

The Benefits of Hiring Individuals with Autism

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Individuals diagnosed with autism are on the increase and therefore any assistance given to them to generate a better quality of life through employment will go a long ways in helping many. This conceptual paper reviewed the literature to evaluate some apparent problems associated with the hiring process and identify effective practices. Early intervention and training along with professional involvement were found to be advantageous in assisting individuals with autism as well as their families, caregivers, tax payers, organizations, and others who may also be involved in supporting the lives and wellbeing of this population.

Field of Research: Leadership

Keywords: Autism, leadership, collaboration

JEL Codes: J2, M5

1. Introduction

Attention needs to be given to the hiring of individuals with autism because it is a population that is increasing in number and presently there is not a cure for the source of this problem. The frequency of children diagnosed with autism disorder continues to increase and the cost of assistance continues to increase. The Autism Society of America indicates that autism services cost US citizens \$236-262 billion annually and a majority of costs in the US are in adult services. Autism Society (2014). While the medical field cannot provide us with a scientific reason for this, there is a consistent growth in the numbers of cases. In 2014, Miriam Falco indicated that 1 in 68 US children have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which is a significant increase from 1 in 88 for the previous two years. Additionally, Autism Speaks (2015), suggested that a new government survey indicates that autism prevalence is now at 1 in 45. A recent release by the College of Public Health at the University of Iowa (2018), announced that analysis of Clinical Document Architecture CDA, data suggests this number to be higher than previously thought and that it is about 1 in 41 (24%). Hence, no matter what data you accept the indication is that there is an increase in the prevalence of the number being diagnosed, which means this is a vast amount of the US population that could be contributing to the country, their families, and themselves and they are in need of assistance.

Due to the increase in the number of individuals with autism in our population there becomes an increasing need for trying to increase the quality of life of these individuals and their caretakers. Therefore, in trying to improve their quality of life

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along with understanding the increase in the growth of the population we have to try and find a means to improve their economic status which might assist in providing them a better quality of life. Hence the question becomes, "What strategies can be developed to increase the number of individuals with autism that are employed?" Therefore, relevant propositions will be identified in this conceptual paper.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 contains above 'Introduction', Section 2 focuses on Theoretical Underpinnings and Literature Review, Section 3 discusses successful practices and benefits relating to providing assistance, Section 4 provides theoretical propositions and Section 5 contains conclusion

2. Theoretical Underpinnings and Literature Review

2.1 Hiring Problems

It is difficult for individuals with autism to find employment because there are so many barriers of misconception. This is true even though finding employment for individuals might improve their quality of life and may also enable their families and the caregivers to have a better quality of life. Not being able to find employment or being able to normalize into society can have its downside for the individuals with autism and in most cases it is because of psychosocial problems. In a longitudinal study by Billstedt et al. (2005), they followed a sample of 120 individuals with autism from childhood to adulthood, from 13-22 years and re-evaluation at 17-40 years. They used a set of criteria for classification of outcomes taking into consideration employment, higher education/vocational training, independent living, and peer relations. They found that 5% had died before the first follow-up and the outcome of 78% was poor. The results of the study showed that only four of the individuals were positively correlated with a better outcome. The conclusion basically showed that children with autism may have an even worse psychosocial outcome than previously believed. Hence, without trying to normalize these individuals through schooling, training, and employment, into a real population and life, the quality of their lives will probably deteriorate even faster. This is one of the reasons it is important to aim for early intervention to try and retain and improve those psychosocial skills as much as possible in order for these individuals to be able to interact in a socially appropriate manner.

Hiring problems for individuals with autism do exist and continuous research in an attempt to resolve some of this problem is an ongoing process. Presently, research has indicated that there has been poor outcome for employment of young adults with autism spectrum disorder ASD, and adults with autism disorder are still underrepresented in the workforce (Anderson et al., 2017). However, research does show that individuals who have received a large percentage of vocational rehabilitation have shown to be able to fair more effectively which amplifies the importance of vocational rehabilitation involvement (Alverson & Yamamoto, 2017). Since vocational rehabilitation services provide a substantial amount of federal and state funding to assist individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment the support of these services are an invaluable asset to individuals with autism to be able to find and retain employment. Understanding the constant increase in the identifiable number of children being born with ASD, these individuals will deserve the assistance and attention of these support activities. Support of all services is very important as research shows the outcome for young adults with autism lag far

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behind those of their peers without disabilities. Additionally, most postsecondary education program for students with disabilities incorporate internship experience to foster employment skills. However, it must be taken into account that even with the support of these types of rehabilitation services the proximity of job coaches may inadvertently hinder social opportunities and independence (Gilson & Carter, 2016). Again, it is imperative to take this into consideration because of the importance of those psychosocial skills that are so necessary for attaining and maintaining employment.

For individuals with autism, job skills, a lack of training, as well as psychosocial skills can act as barriers for employment and this appears to be more of a problem for individuals with autism than with other types of disabilities. An additional reason why individuals with autism may need supplementary assistance in locating employment is because research has shown that when it comes to gaining employment they remain far behind of other individuals with different disabilities. Therefore, it will take additional support for individuals with autism to find and retain employment. The support is important because they appear to draw lower average wages for young adults that normally hold similar low job skill types. One of the reasons for the lower wages could also be associated with the hesitancy of accepting leadership roles which might also be related to the psychosocial skills. In a study by Shogren and Plotner (2012), it was indicated that students with autism or intellectual disability were significantly less likely than students with other disabilities to take a leadership role. They also appeared to have more identified needs for support after school than did students with other disabilities (Shogren & Plotner). This exists even though early work experience during high school represents one of the most consistent predictors of post school employment for students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2010). Therefore individuals with autism will require support in becoming more independent if they are to assimilate into society and the workplace.

Overall the young adults with autism are basically experiencing particular difficulty in successfully transitioning into employment and therefore, strategies need to be developed for improving the possibilities for them to make this transition (Roux et al., 2013). Without developing strategies for assistance the cycle will continue and the cost will continue and the quality of life for these individual will remain stagnant. Even adults with autism usually have difficulty maintaining employment for several reasons including the problem of being able to perform work tasks (Bennett et al., 2013). Of course some of this inability to perform work tasks may still be associated to the fact that autistic individuals tend to lose some of their social skills as they become older and that is why early diagnose and early intervention is so imperative.

2.2 Employment

Studies indicate that one of the reasons it is difficult for young individuals with autism to find employment is centered on the fact that employers are not that excited about hiring individuals with autism. In fact research indicates that even young adults with high-functioning spectrum disorder have low employment rates as job interviewing presents a critical barrier to employment for them (Smith et al., 2015). In one investigation about employment one of the variables of concern was to determine whether employers would employ a person with autism and the results indicated that in some areas individuals do not have a positive atmosphere for employment of the individuals with autism and the employers do not want to employ a person with autism (Stankova & Trajkovski, 2010). However, a vast number of individuals with

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autism tend to be able to adapt to technology and the results of a more recent study, by Walsh et al 2017, found that the use of technology-aided interventions can be effective on increasing employment outcomes for adults with autism. At this time, changing perceptions of employers appears to be one of the major issues of concern.

Vocational rehabilitation services can be very instrumental in assisting individuals with autism to gain and have an excellent chance of retaining employment. This can be especially true for those individuals that are transition-aged adults. Transition-aged adults with autism are more likely to become successfully employed as a result of receiving vocational rehabilitation services than the overall population of transition-aged adults served by vocational rehabilitation services (Burgess & Cimera, 2014). The results of a study by Garcia-Villamizar and Hughes (2007), suggested that vocational rehabilitation programs have a beneficial impact upon cognitive performance in people with autism. Even though the findings of the study by Burgess and Cimera revealed that the employed transition-aged adults consistently worked fewer hours and earned lower wages than those in the overall populations, the positives associated with the activity of being employed should be considered as a benefit to the autistic individuals and to the caregivers.

One of the most important studies that apply to autism and employment is the study by Brownlow (2010), wherein the perception of the investigation is whether people with autism must change in order to accommodate the non-autistic world. The author of the investigation presents an alternative construction of autism as a difference rather than a deficit or deviance. The author wanted to examine the negotiation of a place for a person with autism within a neurologically typical dominated society. This could possibly illustrate that there need to be some identification developed for the workplace and that therapeutic intervention may enable a more effective understanding (Brownlow). In fact, support specific to students with autism should include providing intensive instruction in social communication, job skills, visual supports, and work routine and structure (Wehman et al., 2013). With the importance of the usefulness of these issues and the necessity for encouragement in these areas perhaps accommodations could be developed around creating an effective fit for these individuals in the workplace.

Society must continue to try and find different means of assisting individuals with autism in developing skills and preparing themselves for employment. To this end numerous different methods have been and are being evaluated. Audio cuing was an evaluated method for enabling autistic personnel to perform duties at a particular job site. The researchers evaluated audio cuing by delivering prompts to facilitate individuals with autism and intellectual disability regarding when to perform job skills. Their results illustrated that audio cuing produced job performances well above the designated criteria during training and with on the job performance. The participants and their parents reported a high degree of job satisfaction and this comes as encouragement to individuals that are trying to find job placement for these individuals (Allen et al., 2012). The evaluation illustrated that audio cuing can be very helpful, since speech and language impairments can pose significant problems and challenges, to the successful workplace inclusion of young adults with autism. It demonstrated the possibility of communicating with autistic individuals pertaining to when to accomplish certain tasks. This is important because breakdowns are more apt to occur when support staff or workplace supervisors are unsure of how to

support effective communication, therefore it shows that electronic communication might be used and any positive successes are welcomed (Pouliot et al., 2017).

One of the main purposes of employment for individuals with autism is to try and help with promoting social inclusion. While the financial benefits are extremely important social inclusion is extremely important in developing a higher quality of life for them and their families and friends. It is important for children and adults with disabilities to be able to live a good life in their communities with reasonable adjustment being made by society to ensure that this is possible (Roberts et al., 2011). However policies and understanding of these values are not a part of our present society. The educational system is where it has to begin, but the difficulty in social skills development continues to challenge the successful inclusiveness of students with autism. Even though federal law dictates individuals with disabilities have the right to be educated in classrooms with students without disabilities, for students with autism, social communication and behavioral deficits make inclusion somewhat difficult (Talib, 2012). Hence the problem of increasing social inclusion continues and remains a major problem with trying to gain and retaining employment.

3a. Successful Practices

There are techniques for achieving success in hiring and supervising individuals with autism and one study found that the capabilities and understanding of the supervisor showed to be essential to their success. In a study by Hagner and Cooney (2005), supervisory practices and supervisor perceptions of employees with autism were examined by interviewing autistic employees and using worksite observations. Through a qualitative analysis they found that specific accommodation strategies were normally associated with successful supervision, to include consistent scheduling and set job responsibilities, the utilization of an organizer to structure the job, the reduction of idle and unstructured time, being direct in communications, and providing reminders and reassurances. The supervisors felt that the assistance they and the autistic employees received from a rehabilitation agency also played a major role in the success of the program (Hagner & Cooney). The success of these types of strategies and implementations illustrate that organizations might be able to find successful and beneficial methods for hiring individuals with autism.

There can be additional methods and strategies for assisting individual with autism in becoming more independent. A study by Hume et al. (2009), pointed out that intervention strategies that encouraged over-reliance on adult support could contribute to poor long term outcomes for adults with autism, while on the other hand self-monitoring, video modeling and individual work system present a shift in stimulus control away from continuous adult management and provide an alternate stimulus that have proven to be successful in addressing executive function deficits and increasing independence. Understanding and utilizing this alternative stimulus could be very beneficial over the long run in enhancing the quality of life for the autistic individual and the family.

One of the problems associated with autistic individuals in gaining employment is maneuvering through the interview process. This is a significant problem because of the lack of communication skills. In gaining employment some individuals with autism may not be able to maneuver through the process, but on the other hand

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some individuals with autism may be on the higher end of functionality and may be able to gain employment when the position does require an interview (Strickland et al., 2013), found that through the usage of an internet accessed training program that included Theory of Mind-based guidance, video models, visual supports and virtual reality practice sessions in teaching appropriate job interview skills, that youth who completed the employment program had significantly more effective verbal content skills. Hence, those individuals provided the benefit of such training may perform slightly better than if they had not been provided the training.

3b. Benefits to Providing Assistance

One of the major benefits in assisting individuals with autism to have a better quality of life is often found in the instances of the reduction in stress for the autistic individual and the family members. Most of the actual services that are provided to autistic individuals often cause the caregivers in the family to have to ignore other family issues and focus exclusively on the child. This is especially true for mothers who often have to even forego participating in personal meaningful occupation because of having to focus time on navigating and participating in professional services for the child (Hodgetts et al., 2014).

In a case control study designed to investigate supported employment intervention on the employment of transition-age youth with disabilities served by the public vocational rehabilitating system, the results identified that six homogeneous subgroups that received supported employment was found to have increased employment rates across all of the groups. The effect of supported employment was especially strong for youth who were Social Security beneficiaries, special education students, and individuals with intellectual disabilities or autism who were high school graduates. The study suggested that supported employment is an effective service for enhancing vocational rehabilitation outcomes for young adults and provides valuable information for policy makers, health care providers, rehabilitation counselors, and educators (Wehman et al., 2014). This is another example of how an activity such as supported employment intervention by the public vocational rehabilitation system can be beneficial in enhancing the employment ability of autistic individuals.

The Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication-related Handicapped Children TEACCH, program which helps individuals with ASD to become as independent as possible by assisting them in obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment. TEACCH really attempts to encapsulate the best of all strategies in trying to develop innovative methods to assist individuals with ASD. One of the greatest assets that the program provides is taking into consideration of the importance of long-term support which can be seen as a benefit that adds to the quality of life of all family members (Jill et al. 1997). Additionally, because parents are able to implement the program at home, it is a truly beneficial means to help with remediation (Hungelmann, 2000).

Even though Title I of the American with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination in employment, over 26 years later, the employment rates for individuals with disabilities is still about 34 percent. Any assistance that can be given to enhance the quality of life for the autistic individual would be appreciated and developing an improved quality of life for the entire family would be a major benefit to all concerned.

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Even the siblings of autistic children have to undergo a certain amount of social-emotional adjustment as there is a certain amount of stress involved in having a sibling with autism (Pilowsky et al., 2004).

In recognizing the need to assist individuals with disabilities several communities have become involved to try and support employment activities to enhance a higher quality of life for these citizens with disabilities. There are also community service activities that can play an important part in the transition to adulthood for students with disabilities. These resources can be implemented during high school and they are basically transition services that can assist youth with disabilities to transition from high school to the adult world. The problem is they are not offered in a lot of communities. However, these community efforts can be quite helpful in assisting youth make that transition to gaining employment (Hoover, 2016). Youth who received job placement services appear to have a better chance of obtaining employment and individuals that complete postsecondary education show to have stronger earnings (Migliore et al., 2012).

When investigating employer practices that enhance success for employees with an autism spectrum disorder, Strofferahn (2017), found several issues that were brought forth. He found that accommodations were necessary to enhance the chances of success for employees with ASD. He also reported there was a positive effect on workplace morale and camaraderie, that there was a connection to increased or improved customer relations and satisfaction, and that hiring an employee with ASD had a positive effect on the employer's professional career or personal life. This illustrates that there can be several personal and organizational benefits to hiring individuals with ASD.

One of the major benefits gained from giving and helping others is the fact that it may even help the benefactor to live longer. There are numerous reasons for giving and assisting others and research indicates that the benefits are positive. Giving tends to make us happy and the National Institute of Health pointed out that when people give there is a region of the brain which experiences pleasure, social connection, and trust which makes us feel good. Therefore, as we receive a sense of feel good this is important to our overall health. The benefit from this is that we can have a decrease in stress and high blood pressure and we gain other types physiological benefits. Through giving, many of these physiological issues are also transferred and are found to be immensely beneficial to the caregivers and other receivers of the giving process. Therefore, when you give you are not only providing a positive to yourself but you are also strengthening your bond with the individual or organization to which you are providing the assistance and this in turn encourages them to give as giving is also contagious. More importantly, giving also indicates that you realize there is something much larger than you and you are willing to be a part of it. Gillespie (2015) reported that according to research by Harvard Business Professor Michael Norton, money can truly buy happiness, when it is spent on worthy experiences and causes and not material things.

4. Propositions

Based upon a research of the literature and the descriptive information that was available pertaining to employing individuals with autism, several propositions emerged. It is presumed that employers do not seek to hire individuals with autism

when the proposition is that there is insufficient information available to employers and a lack of knowledge about adults with autism and their strengths and talents. One of the most important propositions to understand is that perception of individuals not being capable of meaningful and complex work is untrue. The point is that many individuals with ASD can often grow up to hold complex jobs. The perception is that individuals with autism spectrum disorder have the lowest rates of employment, and adults with autism switch jobs at a higher rate than nondisabled peers. When the real proposition appears to indicate that during the job interview the expectations and accommodations may not have been clearly understood (Taylor, 2017). These issues are important because as stated by Stuckey (2016), "Competitive employment for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder ASD, is important because this group is described as the most employable, yet least employed" (p. iii).

5. Conclusion

It is well established that the rates of employment for young adults with autism after leaving secondary school systems are very low and that they spend most of their time in sheltered workshops or day activity centers. In many cases they will more than likely not have any daytime activities. It is pointed out that presently the normal service systems may be inadequate to accommodate the needs of youth with ASD who do not have intellectual disabilities during the transition to adulthood (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). The inadequacies of the system have to be turned around so that new and innovative strategies can be implemented to enhance new and improved assistance for matching skills and abilities with employment duties. If the situation is not turned around we will continue to waste a vast amount of man power while at the same time depriving a large number of individuals from enjoying an improved quality of life.

One of the reasons it is so important to assist young people with autism is because of the pressure and stress that the autistic individual can sometimes place on the other members of the family unit. A family member with autism poses numerous challenges to other family members. Therefore, the family members often have a lesser quality of life compared with the families of other developmental conditions. The well-being of children normally depends very strongly on the quality of life that the parents can provide for the child (Calonge-Torres et al., 2017). When you add to this that numerous children with autism have seizures and therefore numerous children with autism cannot be alone for any substantial length of time it can be very stressful for the caregiver. Epilepsy is quite common in autism spectrum disorders, and it is increasingly being understood to be a condition that is a clinical problem that must be dealt with as the rate of this co-morbidity can vary depending upon age (Canitano, 2007). The co-morbidity of autism and epilepsy can be cause for one caregiver not being able to maintain employment which can also detract from the quality of life of the entire family. It can be very difficult for a family with an autistic child to have what is considered a normal average stress-filled life. Additionally, couples with an adolescent autistic child are often faced with the difficult decision of how to divide child care responsibilities and paid employment (Hartley et al., 2014).

Without a doubt the benefits that can be gained from providing and giving assistance to individuals with autism can reverberate through the entire giver-receiver activity. The autistic individuals along with all of the caregivers can benefit from the assistance given and additionally, the individuals that give can become a part of

something larger and the giving can become contagious. One of the most important factors that individuals planning to help this population must understand is that professionals must engage more deeply into this problem in order to achieve a complete integration of individuals with autism in society (Stankova & Trajkovski, 2010).

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