



The Potential Impact of Management Practices on the Employment Viability of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) within the Information Professions

Introduction

Within the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) community, **there is a growing movement to decrease the number of unemployed and underemployed adults with ASDs**[i], in particular those with High Functioning Autism. The information professions have been identified as one of the best career paths for adults with ASDs. Several non-profit technology companies train and employ adults with ASDs in Information Technology (IT) and other technically oriented sectors. In addition, the Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development has launched the following website: *Meet the Future Face of Employment – Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Technology Fields*[ii]. Fundamental to the success of this movement is shifting the emphasis from ASDs as disabilities to a recognition that individuals with ASDs may have specific characteristics that help them excel within certain professions, in particular the information professions. Based on the symptoms exhibited by individuals with ASDs, as identified by the DSM-5, this research attempts to identify: **What management practices and/or supports need to be in place to help individuals with ASDs maintain gainful employment within the information professions?** To address this question, interviews are being conducted with individuals associated with non-profit organizations who oversee ASDs client/employee placement outside of the organization and/or supervise ASDs client/employee work within the organization. The interviews focus on examples of individuals with ASDs employment success (and failure), as well as those interventions that may have potentially influenced these outcomes.

[i]Autism Works National Conference on Autism & Employment (St Louis MO, March 2012); Autism Speaks Employment Think Tank (NYC, June 2012); and New England Museum Association Annual Conference - session title: *Interns with Asperger's Syndrome in a Museum Gallery Guide Program* (Newport RI, November 2013).

[ii]Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). (2014). *Meet the Future Face of Employment – Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Technology Fields* [website]. Retrieved from <http://mn.gov/mnddc/asd-employment/index.html>

Preliminary Findings

Based on interviews conducted at *Specialisterne*[iii], **the following management approaches have been associated with ASD employee success:**

- Successful completion of intensive social skills remediation interventions prior to consideration for job placement; ASD individuals seeking job placement assistance from organizations such as *Specialisterne* come with a variety of challenges of varying intensity.
- A great deal of attention is paid to the ASD employee/job “fit”, taking into account the often reduced adaptability/flexibility of ASD individuals relative to the general population.
- Undergoing an often painstakingly detailed discussion with employers concerning the ASD employee’s job description, to help make clear to the employer the necessity of providing the ASD employee with very clear and specific direction.
- Taking proactive versus reactive approaches to employee performance management, such as (at the very least) weekly (sometimes daily) “check-ins” with ASD employees and their employers to see how things are going; these need to be conducted in a way that encourages individuals to speak candidly.
- Although anecdotal, it appears to be assumed that this approach will only be successful with ASD individuals identified as “High Functioning” (based on the DSM-5 criteria).

In addition, **the following environmental factors appear to aid in the successful placement of ASD employees:**

- ASD employee placement occurring in a location where a) technology startups are on the rise and b) there is a shortage of qualified labor.
- A recognition by local employers that the specific personality characteristics associated with ASDs on balance add more benefits than costs.
- The individuals charged with the placement of ASD employees having personal experience with individuals with ASDs prior to being hired in their current placement positions; this experience was often cited as an important source of insight and sensitivity needed to “shore up” sometimes sorely tested patience.

[iii] <http://usa.specialisterne.com/about-specialisterne/>