ARE RISK & ANALYTICAL LEADERS MAXIMIZING THE NEURODIVERSE TALENT POOL?

Justine Aspey
Managing Director, Adway Associates – Executive Search Ltd
Justine Aspey

- Founder of Adway Associates- Executive Search Ltd; specialist Risk & Analytics recruitment firm
- Worked as a Headhunter within Risk and Analytics for 25 years+
- Co-Founded a Risk Management Consultancy
- Working in partnership with Jaywing Risk to develop new markets and customer relationships
What is Neurodiversity?

- Neurodiversity is a term that has gained increasing use since the 1990’s. It is attributed to an Australian sociologist Judy Singer.

- “The idea that there is only one ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’ type of brain or mind or one ‘right’ style of neurocognitive functioning is no more valid than the idea that there is one ‘normal’ or ‘right’ gender, race or culture” John Elder Robinson, Neurodiversity Scholar, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg.

- Neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation; the brain functions, learns and processes information differently.

- According to Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) it is estimated that 1 in 7 people in the UK are neurodivergent.

- Research indicates most forms of neurodivergence are experienced on a spectrum and can include the Autistic Spectrum which includes Aspergers, Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyscalculia and Tourette’s syndrome (a fuller list could include bipolar disorder, OCD and others).
Strengths of autistic people

- Focused
- Loyal
- Excellent memory
- Logical
- Technical
- Knowledgeable
- Different way of thinking
- Creative
- Attention to detail

National Autistic Society
"Must have" skills for Risk, Analytical and Data experts

- A high level of mathematical ability demonstrated by a relevant degree and often a MSc and/or PhD
- Programming languages such as SAS or SQL and increasingly Python and R
- The ability to analyse, model and interpret data
- Data Visualisation
- Problem-solving skills with a methodical, logical approach
- The ability to plan work and meet deadlines
- Accuracy and attention to detail
What softer skills do Analytical roles need?

- Stakeholder Engagement
- Ability to communicate technical topics to non-technical audiences
- Strong communication skills; verbal and written
Are there links between Neurodiverse minds and mathematical/statistical capability?

- This is a new and relatively recent area of research
- “People with autism have a huge ability to recognise patterns and show great attention to detail so they can spot information that other people might miss. They also like predictability, and for things to be very structured, which means they’re diligent and have a low tolerance of mistakes. So software is often an area where they can use their talents. Software development and testing was where it all started for us, but we’ve also hired people for jobs like graphic designers, data analysts and consultants.”
  
  Stefanie Nennstiel, Director of Diversity & Inclusion at SAP
- University of Padova psychologist Paola Bressan undertook a study in 2018 that linked systematic thinking (over empathic learning) with mathematical ability, exploring the concept that individuals who have autism may have a head for numbers
- Catherine Leggett, employment consultant at the National Autistic Society (NAS) highlighted increased interest in the employment of autistic people in Cyber Crime
- Tech firms such as Microsoft and SAP seem to be leading the way
Is your recruitment process Neurodiverse friendly?

- Study by Westminster ‘AchieveAbility’ commission for dyslexia and Neurodivergence (UK) found that 88% of neuroatypical candidates felt discouraged from applying for a job and of those that did 52% felt discriminated against during the selection process.

- According to the National Autistic Society 16% of adults with autism are in full-time paid employment in the UK, compared with 47% of disabled people and 80% of non-disabled people.

- 77% of unemployed autistic adults, or people responding on their behalf told NAS they want to work.

- Communication is key.
Making your recruitment process Neurodivergent friendly

**Job Description:**
- Ensure the Job Description (JD) is clear and well laid out
- Consider audio/visual JDs as alternatives?
- Ensure job title, location, salary, hours etc are clear
- Ensure that the JD isn’t generic and the job purpose and responsibilities are clear and concise
- Confirm the interview process including number of interviews, format, whether there are any tests

**CV Submission:**
- If this is done by a Portal is there a question about neurodiversity?
- Is the procedure for CV submission clear and simple?
- Do you acknowledge receipt of CV within an acceptable time frame i.e. 24-28 hours?
- Do you provide a clear time frame on next steps and what those next steps are?

**Interviews:**
- Ensure the candidate is fully briefed beforehand
- How long the interview will last?
- Names and job titles of the interviewers (photos in advance can be very helpful)
- What it will cover?
- Will it be competency based? Will it use specific methods e.g. STAR?
- Detail surrounding any tests e.g. SAS test
Do you provide Neurodiverse employees with the best platform for success?

- Awareness of office layout and sensory environment
  - Large, open space environments can prove to be uncomfortable to those with a neurodiverse mind
  - Noise and bright/artificial light can contribute to cognitive overload
  - Travel to work at peak times can increase stress and anxiety for people on the Autistic spectrum
- Simple remedies could include:
  - Allowing employees to wear headphones to enable them to focus on the task in hand
  - Sitting by a window or facing a wall
  - Read-write software (which makes web and document text accessible)
  - Pens that record an audio file of notes
  - SAP launched an Autism at Work program in May 2013 and pledged that by the end of 2020, 1% of its workforce would identify with the Autistic Spectrum and even designed an bespoke onboarding process; assigns people a trained mentor
  - NAS when asked about UK employers that were driving initiatives for employing people with autism cited JP Morgan Chase and Lloyds Banking Group
Do you have the culture and leadership in place that encourages Neurodiversity?

- Is it part of your brand and marketing strategy?
- Is it prominent in your recruitment processes e.g. on your portal?
- Does your recruitment procedure make it unequivocally clear that neurodiversity is actively encouraged and supported?
- Neurodivergence will usually amount to a disability under the Equality Act of 2010; albeit it is not specifically mentioned
- Is it covered in your Employee Handbook?
- Does your organisation and leadership team actively and vocally support neurodiversity
- Is it clear that there is an open, supportive culture that enables neurodivergent staff to disclose their needs and feel they are being treated equally and fairly?
Conclusion

- Not everyone who is neurodivergent will have a formal diagnosis
- Not everyone who thinks differently has a recognised issue
- Avoid presumptions
- Your Diversity and Inclusion strategy should directly address neurodiversity and should not be a “one-size-fits-all”
- The more inclusive and accessible your business is, the more varied your talent pool will become which in turn should lead to a talented and creative workforce
- It’s clear from the stats provided by ACAS & NAS that the neurodiverse talent pool is not being maximised by any business or specific functions
CELEBRATE
NEURODIVERSITY
Any Questions
Sources and Reference material

• https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-30013-8#ref-CR3
• **Guide to inclusive recruitment for neurodiversity** Nancy, May 12, 2017,
• https://www.geniuswithin.co.uk/blog/dyslexia/i-find-most-employers-want-to-be-disability-confident-recruit
• https://www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/employment.aspx
• https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage
• acas.org.uk
• autismawarenesscentre.com
• Psychology Today
• National Autistic Society
• https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/long-reads/articles/employers-hiring-neurodiversity