables a recruiter to mark the special process for hiring. Once hired, it helps onboarding as per neurodiversity processes like buddy and mentor assignment, trainings, process orientation, etc., to ramp up people with autism while balancing their strength and development needs. SAP SuccessFactors enables

complete hire-to-retain cycle for the people with autism. It enables teams to have the best of talent and development to get the future they want.

The foundation of my vision of inclusive interview process leverages user experience, innovation and technologies. SAP Business Technology Platform (BTP) is a unified open technology platform that supports the holistic unification of data, technology, and business processes. The platform combines access to technology with ease of use in a simple and harmonized experience, with a distinct focus on rapid process innovation.

The strong application development and integration capabilities of BTP based on Cloud Foundry and open standards can help build an effective, adaptive, and assistive solution for interview processes. We can execute scalable and flexible use cases to support a neurodiverse workforce interview process.

At Capgemini, it is our endeavour to become more inclusive and sustainable and help our clients achieve their inclusivity and sustainability ambitions. We are fully committed to fulfilling SDG Goal 10 (to reduce inequalities regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, social background, and physical abilities) and SDG Goal 8 on (to provide decent work and economic growth to people with a detailed framework for inclusivity). Apart from ESG compliance, neurodiversity inclusivity initiatives enable organizations to create a truly positive impact in the society and strengthens their image as a responsible organization.

I thank my colleague Ashwini Jaokar (who leads the HCM competency in APAC SAP COE) for her inputs on the neurodiversity enablement features of SAP SuccessFactors. Also, I thank Prasanna Bhangale, BTP Architect in APAC SAP COE for his input. In our next blog, learn more details on the development of this application as our first steps to including people with autism in our workforce.

\* <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-neurodiversity-20211123264>

\*\* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jenniferpalumbo/2021/04/27/why-autism-speaks-is-encouraging-companies-to-hire-those-on-the-autistic-spectrum/?sh=62b1226c52a2>



For further information, feel free to reach out to

**Ashish Kaul**

**Senior Manager, SAP**

[ashish.b.kaul@capgemini.com](mailto:ashish.b.kaul@capgemini.com)

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