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Memo

Accessibility is an important concern for the library. We have been creating initiatives to make the library more accessible for patrons, but it is important to make the library accessible for employees as well. I propose that we work on making the library more accessible for autistic employees and potential employees. A large percentage of autistic people are unemployed or underemployed (Patton, 2019). By making employment at the library more accessible for autistic people, we can create equity for this group. Austin and Pisano wrote about how neurodiverse people, which includes autistic people, can be highly effective workers and bring diverse ways of thinking and looking at problems (2017). Some of the benefits they cite from companies that have instituted neurodiverse hiring programs include “productivity gains, quality improvement, boosts in innovative capabilities, and broad increases in employee engagement” (Austin & Pisano, 2017). Autistic employees can be very beneficial to our library.

Research Findings

Patton lays out a clear theory of how autistic workers can have difficulty with current prominent management theories (2019). One of the important things he wrote about is how attributing certain behaviors of autistic workers to things other than their autism can cause problems (Patton, 2019). For example, lack of eye contact could be attributed to rudeness or lack of attention, when it is actually due to the autistic person being uncomfortable with eye contact. Understanding how autism manifests in behavior is important. Another important takeaway is the importance of supportive management (Patton, 2019). Hayward et al. did a study which looks at communication difficulties autistic employees experience and they also determined that supportive management is very helpful in this case as well (2020). This is why I want to focus on

management for this initiative. Parr and Hunter looked at different management theories to determine if any one was more effective than the others for autistic employees (2014). They theorized that authentic leadership would be the best but determined that each theory had their own strengths and weaknesses (Parr & Hunter, 2014). An important thing to keep in mind is that each autistic person is an individual, and what works best for one may not be what works best for another (Parr & Hunter, 2014). As it is a spectrum disorder, symptoms and behaviors can vary widely. Patton also recommended having a mentorship program (2019).

A study by Waisman-Nitzan et al. looks at the sorts of accommodations that are helpful to autistic employees (2021). They separated these into four different categories: job performance, social environment, daily workplace routine, and physical and sensory environment (Waisman-Nitzan et al., 2021). The accommodations they listed are as follows:

Job performance:

- Clear instructions from a single supervisor
- Clear and detailed feedback
- Ongoing supervision and guidance

Social environment:

- Acceptance and respect
- Education of coworkers about autism
- Workplace mentor

Daily Workplace Routine

- Consistent but flexible work hours
- Assistance with setting priorities and focus

- Structured break times
- Structured and consistent job assignments

Physical and Sensory Environment

- Noise reduction
- Physical environment organization (Waisman-Nitzan et al., 2021)

This is not an exhaustive list but should give you a good idea of the sorts of accommodations that could be helpful. Once again, the thing to keep in mind is that every autistic person is going to need different things from this list. Another important thing to keep in mind when it comes to accommodations is that other employees may see accommodations for autistic employees as unfair (2019). Creating an accepting and understanding environment should help to reduce this possibility.

A final concern to make sure to be aware of is disclosure of autism. If a candidate discloses during the hiring process, we can discuss which accommodations may be helpful to them, but they may not be comfortable disclosing due to stigma or a desire to be treated the same as everyone else (Whelpley et al., 2020). I think one of the things that can help with this is to make it clear that accommodations are available and can be requested. Some of the suggestions for making hiring more accessible include not doing group interviews (Whelpley et al., 2020), and work samples or trial runs instead of interviews (Patton, 2019). Patton also stated that “evidence-based research has concluded that structured interviews are more valid than unstructured interviews” (2019). Unstructured interviews are likely to be especially harmful to autistic potential workers, so this change is beneficial for them and for us (Patton, 2019).

Goals

- Make the library more accessible for autistic employees.
- Create a more accessible hiring process.

Objectives

- Managers will participate in a training program to learn about autism spectrum disorder.
 - It is important the program includes autistic people
- Institute a mentorship program for new employees.
- Revise the process for requesting accommodations.
 - Create a document with clear instructions and a list of ideas for accommodations.
- Revise the hiring process.
 - Create a structured interview outline.
 - Offer candidates a choice of format (phone interview, in person, video chat).
 - Include information about accommodations with job postings, as well as in communications to potential candidates.

Outcomes

The following outcomes will be measured through a survey taken before the training program and an exit survey taken after attending the training program.

- Managers will have increased confidence in their abilities to manage autistic employees.
- Managers will have increased knowledge about autism spectrum disorder.

We will survey new employees about the mentorship program after 3 months.

New employees will describe themselves as:

- Feeling integrated into the workplace
- Comfortable asking their mentor for assistance

For accommodations:

- We will see an increase in accommodation requests.

And ultimately I hope for the outcome of this program to be a greater number of autistic employees at the library.

References

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