**Neurodiversity at work benefits everyone – why companies are hiring autistic people**

September 24, 2020 2.51pm BST

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Some of my favourite fictional characters include Spock and Seven of Nine from Star Trek, Dr Martin Ellingham from Doc Martin and Shaun Murphy from The Good Doctor. Apart from being brilliant at their jobs, they are all considered to be autistic by the autism community.

It is no coincidence that what makes these characters so good at their jobs are characteristics associated with autistic or non-neurotypical people. Leaving aside The Good Doctor’s and Seven’s savant abilities, they are all logical thinkers, curious, evidence-based decision makers, tenacious, persistent at solving problems and focused. They offer different perspectives and don’t succumb to the sort of groupthink or non-evidence based decision making that lands many companies in trouble.

Their tendency to be direct and honest in social interactions can sometimes get these characters into hot water. But it also stops them getting bogged down in office politics. And it’s for all these reasons that, in the real world, a growing number of companies are seeing the value of hiring autistic people.

Technology companies such as [Microsoft](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/inside-microsoft/cross-disability/autismhiringcorporate) and [Dell](https://jobs.dell.com/neurodiversity) have autism hiring programmes. The hiring process tends to focus on the technical abilities of candidate and includes observing team-building exercises.

Other organisations are going further, aiming to change perceptions and highlight the benefits that hiring people with different ways of thinking can bring. German software company SAP [launched an initiative](https://www.sap.com/idea-place/autisminclusionpledge.html#inspiring_videos) in 2013 to recruit more people on the autism spectrum and showcase the benefits they bring to the company. Their chief executive, Christian Klein, [says](https://www.sap.com/idea-place/autisminclusionpledge.html):

SAP teams who have colleagues with autism report a rise in patent applications, innovations in products, and an increase in management skills and empathy.

This is due to the curiosity of autistic people, an ability to memorise large amounts of information, see patterns as well as detail and a determination to get the job done. New ways of seeing problems have led to innovations for the company. These successes have thrilled managers and encouraged them to look beyond the neurotypical skill set.

**Room for improvement**

Despite these clear benefits, participation rates of autistic people in the workforce is low. It’s [32%](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2019-07-02a.1174.2) in the UK (16% full-time) and [38%](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2019-07-02a.1174.2) in Australia, despite the vast majority of unemployed autistic adults wanting employment and having skills to offer. In many other countries, there is no data – autistic people of working age are invisible.

Selection processes for jobs often emphasises eye contact, small talk and rapport, which can lead to employers missing out on autistic candidates. So-called soft skills may be sought and judged when they are not required or not an integral part of the job, even where they are trumped by work ethic, technical and perception skills.

Autistic people don’t always fit into existing office dynamics. [fizkes / Shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/african-american-millennial-guy-feel-lonely-1194497173)

Some consider people on the autism spectrum to be refreshingly direct and honest. But autistic people can be considered rude for their direct way of communicating. This isn’t because they do not care about others, they just might not respond to people in the way that neurotypical people expect.

Recent [research](https://www.scottishautism.org/news/new-research-collaboration-between-university-edinburgh-and-scottish-autism) by Catherine Crompton and Sue Fletcher-Watson “found that autistic research participants communicated more effectively with one another than mixed groups of autistic and non-autistic people”. This shows that autistic and non-autistic people have different expectations about communication and social interactions. They think, feel and communicate differently.

**Reporting and accountability**

To avoid missing out on the skills autistic people bring, companies can learn from the experience of improving gender and race diversity, where both direct and indirect discrimination act as a barrier. There is still a long way to go when it comes to gender and race equality in the workplace and the road ahead for the neurodiverse is no less arduous.

Over many years of reviewing corporate reports, including their equal opportunities policies and disclosures on gender, race and “disability”, I can count on one hand the mention of the benefits of neurodiverse teams, the successes of autistic individuals or the measures taken to accommodate them. My research shows how the banking and retail sectors have changed the way they hold themselves accountable for the employment of [women](https://drcaroladams.net/the-changing-portrayal-of-the-employment-of-women-in-british-banks-and-retail-companies-corporate-annual-reports/) and [ethnic minorities](https://drcaroladams.net/reporting-and-the-politics-of-difference-nondisclosure-on-ethnic-minorities/) over the last century, in line with changing views of society. This also reflects changes in government policy.

Greater awareness of neurodiversity is needed and will hopefully lead to similar changes for people who think differently to the majority. We need all kinds of people – women, different races, cultures, sexual orientations and neurodiversity – at all levels of our organisations to create our future. Whether that’s activist Greta Thunberg daring to confront political leaders on climate change, an academic challenging practice and policy through evidence, or an employee finding an innovative solution to a problem.

Source: https://theconversation.com/neurodiversity-at-work-benefits-everyone-why-companies-are-hiring-autistic-people-146788?utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20September%2025%202020%20-%201741516859&utm\_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20September%2025%202020%20-%201741516859+CID\_054444a81388410f22cbd4510d76740b&utm\_source=campaign\_monitor\_uk&utm\_term=Neurodiversity%20at%20work%20benefits%20everyone%20%20why%20companies%20are%20hiring%20autistic%20people