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The Benefits and Challenges of Hiring People with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract

People with disabilities, including individuals with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), are an underrepresented group in the labour force. As part of their own corporate social responsibility programs, pressures from consumers and within the labour market, many organizations are beginning to hire a diverse group of people. Individuals with Asperger's syndrome or those classified with high-functioning autism, have a variety of skills and strengths which can benefit employers in a variety of industries. Although there has been considerable research about the education system and children with ASD, the employment of adults with ASD has received less research attention. Employers may be hesitant to hire an individual with a disability, including ASD, for a variety of reasons. Changes in organizational culture, corporate social responsibility programs, and diversity management can have an effect on the hiring practices of an organization. Accommodations in the workplace can assist an employee with a disability to perform their duties. Employers can find assistance and support from a variety of organizations to assist them in hiring and retaining employees with disabilities. Employers, society and individuals with disabilities all benefit when an individual with a disability is able to find work that matches his or her skills and strengths.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder, Asperger's syndrome, disability and work, diversity in the workplace

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1 Introduction

Many businesses and organizations understand that their clients and customers are a diverse group of people. In order to be successful, organizations need a workforce as diverse as the market. According to the 2006 Canadian Census, the population of Canada was 31.6 million people (Statistics Canada, n.d.). The Participation and Activity Limitation Survey of 2006 determined there were 2.47 million Canadians with activity limitations, people with disabilities, who were between the ages of 15 and 64 and who potentially could have been in the work force (Statistics Canada, 2008). People with disabilities are part of our diverse population, they are consumers of products and services and many have skills that are in demand in the work force. A diverse work force may understand the needs and wants of a diverse market, and this can help businesses and organizations to remain competitive and successful in the marketplace.

Currently people with disabilities are an underrepresented group in the labour force. Employers who promote an inclusive and diverse work force will be able to benefit when they hire and retain people with disabilities. Consumers also expect businesses to have a diverse work force. There are many pressures on businesses today to do the right thing through their corporate social responsibility policies and practices. CSC, a global IT services company (Computer Sciences Corp, n.d.), has been recognized for its employment of people with disabilities ("More Than Reasonable", 2012). Hiring a diverse group of individuals and not exploiting these individuals is one way businesses can demonstrate to their consumers they are being socially responsible.

People with disabilities are not part of a homogeneous group and therefore accessibility to employment and possible accommodations in the workplace may vary. Some disabilities may be visible, such as a person who uses a wheelchair, while other disabilities are non-visible, such as a person who is deaf or a person who has autism. Regardless of the disability, potential employees may require accommodations in the workplace. People with disabilities can contribute to the work force and be an asset to an organization.

The baby boomers have begun to retire and this will put pressure on the labour market (Bowlby, 2007). This increase in demand for workers may provide an opportunity for the traditionally underrepresented groups, such as the disabled, women, and minorities. As well, some managers are finding it may be more difficult to motivate Generation Y employees (Twenge, 2010). As these individuals do not focus on work as the central part of their lives, they value their leisure time and some studies also "say they are less willing to work hard....Viewed more negatively, the work ethic has declined and productivity may follow" (Twenge, 2010, p. 208). Therefore some employers may see this change in work ethic to be a problem. In their article, Barnes and Powers referenced one Associated Press story in The Providence Journal: "Dropouts, unskilled minorities, people with disabilities, seniors-those who traditionally are unwanted or who get the worst jobs are suddenly wanted" (Barnes & Powers, 2006). Barnes and Powers noted poor work ethic and poor attitudes can have "a negative impact on customer satisfaction" (Barnes & Powers, 2006, p. 6). Employees who are motivated, they like the work they are doing and they have a sense of self-fulfillment, are more likely to be satisfied with their job and will be better performers (Lam, 2010). "Satisfied employees

are committed. The organization can keep them and they will be more than usually productive. These employees' efforts - above and beyond work – create superior customer value. That creates customer satisfaction and customer loyalty” (Wilson in Hayes, 1999, p. 49).

Many individuals with disabilities find it difficult to obtain and retain employment. Statistics Canada's Participation and Activity Limitation Survey of 2006 found the unemployment rate for Canadians without disabilities was 6.8 percent and was 10.4 percent for Canadians with disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2008). Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are included in the statistic of people with disabilities. Specialisterne, The Home Depot, and Walgreens are examples of organizations which have been successful in creating an inclusive workplace by hiring people with disabilities, including ASD. Unless an employee self-identifies as having a disability, many employers may not know how many employees have a disability, such as ASD. The Specialist People Foundation, which owns Specialisterne, has a goal to create one million jobs for people with autism (Specialist People Foundation, n.d.). Since 2004, Specialisterne Denmark has been able to support over 230 people by creating job profiles (Specialist People Foundation, n.d.). Walgreens' distribution centre in Anderson, South Carolina has reported approximately 35 to 40 percent of the workforce have disclosed that they have a disability (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). Walgreens is finding that there has been a decrease in the number of employees who disclose their disability (Autism Works, 2012). “Because the supports and accommodations are so readily available at the facility, workers can use them without having to formally report their disability if they don't want to” (Autism Works, 2012). As of 2010, Ken's Kids, whose first corporate partner was The Home Depot, has been able to find jobs for 181 people at Fortune 100 companies (Loschiavo, 2010). These examples will be expanded upon in the literature review section.

Approximately 1 percent of the world's population is affected by ASD (Wareham & Sonne, 2008). “Of this 1 percent, only 6 percent have any form of gainful employment” (Wareham & Sonne, 2008, p. 11). In 2010 it was estimated that 70% of individuals who had been diagnosed with ASD were under the age of 14 (Gerhardt & Lainer, 2011). As these people age, employers and services needs be prepared in order to accommodate this large group of individuals. This is a large group of people who may be able and willing to join the workforce. It should be noted that not all individuals with ASD will be able to join the workforce due to their place along the autism spectrum, but many may be able to.

When an individual is able to find employment there are numerous benefits for the individual and society. Social connections, economic self-sufficiency, a sense of dignity and self-worth are ways an individual can benefit from employment (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lysaght, 2007). For individuals with disabilities the benefits are the same as they will have “the sense of feeling productive and staying busy, having relationships with co-workers, feeling important, increased income, and having opportunities for continued growth and advancement” (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lysaght, 2007, p. 29). Society also benefits when individuals with disabilities are able to find employment as there will be “lower support costs and income from tax revenues paid by those earning

over the minimum wage (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lysaght, 2007). The province of Ontario “spends \$3.3 billion a year on disability income support” (Ontario Disability Employment Network, n.d.). In their study of a supported employment program in the United Kingdom, Howlin, Alcock and Burkin determined the number of individuals in the program received fewer benefits, such as severe disability allowance, income support, housing support and job seekers allowance after they found employment through the program (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005). As individuals with disabilities are able to find good paying jobs this should reduce their dependency on support programs which should decrease the costs for the government.

2 Research purpose and research question

2.1 Research purpose

There is an increase in the number of people being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. ASD is also more prevalent in males as Eric Fombonne found in his study; the ratio of males to females with autism was 4.3:1 (Fombonne, 2003). It is difficult to determine if the prevalence of autism is higher in certain geographic areas; increases could be due to the availability of services in certain areas (Fombonne, 2003). The reasons for the increase in the number of diagnoses of ASD are difficult to determine and are outside the scope of this paper. There are numerous studies, books, and articles reviewing the education system and the support systems for children with ASD. Unfortunately there has not been much research conducted on how to support adults with ASD in the workplace or how to support employers who hire individuals with ASD (Hare & Mills, 2009). Individuals with ASD can be productive members of society. Society and organizations may need to determine what supports and accommodations are needed in the workplace to assist people with autism as well as other disabilities.

Finding and retaining employment can be difficult for individuals with a disability. Individuals with a disability are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed and underutilized compared to Canadians without a disability (Statistics Canada, 2008; Raskin, 1994). Accommodations may be necessary to assist an individual to join the workforce. Accommodations have become common over the years and include things such as flextime and ergonomic seating (Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, 2013). It is possible to make reasonable accommodations in the workplace to assist the individuals with disabilities to contribute to the success of the organization.

In Canada the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Employment Equity Act* are two Acts which discuss accommodations for individuals. The *Canadian Human Rights Act's* purpose “is to extend the laws in Canada to give effect...to the principle that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated...without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices” (Government of Canada, 2012, p. 1). The *Employment Equity Act's* purpose “is to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability...by giving effect to the principle

that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences” (Government of Canada, 2012, p. 1). Part I of the *Employment Equity Act* discusses the employer’s obligations and states “The employer shall prepare an employment equity plan” (Government of Canada, 2012, p. 7) and that the plan is used for making “reasonable accommodations” (Government of Canada, 2012, p. 7). The term reasonable accommodation is an important one, “it encompasses every form of adjustment, from work rule to physical changes to a workstation” (Raskin, 1994, p. 84). It is important for employers and society to remember that it is not possible to place all individuals with disabilities into one group due to the differences in their abilities. People who are visually impaired will have different accommodation requirements than people who must use a wheelchair who will have different accommodation requirements than people with developmental disabilities.

In Canada, private-sector employers are not regulated at the federal level but at the provincial level (Wilton & Schuer, 2006). Each province will have its own human rights law and it is important for an employer to understand that law. “In Ontario, the human rights code requires ‘reasonable’ efforts to appropriately accommodate qualified workers to the point of undue hardship” (Wilton & Schuer, 2006, p. 188). If an employer does not offer accommodations, it is the responsibility of the individual to file a complaint (Wilton & Schuer, 2006). Different government Acts will not necessarily require employers to make changes in their workplaces. In Ontario, “the 2001 *Ontarians with Disability Act* did not mandate accommodation by private-sector employers” (Wilton & Schuer, 2006, p. 188). Although accommodations may not be mandatory, employers may realize that reasonable accommodations are not difficult or expensive and will benefit the organization and its employees. In their paper, MacDonald-Wilson et al. found many examples of organizations spending less than \$500 on accommodations in their workplaces (MacDonald-Wilson, Rogers, Massaro, Lyass, & Crean, 2002). These cases will be expanded upon in the literature review.

Organizations can realize a variety of benefits when they hire individuals with ASD. Some of the traits of ASD such as intense focus, attention to detail, truthfulness, reliability and an affinity for repetitive tasks (Hendricks, 2010; Wareham & Sonne, 2008) can be beneficial for an organization. In their study, Griffith et al. interviewed eleven individuals with Asperger’s syndrome and found some of the individuals saw the positive aspects of Asperger’s syndrome (Griffith, Totsika, Nash, & Hastings, 2012). “Lucas: I don’t have the same limitation that other people seem to have (...) people say, they think outside the box. I’ve never had a box, I don’t even know what a box is, I’ve always thought outside the box. Nothing is taboo to me” (Griffith, Totsika, Nash, & Hastings, 2012, p. 538). It is important for employers to recognize the different abilities of individuals, rather than their disabilities. By creating a culture of inclusiveness, organizations can remove barriers, both physical and attitudinal (Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2005) that may exist within the organization.

Due to the nature of ASD some industries and jobs may be better suited for individuals with ASD. One example of an industry where some individuals with ASD have been successful is software testing. “Companies found that people with autistic spectrum

disorder (ASD) have a greater attention to detail than average, making them suitable for software testing” (Saran, People with autism found suited to software testing, 2008). One example is Specialisterne, a software company in Denmark, which employs people with ASD (Saran, Consultancy uses people with autism to improve software testing process, 2008). Dr. Margaret Clarke, the executive director of the Sinneave Family Foundation’s Ability Hub in Calgary, believes that “individuals with autism have a great capacity to learn, they’re just often held back by specific skill deficits or not given a chance” (Boesveld, 2011). This may mean there may be more opportunities for people with ASD in the future.

The concept of corporate social responsibility has been around for quite some time. “Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the way a corporation achieves a balance among its economic, social, and environmental responsibilities in its operations so as to address shareholder and other stakeholder expectations” (Sexty, 2011, p. 139). Companies may hire individuals with disabilities as they feel it is part of their CSR policy, one of their social responsibilities. However, organizations must be careful that they are not exploiting these employees. Wilton and Shuer found in their research some employers who may be exploiting some of their employees who have disabilities. One of the respondents stated “Working with a lot of disabled people, especially kids, you find a lot are obedi...you know, willing to please, almost ready to do anything that you ask for (Manager, convention centre, 58 non-union workers)” (Wilton & Schuer, 2006, p. 191). Other respondents commented on the integrity and productivity of the employees, however, their comments can also be seen as employers taking advantage of certain employees (Wilton & Schuer, 2006). There may be CSR benefits for organizations who hire individuals with disabilities. Employers may be able to connect with different ASD groups and promote the work of the ASD group as well as the work of the employees with ASD. This can result in a win-win situation by highlighting the work of the ASD group as well as positive self-promotion in the community for the company hiring the individuals with ASD.

2.2 Research question

Can organizations benefit from hiring individuals with ASD, and if so, how? Although there may be challenges for organizations to hire people with disabilities, there may also be many benefits. Inclusive cultures, diverse workforces, possible increases in innovation, and a positive corporate image are some benefits for organizations when they hire people with ASD. With the right support and assistance, employers, employees and society may benefit when a person with ASD is able to find a good job.

3 Research design

This is a conceptual paper which reviewed articles, studies and documents primarily between the years 2002 and 2012. As more had become known about ASD, as well as due to the changes to labour laws and hiring practices, it was important to review more recent articles.

A couple of assumptions were made researching and writing this paper. As the spectrum of autism disorder is quite large, not all individuals on the spectrum may be

suiting for different workplaces or for the workforce in general. Therefore, when referring to individuals with ASD, the individuals would be those classified as high functioning or those with Asperger's syndrome. The second assumption was that organizations will know that they are hiring an individual with a disability, which the potential employee has chosen to disclose.

Many key words were used when researching this paper and they include: autism, autism spectrum disorder, Asperger's disorder, Asperger's syndrome, employing people with autism, accommodations for people with disabilities, and corporate social responsibility. ABI/INFORM Global, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, SAGE Journals and Google Scholar were used to search for articles. Key words and combinations were used in different databases: Diversity AND workplace OR employment AND autism OR disabilities AND accommodations; workplace AND accommodations AND people with disabilities.

4 Literature review

4.1 Autism Spectrum Disorder

Leo Kanner first introduced the concept of autism in his paper published in 1943 (Wing & Potter, 2002). "Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a class of developmental disabilities which cause serve impairments to a child's communications, their social interactions, and in their play and behaviour" (Law, 2006). "ASD is a complex neurobiological condition that can affect the normal function of the gastrointestinal, immune, hepatic, endocrine and nervous systems. It impacts normal brain development leaving most individuals with communication problems, difficulty with typical social interactions and a tendency to repeat specific patterns of behaviour" (Autism Canada Foundation, 2011). There are a number of disorders encompassed by ASD such as autism, Asperger's disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (Law, 2006). ASD is a complex disorder as there are varying degrees of "severity, intelligence and adaptability" (Boesveld, 2011). Therefore it is difficult to group all individuals with ASD into one general classification. ASD is considered to be a developmental disability (Hendricks, 2010). Individuals with Asperger's syndrome have relatively normal language skills (Hillier, et al., 2007) but they "may not understand the subtleties of language, such as irony and humor, or they may not understand the give-and-take nature of a conversation" (Autism Society, n.d.).

When Kanner's paper was published the thought was that autism was a rare condition affecting 2-4 per 10,000 children (Wing & Potter, 2002). Although Canada does not have a formal monitoring system in place to determine the prevalence of ASD in the country, Autism Society Canada estimates there are approximately two hundred thousand individuals with autism in the country (Tremonti, 2013). The United States has found that the prevalence of ASD is now 1 in 88 (Autism Society Canada, 2012). The increase in the prevalence of ASD is outside the scope of this paper, but it is important to realize the increase in the number of individuals with ASD as this will impact society and the labour force.

Autism is normally defined by negative characteristics and deficits (Mottron, 2011). Laurent Mottron, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Montreal and the director of the autism program at the Hospital Rivères-des-Prairies, referenced different studies which have shown how individuals with autism outperform other people in a variety of tasks such as “perception tasks, such as spotting a pattern in a distracting environment” (Mottron, 2011, p. 34) as well as “auditory tasks (such as discriminating sound pitches), detecting visual structures and mentally manipulating complex three-dimensional shapes” (Mottron, 2011, p. 34). Although each person with ASD has slightly different characteristics, many individuals have similar traits such as intense focus, attention to detail, truthfulness, reliability, and an affinity for repetitive tasks (Hendricks, 2010; Wareham & Sonne, 2008). It is important to learn more about autism and focus on the strengths these people have rather than what others may perceive as weaknesses when compared to their neurological typical peers.

4.2 Organizational culture

Each organization is unique as is its culture. “Organizational culture refers to the complex set of beliefs, assumptions, values, attitudes, expectations and norms held and shared by its members (management and employees) and exhibited in artifacts and behaviours” (Lam, 2010, p. 11). Changes in society are being reflected in the changes in organizational cultures, such as creating a culture which is accepting of a diverse group of individuals. Organizational culture and leadership are related (Lam, 2010). Leaders of an organization demonstrate what is important, as well as what behaviours are expected and acceptable (Lam, 2010). It can be very important for leaders to create a work environment that is accepting of diversity and has “an atmosphere of respect and caring” (Gilbride, Stensrud, Vandergoot, & Golden, 2003). It is important for leaders in an organization to be sincere as they move to change the attitudes of the organization and its culture. Leaders must “walk the talk” and be consistent with their actions and messages to all staff members to ensure the right message and the same message is being delivered constantly throughout the organization.

Susanne M. Bruyère of Cornell University conducted research to “examine employer practices in response to the employment provisions (Bruyère, 2000) of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and related civil rights legislation” (Bruyère, 2000, p. 6). Respondents of the surveys were asked to rate the effectiveness of six barriers to employment and advancement (Bruyère, 2000). For both the private and federal sectors respondents, 81% and 90% respectively, the most effective way to reduce barriers to employment was having “visible top-management commitment” (Bruyère, 2000, p. 15). The work of Bruyère demonstrated “that a substantial share of employers believe that employers, supervisor, and co-worker attitudes are a significant problem” (Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2005, p. 9). These results demonstrate how important leadership is to organizational culture and creating a work environment that is accepting of diversity.

Leadership is very important to an organization’s culture; however, the attitudes of managers and co-workers and their treatment of employees with disabilities may have a profound impact on the organization’s culture. Top management may promote the hiring of individuals with disabilities but “negative attitudes from supervisors and co-

workers affect the socialization of new employees with disabilities, and limit their ability to become fully accepted and well functioning insiders. If employees with disabilities remain marginalized, this limits their job performance and opportunities for training and advancement” (Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2005, p. 10). The attitudes and behaviours of supervisors and co-workers are very important to creating a culture of inclusiveness and diversity.

One of the greatest obstacles a person with a disability faces when seeing employment is the attitude of an employer. Unfortunately some “employers, like others in the general public hold unfavourable stereotypes of people with disabilities that result in discriminatory hiring practices regardless the merit of a candidate with a disability” (Weinkauf, 2010, p. 5). A second concept of a barrier to employment for people with disabilities was that of ambivalence amplification, “that disability and merit interact in a more complex way. This perspective suggests that even though employers support the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace, employers hold not only positive attitudes towards people with disabilities but also unconscious negative attitudes” (Weinkauf, 2010, p. 6). Weinkauf referred to C. J. Taylor’s work describing the ambivalence amplification theory as “positive actions performed by a person with a disability led members of the general public to deny their negative feelings towards people with disabilities and respond in disproportionately positive ways, and negative actions from a person with a disability led people to deny their positive feelings towards people with disabilities and react in disproportionately negative and discriminatory ways” (Weinkauf, 2010, p. 7). Both concepts may suggest that an employer may be discriminating against an individual with a disability (Weinkauf, 2010).

Weinkauf’s research found that some employers may have a positive attitude about people with disabilities but that their attitudes “have not translated into positive hiring practices” (Weinkauf, 2010, p. 24). Weinkauf found other employers were “willing to hire people with disabilities, but only those with particular disabilities” (Weinkauf, 2010, p. 24). His research found many employers were “more willing to hire people with minor physical disabilities than people with more visible physical disabilities and being more willing to hire people with physical disabilities before people with intellectual or mental health disabilities” (Weinkauf, 2010, p. 24). The attitudes of managers can have an impact on the attitudes of others within an organization.

An organization’s culture can benefit when there is a diverse group of people working for the organization. Organizational culture can be “deeply rooted and subjective like people’s collective value system (i.e., what they think is right, good, useful, normal, important, etc.)” (Lam, 2010, p. 11). When employees and managers believe that hiring a diverse group of people, including people with disabilities, is the right thing to do and a normal thing to do, people with disabilities may find they fit in better with such an organization. As the prevalence of autism continues to increase, many people will either know someone or perhaps is related to someone who has autism. People who are aware of autism or have a relative with autism may be more open towards people with autism (Nevill & White, 2011). As the behaviours and attitudes of individuals change, so may an organization’s culture to one of inclusiveness.

4.3 Corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility, although not a new concept in the corporate world, has received a great deal of media coverage over the past few years. It has been defined as “the way a corporation achieves a balance among its economic, social, and environmental responsibilities in its operations so as to address shareholder and other stakeholder expectations” (Sexty, 2011, p. 139). Many organizations believe they have a responsibility to various stakeholders, both internal and external. How external stakeholders view an organization and its corporate social responsibility policies can have an impact on an organization’s bottom line. Consumers have a variety of choices in the marketplace so many look for responsible corporations which have similar values. Corporate social responsibility can include a variety of policies and practices, including fair employment practices (Markel & Barclay, 2009). When organizations are receptive to hiring people with disabilities and doing more than the minimum required under the law, this can enhance the public’s perception of the organization (Markel & Barclay, 2009) as well as increase the image of the organization internally.

Siperstein, Romano, Mohler and Parker conducted survey of the attitudes of consumers towards companies which hire people with disabilities (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006). Siperstein et al. pointed out that many consumers think of physical limitations when they think of a disability rather than intellectual impairments (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006). The respondents of the survey had positive responses to companies that were socially responsible (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006). Their study also found that the respondents “had strong positive beliefs about the value and benefits of hiring people with disabilities” (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006, p. 6). The study found that “almost all of the public agreed that they would prefer to give their business to companies that hire people with disabilities” (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006, p. 6). IBM is one organization whose shared values include diversity of its workforce. IBM feels “the marketplace demands it, and it’s what we believe – and have always believed – is the right thing to do” (Childs Jr., 2005, p. 76). Doing the right thing can go a long way in the eyes of an organization’s stakeholders. Businesses need to make money, however there is the belief that they should be able to make a profit in a socially ethical way.

Partnerships can be very important in business and can also send messages to an organization’s customers. When an organization has a diverse workforce and it has partnerships with other organizations and businesses which have diverse workforces, “companies send a clear public message about the depth of their diversity and inclusions programs” (“More Than Reasonable”, 2012, p. 55). Organizations can learn from their partners’ different ways to implement programs and support employees with disabilities in the workplace.

Corporate social responsibility is an important part of business. An organization’s values, culture, decision making, strategy and reporting are all affected by its corporate social responsibility policies and practices (Sexty, 2011). Some stakeholders believe an organization’s social responsibility role is a reflection of an organization’s management (Sexty, 2011). As governments are reducing funding for some social programs, some individuals believe that corporations have the ability and responsibility to address some

of the social issues gaps (Sexty, 2011). Therefore managers need to be aware of the organization's social responsibilities as well as the financial matters in order to demonstrate to internal and external shareholders that they are managing the organization effectively.

4.4 Inclusiveness and Diversity

Diversity and inclusiveness may be similar practices in an organization. When an organization works to create a diverse culture it does so by trying to create a work environment which is understanding, has a vision of inclusiveness, and perhaps, looks at management a little differently than it has in the past (Lam, 2010). When an organization has a vision to include everyone, the organization must be one which promotes and practices respect for all individuals, appreciates differences, ensures everyone has a voice which is heard, and everyone has equal opportunities and rights (Lam, 2010).

Helen Lam wrote about three approaches to workplace diversity, assimilation, differentiation and integration (Lam, 2010). Lam referred to the assimilation approach where "individuals with a different background are expected to conform to the general norm of the majority" (Lam, 2010, p. 187). The differentiation approach is where "individuals are valued because they can add constructively to the skill base of the organization. Different perspectives enrich decisions and enhance productivity and performance" (Lam, 2010, p. 187). Lastly, integration is where "the merits of both the other two approaches are incorporated; that is, equal opportunities are promoted, individual differences are respected and valued, and diversity is appreciated and properly managed" (Lam, 2010, p. 187). This last approach requires the organizational culture to be one of inclusion. If an organization can manage its diversity effectively, it may be able to gain a competitive advantage over its competitors (Lam, 2010). "Integration is critical in the workplace, say experts, where individuals with special needs can gain confidence, exert independence and improve their quality of life" (Owens, 2010). The assimilation approach may not be successful when there are employees with different abilities. Individuals with ASD may not be able to conform to the majority and it may be difficult for them to "'read' the social climate and then be able to adjust to it" (Chappel & Somers, 2010, p. 122). Employees without a disability may not approve of the differentiation approach as they may feel some employees are getting special treatment and that they are being discriminated because of the different treatments (Lam, 2010). Finding the right balance and using the strengths of each individual may be beneficial to an organization. Educating managers and other employees is an important step to creating an inclusive culture.

Inclusiveness does not mean that everyone is the same. Trevor Wilson, one of Canada's leading authorities on diversity, spoke about the differences between diversity and equality. "In an organizational environment, equality has traditionally equalled sameness. As a core corporate value, equality means treating everyone equally regardless of differences. The problem is that people *do* have fundamental differences, which traditional concepts of equality ignore" (Hayes, 1999, p. 45). Creating a community within the organization and having fair employment systems, such as

promotion opportunities, (Hayes, 1999) can help an organization include all employees and all employees may feel as though there are truly included.

Gaining a competitive advantage is important for a business. Diversity management can help an organization gain a competitive advantage (Lam, 2010). Some advantages include cost savings, resource acquisition, marketing, creativity, problem-solving and system flexibility (Lam, 2010). "Organizations successful in managing diversity are able to reduce turnover, absenteeism, and overtime costs because employees are more satisfied and productive in such environments" (Lam, 2010, p. 188). When organizations handle diversity properly they may also decrease the risk of discrimination lawsuits which can be quite costly to an organization. A second advantage is resource acquisition. Diverse work environments are more attractive to a diverse group of people, including women and minority groups (Lam, 2010). In competitive labour markets, organizations may need an advantage in order to attract and retain qualified individuals. A third advantage of a diverse workforce is marketing (Lam, 2010). Organizations with a diverse workforce are able to understand the wants and needs of their diverse customers.

Innovation and creativity are important for many organizations. Quite often a diverse workforce can increase the creativity of an organization (Lam, 2010). Many people with disabilities are innovative in their daily lives as they need to come up with new ways to do things differently than people without disabilities. The innovative and creative qualities of people with disabilities may be an advantage to an organization. Along the same lines as innovation, problem-solving may be one of the skills people with disabilities and other diverse backgrounds bring to an organization (Lam, 2010). As they may problem-solve on a daily basis, people with disabilities may be able to provide a different perspective to a problem and its solution. Organizations need to be flexible in order to respond to external changes, such as demand in the market, as well as internal changes. When organizations are able to manage diversity they may also be able to handle any changes that present themselves to the organization (Lam, 2010). These examples demonstrate how a diverse workforce can help an organization gain a competitive advantage.

IBM's vice president of global workforce diversity, J. T. Childs Jr., believes that workforce diversity is necessary for any organization which wants to be successful (Childs Jr., 2005). Childs' article stresses the importance of leadership when discussing workforce diversity. "Leaders must help all people involved with their business understand that workforce diversity can be the bridge between the workplace and the marketplace. Passion is contagious, and when combined with leadership, the equation is very effective" (Childs Jr., 2005, pp. 74-75). IBM is committed to creating a diversified workforce and it feels that diversity is as important as its delivery of its technologies (Childs Jr., 2005). IBM is one example of a very large organization which truly believes in inclusiveness and diversity.

Many organizations understand the benefits of having a diverse workforce. Diversity in the workplace can include hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities. In the article, "More Than Reasonable", companies discussed how they have been creating "a workforce culture in which every employee's talents can be best leveraged toward

overall success" ("More Than Reasonable", 2012, p. 52). These organizations focus on recruitment, hiring policies, training, partnerships, and advancements for employees with disabilities ("More Than Reasonable", 2012). Some of the organizations mentioned in the article include, KPMG, OfficeMax, Qualcomm, Boeing, and Walmart. Not only do these companies hire individuals with disabilities, many of them also have relationships with suppliers who also have successful diversity programs ("More Than Reasonable", 2012). A survey by the Society for Human Resource Management revealed that "61 percent of 662 HR professionals responding said their organizations now include disabilities in their diversity and inclusion plans. But only 47 percent said their organizations actively recruit people with disabilities, and even fewer – 40 percent – said senior managers demonstrate a strong commitment to do so" (Meinert, 2012). Unfortunately there is still a disconnect between what organizations say they are going to do and what they actually do with respect to hiring people with disabilities.

In order to be included in an organization, individuals should feel comfortable in their workplace. Sensitivity training may be necessary in the workplace in order to educate managers and coworkers. "Sensitivity training can be instrumental in creating a professional climate in which every employee, including those with disabilities, feels comfortable offering ideas and voicing opinions" ("More Than Reasonable", 2012, p. 54). An inclusive work environment will exist when there is trust, respect, people have equal rights and opportunities, and there is open and honest communication (Lam, 2010). Having an inclusive work environment does not mean that everyone is treated the same, but that everyone is included in the work environment.

4.5 Accommodations

"Obviously, because of my disability, I need assistance. But I have always tried to overcome the limitations of my condition and lead as full a life as possible. I have traveled the world, from the Antarctic to zero gravity." ~ Stephen Hawking (Hawking, n.d.)

The *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Employment Equity Act* in Canada refer to accommodations for individuals. "Reasonable accommodations are adjustments to a job, a workplace, or work process that reduce physical and social barriers to job performance to enable individuals with disabilities to realize equal opportunity in the competitive labor market" (Balsler, 2007, p. 656). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 requires most employers to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities, as long as the providing the accommodations do not create a hardship for the employer (Balsler, 2007). "The federal *Canadian Human Rights Act* identifies only cost and health and safety. To be considered undue hardship, financial costs must be so great as to alter the essential nature of the enterprise or affect its viability. And, the availability of outside funding, (e.g., government programmes for retrofitting buildings,) must be considered" (Hatfield, 2005, p. 25). Many accommodations are not very expensive; the majority cost under \$500 (Hatfield, 2005) and therefore would not cause hardship, financial or otherwise, for an employer.

As Balsler pointed out in her work, different individuals with different disabilities require different accommodations (Balsler, 2007). "Even within a group of individuals with the

same type of disability, individuals may need different accommodations” (Balsler, 2007, p. 658). Once an employee requests an accommodation, the employer may get information from disability experts to help with the accommodation. The employer should involve the person with the disability as this person knows what barriers exist in the workplace and what they need in order to perform their job duties (Balsler, 2007). As each workplace and each employee with a disability is different, it is difficult to generalize the accommodations needed in the workplace for people with disabilities. Individuals with ASD may require accommodations, but it is difficult to predict what accommodations may be needed due to the differences in severity of ASD.

Barbara Judy, R.N., project manager with Job Accommodation Network defined an accommodation as “a change that can be made to make the job easier for the worker” (Judy in Weinstock, 1992, p. 42). Judy also explained that having accommodations in the work place the employer is not necessarily lowering their standards (Weinstock, 1992). Hiring qualified, skilled individuals who may require an accommodation, be it a desk that is higher to fit a wheelchair or allowing an employee to work from home, does not lessen the quality of the work of the employee or the organization. It is also important for coworkers to understand that the accommodation can influence how everyone’s work is done (Colella, 2001). Managers and supervisors may worry that accommodations may appear to be unfair to the employees without the accommodations. There may be a decrease in morale or productivity if some of the employees see the accommodation as unfair (Colella, 2001). Although employers may be obligated under the law to provide accommodations for employees with disabilities, it is important that they consider how the other employees will react to the accommodation.

Accommodations can also be made in unionized work environments. Employers and unions in Canada should be aware that human rights legislation “can trump the collective agreement” (Hatfield, 2005, p. 27). In the province of Alberta, “Unions or union contracts cannot prohibit an accommodation that is considered reasonable, even if that accommodation contravenes a collective bargaining agreement” (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2012). If an accommodation requires a violation of a collective agreement, this may not necessarily mean there is undue hardship, yet if there are objections from other workers this could be considered undue hardship (Hatfield, 2005). Seniority can also have an impact on accommodating an employee as, “incumbents cannot be removed from their current job to accommodate someone” (Hatfield, 2005, p. 29). Although the employer is responsible for the accommodation, unions can also share the responsibility (Hatfield, 2005). Unions have the duty to represent all of their members. Hatfield suggests that unions may want “to negotiate contract provisions that foster inclusive and barrier-free workplaces” (Hatfield, 2005, p. 31). When the provisions are in the collective agreement, this should reduce problems, including “the likelihood that individuals who require accommodation will be scapegoated, and reduces the chance of other workers resenting the “special treatment” extended to people who require accommodation” (Hatfield, 2005, p. 31). Education of disabilities and accommodations is important for employers and their managers, as well as unions and their members.

Even before an employee with a disability is hired, an organization may need to make an accommodation for a potential employee during the interview and selection process. Organizations, with the assistance of placement agencies and/or supported employment professionals, can prepare a selection process which can accommodate a variety of people. Many employers are not familiar with accommodations which can be used during the interview process (Bruyère, 2000). Occasionally individuals with disabilities cannot get past the interview stage when employers see the disability rather than the person and their abilities.

Employers may want to create a culture of inclusiveness but are worried about the accommodations they may need to make if they were to hire an individual with ASD. There is a fear that accommodations are difficult and expensive to implement. Accommodations such as flextime, telecommuting, and ergonomic seating are becoming part of the normal work arrangements in some organizations (Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, 2013). Accommodations are not made only for employees but also for members of the public, a business's customers. For example, a fire alarm system uses not only a noise to alert customers and staff of a fire, but the system will also have a flashing light to alert those with hearing impairments. Employers may not realize that they are making accommodations when they install new systems or build new buildings due to new codes in construction. Making other accommodations for employees with ASD can be quite easy and other employees may also benefit.

When thinking of barrier to access we tend to think of physical barriers, such as stairs which a person in a wheelchair cannot climb. However, there are a number of other barriers which individuals with ASD may face when entering the workforce. Some individuals with ASD are sensitive to different stimuli, such as fluorescent lights, noise, smells, and some individuals have a difficult time communicating. "Fluorescent lights 'cycle on and off 60 times per second [which can feel] like sitting in a room with a strobe light" (Davidson, 2010) for some people with ASD. Some individuals may benefit from changes to lighting in the area they work in. What may be a background noise for a neurological typical person may be disturbing to an individual with ASD (Davidson, 2010). Accommodations such as noise cancelling earphones may be helpful. Many office spaces are now scent free areas due to allergies of employees and clients. Some individuals with ASD may have a heightened sense of smell and the scent free policies will make the workplace a little more comfortable. Other individuals with ASD may have difficulties when communicating with others. The use of dry-erase boards, Internet chat rooms or pens and paper to communicate with coworkers and managers are simple solutions to help the employees with ASD interact with others without having to use the spoken word (Davidson, 2010; Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). Mobile phones are also an excellent method for people with autism to communicate with others. In their research, Daley, Lawson and van der Zee found that individuals with autism "reported that they are more likely to use text messages to contact people" (Daley, Lawson, & van der Zee, 2009). These are a few examples of some simple accommodations that can be done in the work place to assist different employees.

Susan Donovan interviewed Thorkil Sonne, the founder of Specialisterne, for Harvard Business Review. In the interview Sonne spoke about how managers and coworkers need to be educated about autism. Many people with autism “have trouble working in teams and understanding social cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. You have to be precise and direct with them, be very specific about your expectations and avoid sarcasm and nonverbal communication” (Sonne in Donovan, 2008, p. 32). Clients of the software testing company Specialisterne have found that by learning to communicate clearly and directly with people with autism, they are better able to communicate with their own staff members (Sonne in Donovan, 2008, p. 32). By making these few adjustments the employer can help reduce some of the stress the employee with autism feels in the workplace.

Many of these accommodations are inexpensive and easy to implement. Many employees who are not on the autism spectrum may also benefit from some of these accommodations. Each employee, whether they have a disability or not, is a unique individual and managers need to understand how to manage a variety of different people. Creating an accommodation for an employee can help the employee perform their job duties easier and therefore they should be able to be more productive.

4.6 Exploitation and tokenism

All for-profit organizations are worried about their bottom lines. If they do not make a profit it is difficult for them to continue their business, so often if they are unable to increase their revenues they must look at reducing their expenses in order to remain profitable. When an organization is hiring a diverse group of people they need to be aware of how the employees are being treated and how they are being compensated and to follow employment equity laws.

One software and design firm in Los Angeles traditionally outsourced its software testing overseas to workers in India (Bennett, 2012). The company’s co-founder Chad Hahn was thinking of “outsourcing to the developmentally disabled rather than the developing world” (Bennett, 2012). Hahn planned to make changes in the work environment to accommodate those with ASD. Although Hahn was willing to make these accommodations, he was not planning on paying the employee the same as what he was paying the software testers in India (Bennett, 2012). Hahn was paying the Indian software testers approximately \$25 per hour and he would be paying the employees with autism \$15 to \$20 per hour. In his interview with Drake Bennett, Hahn mentions “people with autism don’t have a lot of alternatives – when they do find work, it’s usually bagging groceries or sweeping hospital floors at the minimum wage” (Bennett, 2012). When Hahn was asked if he felt he would be exploiting the people with disabilities by not paying them the same rate for the same work, Hahn did not think so. He was running a for-profit company and “if paying less makes the company able to hire the developmentally disabled in the first place, he doesn’t see a problem with it” (Bennett, 2012). Hahn also stated that he has had parents of some of the employees with autism comment “This is a way for my child to make more money than they would have made otherwise, and allow them to be more independent” (Bennett, 2012).

Wilton and Schuer conducted a study of people with disabilities and the regional labour market of Hamilton, Ontario (Wilton & Schuer, 2006). One theme that emerged in their research was termed exploitation (Wilton & Schuer, 2006). Wilton and Shuler found “a number of respondents explicitly identified disabled people as cheap, controllable labour, likely to be grateful for work” (Wilton & Schuer, 2006, p. 191). Some of the comments made by the respondents appeared to be positive, but could also be viewed as a negative that the employees with disabilities are good employees because they do not ask a lot of questions and they do not have any confrontations with clients (Wilton & Schuer, 2006). In some industries, such as cleaning services, some employees with disabilities may be at a disadvantage with respect to earning wages. If the employee is paid for an hour of work yet the employee is at a client’s home and works for more than one hour, they will not be paid for any time over the one hour (Wilton & Schuer, 2006). In this situation all employees including those without a disability had “to finish the work on their own time without pay” (Wilton & Schuer, 2006, p. 192). The concern here is that some employers are looking for employees who are controllable and loyal (Wilton & Schuer, 2006). This type of work environment is not one of equity and some employers are taking advantage of their employees with disabilities.

Organizations should also be sincere when they are creating an inclusive and diverse workforce. Being an equal opportunity employer is about more than saying you hired someone with a disability. Individuals with ASD understand the difference between tokening and belonging (Boesveld, 2011). Quite often people with disabilities feel that they are “in but not of their local community” (Milner & Kelly, 2009, p. 48). Having people with disabilities join the organization does not mean they must become like everyone else. It is important for individuals without ASD to understand those with ASD, similar to the way individuals with ASD must learn to understand and interact with those who are not on the spectrum (Davidson, 2010).

4.7 Organizations integrating employees with ASD into the workforce

There are a number of organizations in different industries that are benefiting from hiring individuals with ASD. It is important to remember that there is not one specific type of job for people with autism, the same as there is not one specific type of job for men or for women. Each person is different, each business is different, and each workplace environment is different. Specialisterne, Walgreens, and The Home Depot are just a few examples for businesses and academic science is one example of an industry where individuals with autism have been able to successfully join the workforce.

Specialisterne is a software-testing firm based in Copenhagen (Donovan, 2008). Software engineer Thorkil Sonne, founded Specialisterne, which is Danish for “The Specialists” (Wareham & Sonne, 2008, p. 12), after his son was diagnosed with autism. Software testing is an extremely important part of software development. Sonne knew from experience that software testing can be specialized. Software programming and testing it are two very distinct jobs which require different skills. Sonne noted that “programmers, prefer to work on new, uniquely challenging problems” (Wareham & Sonne, 2008, p. 14) whereas “testing involves checking and rechecking the same routine outcomes every time a new version of the software appears” (Wareham & Sonne, 2008, pp. 14-15). It can be difficult for programmers to catch mistakes in the

code they have written; similar to when a writer proofreads his or her own work it can be difficult to find errors (Wareham & Sonne, 2008). For many individuals with ASD, their intense focus, attention to detail and aptness for repetitive tasks can help quite helpful when testing software.

Specialisterne's first client was Sonne's former employer. Sonne noted that sub-contracting software testing was new for the client and the fact that the testers had ASD made it a little stranger for the client (Wareham & Sonne, 2008). Sonne did not want the client to think of the work as charity work. Sonne and Specialisterne were going to offer excellent service and pay the employees a competitive wage (Wareham & Sonne, 2008). Specialisterne has been successful over the years and some of its clients include Microsoft and Oracle (Wareham & Sonne, 2008).

Specialisterne's employees, who are consultants, normally work at the client's site (Donovan, 2008). In an interview with Susan Donovan, Thorkil Sonne talked about the relationship between Specialisterne's consultants and the company's clients (Donovan, 2008) Sonne noted that the clients normally provide a contact person, "someone who's good with special people" (Donovan, 2008, p. 32) and Specialisterne provides an introduction to autism and Specialisterne's culture before the consultants begin work for the client. Specialisterne will send a team of two or three testers as well as a team manager who does not have ASD to a client's workplace in order to complete the work (Wareham & Sonne, 2008). The team manager is the one who will liaise with the rest of the client's organization and "insulate the testers" when necessary (Wareham & Sonne, 2008). Specialisterne is able to help individuals with autism find the role which is suited for them and this is part of the company's normal culture.

Walgreens is a large American retail pharmacy chain. While planning the construction of a new distribution centre, one of the senior executives who is a parent of an adult son with a disability, realized there was an opportunity waiting to happen. "The goal from the start was to create an integrated work environment in which employees with and without disabilities would work side by side, doing the same jobs for the same pay, and being held to the same standards" (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012, p. 62). The new 670,000 square foot distribution centre located in Anderson, South Carolina, opened in 2006 and was operating at full capacity by 2008 (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). This distribution centre employs approximately 550 to 600 people, of whom 35 percent to 40 percent of the workforce has a disability (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012).

Walgreens gathers large amounts of data to analyze the efficiencies of its different distribution centres. There were many concerns about hiring people with disabilities, such as a decrease in productivity, turnover rates, and a possible increase in incidents and accidents. The data gathered over the years at the different distribution centres, including the one in Anderson, South Carolina, has been able to disprove some of the concerns about a diverse workforce. Productivity rates were not that different between locations and in ten locations employees with a disability were more productive than the employees without a disability (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). The turnover rate for employees with disabilities was lower than those without (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). Lower turnover rates help organization keep costs down as higher turnover rates mean organizations must spend more money training new employees. In their

report, *Rethinking disAbility in the Private Sector*, the Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities demonstrated the financial benefits of reduced turnover (Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, 2013). The Panel cited the Corporate Leadership Council which had derived a formula to calculate the cost of hiring and training new employees as well as the cost of an internal transfer (Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, 2013). The Corporate Leadership Council determined the cost-per-hire of five different categories of employees: “Executive: \$21,686; Mid-level: \$8,291; Entry level college: \$9,798; Entry level non-college: \$5,436; Internal: \$3,168” (Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, 2013, p. 16). If organizations can reduce the number of turnovers and new hires each year there can be substantial cost savings for the organization.

Walgreens also found that workers’ compensation claims were lower for employees with disabilities than those without (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). Walgreens did find there were more reports of less serious injuries filed by the employees who had disabilities. “The team believes this is because these employees tend to follow the rules exactly as stated and report any injury, no matter how minor. This includes superficial cuts and scratches, and minor aches and pains associated with ergonomic exposures from job duties” (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012, p. 68). The data gathered over the years at the different distribution centres, including the one in Anderson, South Carolina, has been able to disprove some of the concerns about a diverse workforce.

The Home Depot is another large employer which promotes diversity and inclusion. One of The Home Depot’s eight core values is “Respect for all people” (Homer TLC, Inc., 2012). The Home Depot has seven different Associate Resource Groups (ARGs), one of which, Limitless, is a group for associates with disabilities and care givers (The Home Depot, n.d.). The Home Depot also works with local organizations to acquire talent. Ken’s Krew is “a nonprofit that provides job training and placement for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities” (The Home Depot, n.d., p. 13). Since being founded in 1997, Ken’s Krew has trained and placed more than 280 people in jobs (Ken’s Krew, n.d.). The goal of Ken’s Krew (was originally Ken’s Kids Inc. when it was formed in 1997) “is to help these individuals both sustain employment and become productive, successful members of society” (Owens, 2010). The Home Depot understands the importance of diversity and inclusion as it provides financial support in the form of grants to Ken’s Krew and then benefits by hiring the people trained by the program.

Academic science may be an industry well suited for individuals with ASD. Dr. Simon Baron-Cohen is a Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the University of Cambridge (Autism Research Centre, 2013). Dr. Baron-Cohen and others in the Department of Experimental Psychology and Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, have found in “single-case studies of very high-achieving mathematicians, physicists, and computer scientists with AS show that this condition need not be any obstacle to achieving the highest levels in these field” (Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Skinner, Martin, & Clubley, 2001, p. 14).

Dr. Laurent Mottron has worked with eight people with autism including four research assistants, three students and one researcher (Mottron, 2011). Dr. Mottron feels many individuals with autism may be suited for academic science: “From a young age, they may be interested in information and structures, such as numbers, letters, mechanisms and geometrical patterns – the basis of scientific thinking” (Mottron, 2011, p. 35). Michelle Dawson joined Dr. Mottron’s lab his research assistant. Ms. Dawson has shown him “that autism, when combined with extreme intelligence and an interest in science, can be an incredible boon to a research lab” (Mottron, 2011, p. 34). Mottron feels that people with autism’s “intense focus can lead them to become self-taught experts in scientific topics” (Mottron, 2011, p. 35). Dr. Mottron has found many of the strengths of people with autism can be helpful in research including their ability to process large amounts of perceptual information, their exceptional memories means people with autism are less likely to misremember data, and their ability to spot recurring patterns in large amounts of data (Mottron, 2011). The autistic brain and the neurotypical brain may be able to work well together in a research lab. The world of academia may be another industry for some individuals with ASD to find successful careers.

It is important for employers not to stereotype individuals with ASD or other disabilities. Not every job is suitable for every person due to their interests and strengths, regardless of whether they have a disability or not. Employers seek to hire an individual with the proper qualifications for any position they have within the organization. Underemployment continues to exist for young adults with ASD (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Employers need to stay focused on the individual rather than the disability.

4.8 Support and assistance for organizations hiring individuals with ASD

There are numerous nonprofit organizations and government ministries which can assist and support employers and employees with ASD. Supported employment programs and financial assistance are two examples of ways employers can find support to hire people with disabilities.

Supported employment is defined as “Real work in integrated work settings with ongoing support provided by an agency with expertise in finding employment for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market” (Research Autism, 2013). A quick Google search of “Canadian supported employment programs for Autism” resulted in a list of different programs in different provinces, usually associated with Autism Society Canada. Many agencies are also partners with either the federal or a provincial government. Many of the organizations and agencies work with a variety of differently abled people, not only individuals with ASD. Where a business is located may also determine the services available to assist them in hiring and training an individual with ASD or other disability. Large urban centres are more likely to have access to a variety of organizations and associations with staff members who have the training and skills needed to coach the individual with ASD.

Supported employment programs can be beneficial for both the employer and the employee with ASD. Howlin, Alcock and Burkin did a follow-up study of a specialist supported employment service in the United Kingdom for individuals with autism entitled

Prospects (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005). Howlin et al. found that the program was successful in helping individuals retain employment. Thirteen of the nineteen individuals who had found employment through Prospects remained in permanent jobs (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005). The program's employers included "large private companies...small to medium enterprises...charities, and government and public sector companies" (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005, p. 538). A variety of types of employment were also found for the participants of Prospects including administrative, technical, computer, catering, cleaning and factory work (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005). Many of the individuals who had found employment were satisfied with their job, for some their confidence increased and there was also an increase in the number of individuals living independently (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005). Managers who participated in Prospects found the program helped them understand autism and Asperger's syndrome better (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005). Many of the managers found the employment consultant to be quite helpful as well as the manual the consultant designed for the employee on how to perform tasks (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005). Supported employment programs may be quite beneficial to employers and employees.

Networking is an important part in the job seeking process. Many individuals with disabilities may not have employment networks (Rotary 7010 Mentorship Project for Job Seekers with Disabilities, 2011). Rotarians in Rotary District 7010, one district of Rotary International covering North Eastern Ontario and North Western Quebec, "have developed an employment mentorship program specifically for persons with disabilities to enhance potential employment relationships and networks" (Rotary 7010 Mentorship Project for Job Seekers with Disabilities, 2011). "This unique mentorship pilot project is a collaborative program between Rotary District 7010, Employment Ontario (Government of Ontario) and the University of Washington (Seattle) DO-IT Program" (Rotary 7010 Mentorship Project for Job Seekers with Disabilities, 2011). The project is partially funded by the Government of Canada (Rotary 7010 Mentorship Project for Job Seekers with Disabilities, 2011). The project "encourages workers, business leaders, and professionals to help people with disabilities find work by providing advice and connections to business networks for job creation" (Rotary 7010 Mentorship Project for Job Seekers with Disabilities, 2011). The program works by matching mentors with job seekers in their community. The mentor and protégé receive support from "project staff to guide and coordinate the mentorship program" (Rotary 7010 Mentorship Project for Job Seekers with Disabilities, 2011). The Rotary District 7010 Mentorship page has a link to several community and disability services (Rotary 7010 Mentorship Project for Job Seekers with Disabilities, 2011). Some of the supports and services available to help people with disabilities find employment include *Ability Learning Network*, *Community Living*, *Human Resources and Skills Development Canada*, *Learning Disability Associations Ontario*, and *WORKink* as well as links to different associations, including *Autism Ontario*. This is one way employers can be matched up with potential employees.

JOIN is another organization which assists jobs seekers as well as employers. JOIN assists "job seekers with disabilities to find and maintain work and assist employers to recruit qualified candidates to meet their hiring needs and make their workplaces more accessible" (JOIN, n.d). Many of the services provided by JOIN are helpful for

employers who have not had many employees with disabilities in their workplace. Services such as interviewing tips for interviewing people with disabilities, workshops on specific disabilities, access to coaches for people with disabilities as well as many others, allows the employers to benefit from the knowledge of JOIN and its professional staff members (JOIN, n.d.). Organizations such as JOIN are helpful when an employer is looking for assistance to hire people with disabilities.

When an employee or potential employee has disclosed their disability, employers may not know exactly where to find the support they need in order to support their employees. Associations such as CNIB, Canadian Hearing Society (CHS), and Ontario Partnership for Adults with Asperger's and Autism can provide employers with valuable information. Employers can usually find links or phone numbers to the associations on the different web pages. The CNIB's For Employers web page has a phone number listed for employers to contact people at the CNIB who can provide more information about "supporting employees who are blind or partially sighted" (CNIB, 2012). The CHS has a web page dedicated to Workplace Accessibility (The Canadian Hearing Society (CHS), 2013). A quick search on the internet can help an employer find an association which can help them provide a barrier free workplace, as well as provide support and accommodations to their employees.

4.9 Challenges for employers

There are numerous benefits to employers who hire people with ASD and other disabilities. However, many employers have concerns about hiring people with disabilities. Education and gaining experience with employees with disabilities will help employers face and overcome any challenges they have when looking to hire people with disabilities.

One major concern some employers have when hiring people with disabilities is safety (Shier, Graham, & Jones, 2009). Walgreens' Anderson distribution centre allowed hearing-impaired and deaf team members to drive the lift trucks (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). There was some concern at first as the organization did not have any external research to help them determine if allowing the hearing-impaired team members to drive the lift trucks would be a safety issue (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). The training, communicating and coaching methods were adapted to suit all employees who wanted to train to become lift-truck drivers (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). Walgreens gathered data on the drivers of the lift trucks for team members with and without a disability. Walgreens "determined that the employee population who had disclosed disabilities (team member with disability population, or TMWD, in Walgreens parlance) had a significantly lower rate of lift-truck incidents than the rest of the DC's lift driving populations" (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012, p. 67). Walgreens did further research and determined that "the deaf-hearing impaired group had an incident frequency that was less than 50% of the remaining population" (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012, p. 67). The hypothesis of the Walgreens' management team is that the deaf drivers are able to concentrate on the task at hand and are not distracted by other noises around them and therefore this improves their safety performance (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). When an employer is willing to take the time to look at how

to train different employees to perform different tasks, they can reduce their concerns about safety in the workplace.

Kaye, Jans and Jones conducted a study to determine why employers do not hire and retain employees with disabilities (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). Kaye and his colleagues used “indirect or structured projective questioning, a technique ...found to be effective in reducing social desirability bias” (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011, p. 528). Kaye et al. asked survey respondents to answer questions about employers in general, not their organizations’ specifically (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). The top three reasons why respondents thought employers do not hire people with disabilities were:

1. “They are worried about the *cost of providing reasonable accommodations* so that workers with disabilities can do their jobs” (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011, p. 529)
2. “They *don’t know how to handle the needs* of a worker with a disability on the job” (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011, p. 529)
3. “They are afraid they *won’t be able to discipline or fire* a worker with a disability for poor performance, because of potential lawsuits” (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011, p. 529)

The top three reasons why respondents thought employers did not retain people with disabilities were:

1. “They *don’t know how to handle the needs* of a worker with a disability on the job” (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011, p. 530)
2. “They are afraid that workers who develop disabilities will become a *liability* to them” (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011, p. 530)
3. “They are worried about the *cost of providing reasonable accommodations* so that workers with disabilities can do their jobs” (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011, p. 530).

Some of the participants in Kaye, Jans and Jones’ study provided additional reasons for employers not hiring or retaining employees with disabilities. “Many respondents felt that employers believed (or stated that they themselves believed) that a worker with a disability ‘doesn’t pull his own weight’, ‘can’t do the job 100%’, or ‘might not have the same capacity’ as other workers” (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011, p. 529).

Kaye et al. also proposed different strategies which organizations may use to help them hire and retain employees with disabilities (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). A majority of the respondents, 74.4 percent, thought that “*More or better training* on disability issues for supervisors and managers” would be very helpful (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011, p. 532). Many of respondents believed that education and familiarization of people with disabilities and disability issues were strategies organizations could use to improve their hiring and retention of employees with disabilities (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). The study by Kaye, Jans, and Jones highlighted some of the concerns and attitudes some employers have towards employees with disabilities. The possible strategies and solutions proposed by Kaye et al. may be able to address some of the concerns and fears some employers have about hiring and retaining employees with disabilities.

5 Recommendations

A recurring theme in many of the articles researched for this paper emphasized the importance of educating managers and coworkers about people with disabilities. A lack of knowledge or experience may have an impact on a manager's decision of whom to hire for a position. When managers have positive experiences with employees with disabilities, they have "more favorable attitudes toward hiring applicants with the same disability" (Unger, 2002, p. 4). Some employers perceive people with physical injury disabilities more positively than people with psychological or intellectual disabilities (Winn & Hay, 2009). Education and experiences with people with disabilities may have positive impact on the attitudes of employers.

Many of the articles researched for this paper highlighted the same benefits and challenges for employees with ASD. The ability to focus on tasks, to search and stay on a project, spot patterns in data, to remember things better than other coworkers without ASD are often mentioned as the strengths of people with ASD (Silliker, 2011; Wareham & Sonne, 2008; Mottron, 2011). Due to the nature of ASD, some employees with ASD may have a difficult time with communication, social behaviours and motor abilities (Silliker, 2011). Employees with ASD may need a little longer training and adjusting period. Once the employee has been hired and begins work, accommodations may be needed to help the employee adjust. Accommodations could be as simple as moving a desk into a corner rather than having it in the middle of a room (Silliker, 2011). These small challenges can be solved quickly if the managers and other coworkers are receptive to the needs of the employee with ASD.

Many of the articles also mentioned how managers and organizations have realized how employees without ASD have benefited from having employees with ASD in the workplace. Employees with ASD may require a more direct method of communication, which is they may need very clear instructions in order to perform their duties. Some employees without ASD may not ask questions about the task they are to perform for a variety of reasons. If they do not understand what is required of them they may put off the task or complete it incorrectly. If everyone in the organization begins to speak directly and is not afraid to ask questions, stress levels within the organization may decrease and hopefully employees will become more productive.

As the prevalence of autism is increasing, there is a need to further study and examine how to support individuals with autism in the workplace. Employers will continue to seek assistance from different organizations in order to hire and support their employees with disabilities, including autism. People with disabilities cannot be placed into one homogeneous group; therefore it is not possible to create a generic set of accommodations.

Diversity in the workplace, support and accommodations for employees with disabilities will increase in importance as the labour market becomes increasingly competitive. Participating in job fairs for people with disabilities is one way employers can recruit and attract skilled employees. JOIN is one organization which holds career fairs in Ontario for people with disabilities. Employers can connect with potential employees, interview on site and network with other HR professionals (JOIN, n.d.). Many associations have

promotional campaigns, for example, the month of April is Autism Awareness Month (Autism Society, n.d.) and October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM Canada, 2010).

Besides awareness campaigns, many associations and organizations assist individuals with disabilities find employment. The Rotary District 7010 Mentorship Project has a list of community employment and disability services (Rotary 7010 Mentorship Project for Job Seekers with Disabilities, 2011). The following list is a few examples of the organizations and associations listed by the Rotary Mentorship Project (Rotary 7010 Mentorship Project for Job Seekers with Disabilities, 2011):

- Ability Learning Network: help individuals to find blue-collar jobs as well as those who want to start their own business
- Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario: for job seekers of any disability type
- Career Edge: focus on university, college and high school graduates gain career experience through paid internships
- CNIB Employment Accommodation Network: Canada-wide program to assist visually impaired people find work
- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC): provide employment support for people with disabilities
- Project Work: for individuals with an intellectual disability or need additional support to learn an entry level job
- WORKink: online career development and employment portal for Canadians with disabilities

These examples as well as the different organizations associated with different disabilities can be valuable resources for employers looking for information or assistance when they are looking to hire or have hired an individual with a disability.

As the population of individuals with ASD ages, further studies of how to support individuals with ASD and employers of people with ASD will be beneficial. Many people with disabilities are willing and able to work. Employers must do their best to see past the disability and see the person and their skills which can help the organization be successful. Employers may want to partner with different organizations, such as the Autism Society, to promote the positive experiences they have had with their employees with ASD. Employers can explain how these positive experiences have added value to the organization, the individual and society. Marketing and promoting the positive work experiences of individuals with ASD will help educate the general public and other organizations of the benefits of hiring a diverse group of people.

6 Conclusion

Organizations can benefit from having a diverse workforce. Hiring and retaining people with disabilities can be beneficial for the organization, the employee and society. The individual with a disability benefits by obtaining a job that suits their skills, improves their feelings of self-worth, increases their disposable income and may enable them to rely less on social assistance and family members for financial support. Employers will

benefit from a diverse workforce, dedicated and loyal employees, as well as benefiting from improved public perception. Society will benefit as these individuals are able to pay taxes into the system and this can reduce the costs of social assistance programs. As baby boomers begin to retire they may be increases in demand for skilled employees in the work force. The traditionally underrepresented and underemployed group of people, such as women, minorities and people with disabilities may be able to fill many roles left vacant due to retirement.

Education and awareness of different disabilities will help employers dispel the myths and hire people who are qualified, able and willing to do the work. Realizing that accommodations need not be expensive or difficult to implement, employers may be able to see past the disability and see the individual, their skills and how they will be able to contribute to the success of the organization. Associations, government funding programs as well as supported employment programs may be able to assist employers when hiring and retaining employees with disabilities.

As the prevalence of autism increases in children there will be an increase in the number of adults with autism. Many individuals with ASD are willing and able to work. The traits of ASD may be beneficial to a variety of employers in different industries. Managers who have hired individuals with ASD have found that they communicate better with all of their employees. As society and employers become more accepting of people with disabilities in the workplace and understand ASD, people with ASD should be able to find the right job and have a productive work life.

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