

Autism at Work: Calvin's Journey of Living and Working with Autism

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Calvin took a deep breath and steadied himself as he prepared to enter the interview. "This one is big." As he thought about his efforts in college, part time work, and internships during school, he was cautiously excited to share his unique approach to life with a new company. Diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at the age of 5, Calvin's journey to this moment had not always been easy, but with the support of family, friends, and many others, his dream was almost a reality. "I have always enjoyed helping people, feeling that making their world happier was not just a courtesy, but a responsibility." He was ready to fulfill that responsibility.

Transitioning from high school to university to career life is a daunting journey for any young adult, but more so for an individual living with autism. With over half a million people diagnosed with ASD entering adulthood (CDC, 2015), as well as an increasing number of adults who hide their diagnosis, organizations need to address the growing issue of autism in the workplace. The limited understanding of autism and the characteristics of those diagnosed has led to significant underemployment of those on the autism spectrum. These employees are not currently being utilized effectively, with estimates of total unemployment or underemployment as high as 90% of the adult autistic population (Autism Speaks, n.d.). Roughly half of all young adults with ASD work outside the home within eight years of finishing high school (Roux et al., 2013). With improved diagnostic attentiveness, increased acceptance of diagnosis, and advances in preparing autistic individuals for the workplace, there exists an influx of potential employees with autism. As such, the general understanding of the effects

of ASD on individuals and organizations keep pace with this reality so practicing managers can better comprehend the nuances of those on the spectrum and also how to maximize their motivation and performance.

The goals of this project are twofold. First, it will hopefully increase the understanding of how autism affects those transitioning into the workforce. Second, the paper aims to better prepare those affected by autism in the workplace, whether that be employees on the spectrum or those who manage and work with autistic employees. These objectives will be accomplished by taking dual paths. A synopsis of several key components of management study that relate to autism in the workplace is provided. By focusing on employees with autism as well as those who manage these employees, coverage includes the changing perspective of autism in organizations, autistic employee motivation, ASD diagnosis disclosure, and the job search process for individuals with autism. Next, the case narrative of Calvin and his life is integrated with autism as he shifts his focus from academic to career pursuits. Everyone with ASD is unique in their perspective and how they are affected by autism. Following a real-life example, particularly in this relatively new research area, can provide valuable insight into the nuances and potential of these employees (Eisenhardt, 1989). The ongoing narrative follows Calvin from his diagnosis, to therapy, to academic endeavors, and ultimately, to his job search. The story leans heavily on Calvin's own words in order to give as much transparency as possible into the point-of-view of someone living on the autism spectrum. Calvin, a disguised name, provided his thoughts via phone interviews, e-mail correspondence, face-to-face discussions, learning journals, and video logs.

This paper has the potential to contribute to the small, but growing number of voices discussing the intersection of autism and the study of management. Little is known about the experiences of those with ASD at work (Johnson & Joshi, 2016), but even less is known about autism and job search behaviors. This paper will provide just such a glimpse. This integrated coverage of the challenges and opportunities facing those with autism seeks to add some clarity to a slowly progressing area of note for scholars and practicing managers. Overall, this story of Calvin and the accompanying coverage of autism-related topics can help build on this limited progress.

Calvin and Early Diagnosis

Calvin's earliest memories of his life with autism are as a five-year-old being pulled out of class to undergo a variety of tests. "Walking around a ball pit, standing on a balance beam, answering some lady's questions. Lots of tests and questions and physical challenges—sometimes it was fun, not always. I'm not entirely sure of the symptoms I displayed that led me to get tested." Although his parents knew of his ASD diagnosis, Calvin would not have a name for the differences he was starting to notice between himself and his peers for many years. "The goal was to treat me as a normal child, neuro-typical." In order to facilitate this, Calvin engaged in about three years of sensory integration, speech, and physical therapy. He did not necessarily remember these as therapy sessions, just as more of the many specialists he visited and different activities they had him try. These therapy sessions began to take a toll on Calvin and ultimately ceased. "My mother tells me that after my diagnosis...at some point I said 'I didn't like feeling different.' I wasn't able to understand at such a young age that I was different, only that I was treated differently."

At this point, Calvin's parents stopped the private therapy in hopes he would feel normal. However, he still saw the potential consequences of appearing different than his classmates and he worked to reduce the appearance of those differences. "Fitting in is very important at a young age because kids feel an instinctive need to be part of a social group without understanding why they do or how they can fulfill that need. Kids [with autism] can function similarly [to others], but they don't always understand that they aren't threatened, so sometimes actions [can be perceived as] hurtful bullying. I think my parents wanted to shield me from that, and my objection to the sessions was probably an unconscious, instinctive fear of that, too." Calvin appreciates his family's support and the decisions they made in his best interest. "They always do what they think is best for me... They were able to work with my autism without making me feel different from other people."

Autism Overview

Autism is a term for a group of complex disorders of brain development. Although these disorders initially were recognized as distinct subtypes (e.g., autistic disorder, Asperger syndrome, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified [PDD-NOS], etc.), they were merged into one umbrella diagnosis of ASD with the May 2013 publication of the DSM-5 Diagnostic Manual (Autism Speaks, n.d.). ASD refers to "neurodevelopmental impairments in communication and social interaction and unusual ways of perceiving and processing information" (World Health Organization, 2013, p. 7). It manifests itself, in varying degrees, with difficulties in social interaction, nonverbal and verbal communication, and repetitive behaviors (Autism Speaks, n.d.).

According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 68 American children is on the autism spectrum. Autism is more common among boys than girls. In particular, it is estimated that 1 in 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls will be diagnosed with autism in the United States this year. Moreover, ASD currently affects 3 million children and adults in the United States. Research suggests that the prevalence of autism has continued to increase by 10% to 17% each year, making it one of the fastest growing developmental disorders. There is no definitive explanation for this growth in ASD diagnoses. However, many researchers believe improved diagnosis, increased acceptance of diagnosis, and environmental influences have contributed to the growing rate of autism (Autism Speaks, n.d.).

Because it is a spectrum, each individual with autism is different. Some have a significant disability and are unable to live independently. However, approximately 40% have average to above average intellectual abilities. These individuals can have exceptional academic, visual, and music skills. (Autism Speaks, n.d.). In addition, they often have a passionate interest in or fixation on different idiosyncratic items. This manifests in a mechanical focus on how things work, rather than a psychological focus on how people work (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 1999). Their distinctive abilities and atypical worldview are a source of pride for many individuals on the spectrum (Autism Speaks, n.d.), but many others are confused about autism. This spectral nature of autism leads many to assume that one person with autism is like everyone else on the spectrum, but in actuality, "if you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism" (Shore, 2003).

Calvin's Teenage Years

Throughout junior high and high school, the differences Calvin was noticing with other kids became more pronounced. "I looked at things differently than everyone else. I do not like surprises, even good surprises. Anything that is not preplanned really threw me off...I like to be prepared for the day, having a schedule or expectations helped that." The complexities and unpredictability of teenage years led to a few minor incidents that highlighted Calvin's unique perspective and difficulty with unanticipated actions or events. In particular, he finds social situations with unwritten social norms and unclear messages difficult to navigate. "I would not understand social rules and so obviously would not follow them. This caused a few problems at times...Things like personal space, bad manners, missing social cues. I did not do these things on purpose, I just did not understand. Now I know better how to interact with others."

As he aged, communication challenges also hindered his ability to fully grasp the nuances of social exchanges. This led him to never fully understand what was going on and to sense that he was missing something much of time. "I still have trouble with sarcasm and metaphors. Sometimes in classes or in conversations I would misread a situation because I did not notice someone was being completely sarcastic or I missed an innuendo that everyone else got. I'm getting better at reading other people's expressions and gauging their reactions, but none of it comes naturally to me and I still miss a lot of things." Calvin's approach to problem solving and academic work helped him earn his Eagle Scout and International Baccalaureate designations in high school. Ultimately, he went on to a nationally-ranked private university in the lower midwestern United States to begin his college career.

Shifting Attention to Autism

As previously stated, one of the proposed reasons for the increasing prevalence of autism is improved diagnosis. This suggests that many adults with ASD have been living, and ostensibly working, without a diagnosis that might explain some of their strengths and weaknesses. Autism in the workplace is nothing new. However, some organizations recently have recognized that employees with ASD are valued human capital that should be managed appropriately. A survey by the National Autistic Society found that only 15% of adults with autism are employed full-time, but more than 60% of those who are unemployed would like to find a job, making high-functioning autistic individuals an untapped resource for talent.

The leaders of Winston Capital Management believe the highly developed analytical skills of some people with autism can give their organization a valuable competitive advantage. Similarly, Goldman Sachs has been actively recruiting individuals with ASD since 2003 for internships, which have resulted in permanent employment contracts for some (Tickle, 2009). In 2015, Microsoft created a pilot program to focus on hiring individuals with autism. According to Mary Ellen Smith, Vice President of Worldwide Operations, "[p]eople with autism bring strengths that we need at Microsoft, each individual is different, some have an amazing ability to retain information, think at a level of detail and depth, or excel in math or code" (Autism Speaks, n.d.). Similarly, Walgreens has championed autistic employees as well, exemplified by their South Carolina distribution center that employs a number of employees with disabilities like

autism (Autism Speaks, n.d.). A growing number of employers are taking advantage of the diversity provided by employing those on the spectrum.

Calvin Discovers His Diagnosis

During his sophomore year in the engineering program, Calvin experienced an event that would shape his outlook on his interactions with others and life in general. “My partner disappeared the night before an engineering competition, leaving all our work locked away in his room. Not only did I design an entirely new contraption from the materials in my room, I also outperformed most of the students at the competition the next day, achieving third place overall.” This experience was a double-edged sword for Calvin. He knew his work performance at a difficult task was high compared to his peers—peers that had worked with a partner with better materials, for a longer time. However, shortly after this event, Calvin found out about his autism diagnosis, nearly 15 years after his initial testing.

“When I found out later in college, I was very relieved this time to know that I was different. I was much more mature intellectually than I was as a small child and thus, better equipped to understand this information.” Calvin, with the help of his parents and others, was able to utilize resources to help him understand his method of thought as well as handle social situations. “Finding out gave me the tools I needed to work with it to the benefit of my schoolwork and personal life.” Calvin switched from the engineering program to being a Human Resources major in the College of Business, which is a very people-oriented discipline. As he pursued his degree, he worked various jobs on and off campus and had multiple summer internships. With newfound insight gained from his diagnosis, Calvin was able to predict and even take advantage of potential conflicts at school and work that were caused by his autistic outlook.

Managing Those with Autism

Although managers may be anxious, ignorant, or even prejudiced about hiring people with autism, those making hiring decisions should recognize the current reality that job seekers with autism provide tangible benefits to organizations. The National Autism Society’s training and employment service is called Prospects. According to Prospects employee David Perkins, “when employers realize reasonable adjustments for our guys boils down to good management practices, they see there can be wider benefits” (Tickle, 2009).

In order to attract, select, and retain qualified applicants with ASD, managers must think about their recruitment policy and evaluation process. It is important to be precise in the job description because applicants with ASD likely will interpret words and phrases literally. In addition, organizations should evaluate the emphasis that is put on communication skills for all jobs. During the interview, managers must be aware that individuals with ASD may not demonstrate positive body language and may struggle with hypothetical interview questions. Furthermore, a thorough and realistic job preview can enable the job seeker to ascertain if they would be a good fit for the given position. Once hired, managers must be very clear about the task, the expected standards, and the deadline for completing it. In addition, training and mentoring may help employees with ASD understand their jobs and the nuanced social

climate of the organization, and give insight to other employees about working with someone with ASD. Managers also should be willing to make minor adjustments for qualified employees who may be over-sensitive to workplace stimuli (e.g., bright lights, background noise, etc.). Finally, managers should not force employees with ASD into unnecessary teamwork or social gatherings without their consent (Tickle, 2009).

Calvin at Work

“I have to regularly adjust my behavior to match what people expect of me, based on what I’ve learned from past experience since most people don’t understand how an autistic person is best managed. For example, one of my duties at the Fitness Center is to clean the exercise equipment regularly and I have to clean ‘everything’ on each machine. Normally, I’d assume that ‘everything’ literally meant every part of the machine that I could reach needed to be meticulously clean until nothing perceivable was left...[O]bviously I don’t need to be as thorough as I’d reflexively think.” In addition to his job at the fitness center, Calvin has worked as a desk clerk for a legal clinic, a ranch hand, a database analyst, and as an independent study coordinator (i.e., tutor) at a literacy center. Similarly, Calvin was active in student service organizations and volunteering efforts, which provided many opportunities to interact with others. These work experiences coupled with his solid academic performance (GPA of 3.2 and 4.0 in his major) provided confidence in his capabilities, but he knew there was one more hurdle to overcome.

Autism and Job Search

Like any job seeker, individuals with ASD must prepare for the job search. It is important to understand one’s strengths and weaknesses, the requirements of the job, and how they interact (they being the strengths and weaknesses). In recent qualitative research, one respondent with ASD said, “I was born too early to get diagnosed as a young person, so that I could get an appropriate career, work, and guidance. And now I have had a career in something that I was actually suited to instead of struggling along in a lot of jobs where the best I could do was get along” (Johnson & Joshi, 2016, p. 435). Individuals with ASD often have limitations in their ability to communicate and interact with others at work. For some, jobs with limited social interaction may be a good fit. However, this qualitative research suggests that some individuals with ASD actually prefer jobs with social interaction as long as it is not overwhelming. These respondents appreciate social interactions at work if they were scripted, did not involve crowds, and/or were not face-to-face. Not only did this type of work help them avoid social isolation and its negative consequences, but it showed them that they could overcome the constraints associated with their disability (Johnson & Joshi, 2016).

In addition to finding the right type of job, individuals with ASD must prepare for the interview process, which can sometimes put them at a disadvantage because of their inappropriate affective expressions and social skills (Baron-Cohen, 1997; Mak & Kwok, 2010). Most major organizations use structured interviews that include a set of job-related questions to assess relevant knowledge, skills, and experiences. Structured interviews either include situational interview questions, which ask job applicants what they would do in a hypothetical situation (McDaniel et al., 2001), or behavioral

interview questions, which ask job applicants how they have handled a situation in the past (Campion, Campion, & Hudson, 1994). Individuals with ASD often have problems projecting themselves into imaginary situations (Tickle, 2009), so they must prepare themselves for these situational and behavioral-type interview questions. Human Resource practitioners recommend reviewing the job description to understand the requirements of the job, researching potential situational and behavioral questions that might apply to the job, and brainstorming personal experiences that could be used to answer those questions before the interview.

Calvin's Job Search

Calvin prepared for his post-graduation job search like any dutiful business undergraduate, attending many workshops held by the very active College of Business Career Center. Workshops on resumes, business attire, social networking, dining etiquette, and many more provided a structure to help Calvin prepare for the unpredictability of the job interview. "I prepare by reviewing the description of the job I'm interviewing for plus what the company stands for. Then I review my resume to make a short list of skills and experience that would apply to the job or the company in general. The most important thing is to make a list of about three good questions to ask my interviewer." This preparation can help any job applicant be more grounded in the interview process, but for someone on the spectrum who can be discontented in unpredictable social situations, there are other considerations.

The pre-interview anxiety and ongoing over-analysis during the interview make it challenging. "There is always some level of discomfort during an interview because the stakes feel higher than perhaps they usually are, and my autism is partly responsible for that. The nature of autistic thinking is often an all-or-nothing perspective where the idea of failure is magnified to disastrous proportions. Autism can also affect an interview because I may interpret and answer a question differently than the way it was asked. Since my perspective is so different from other people, I often have to put a lot more thought into what I'm about to say so that it makes sense in the context that they asked the question and not just the context in which I interpreted the question. Again, I probably attribute more weight to [a] question than there really is; they may even appreciate a real answer more than a canned answer to their canned question." Calvin tries to mitigate these parallel thoughts during the interview process by remembering the big picture and that he sees things through a different lens than those interviewing him.

Disclosing an Autism Diagnosis

A related issue to this topic is whether or not to disclose an ASD diagnosis during and/or after the interview. In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits organizations from discriminating against individuals with disabilities in employment decisions. Once qualified individuals disclose their disability, the ADA also requires organizations to make reasonable accommodations so these individuals are able to perform their job. Unfortunately, individuals who disclose their disability during the interview process may give the organization a reason to eliminate them from the applicant pool, regardless of the legality of their decision. Employment experts advise individuals to disclose their disability only after they have been given a job offer (Ryan, 2004).

Once hired, individuals with ASD must decide if it is in their best interest to disclose their diagnosis. Recent qualitative research suggests that respondents with ASD have overwhelmingly tried to pursue nondisclosure. For example, one respondent avoided disclosure because of the detrimental stereotypes about autism. She said, “I do not want to be perceived as what I feel is a stereotype of—I think people think they’re rude and mentally slow—I do not want to be perceived as a stereotype” (Johnson & Joshi, 2016, p. 436). Similarly, others worried about the career consequences of disclosure. One respondent said, “I guess one obvious example is a tendency to think you are going to be evaluated poorly, that supervisors are going to say hurtful things” (Johnson & Joshi, 2016, p. 437). If individuals chose to disclose their diagnosis, they shared this information with close friends or in workplaces that were perceived to be accepting and educated about autism (Johnson & Joshi, 2016). The authors of the study encouraged individuals with ASD to find extra-organizational support (e.g., employment counselors, job coaches, etc.) to identify the appropriate targets of disclosure at work.

Calvin and Diagnosis Disclosure

Acknowledging the importance of employees’ fit within their organization, Calvin is interested in seeking out autism-friendly businesses that may appreciate and maximize the input from individuals on the spectrum. “I recently read an article about Marvel Comics and how they used a team of autistic employees to work on a popular movie. There are other companies that see the advantages of people like me. We are very detail-oriented, comfortable with repetitive, even monotonous or menial tasks, and follow instructions well. There are a few companies in my area, like Walgreens, that look for autistic employees, but I have not yet come across opportunities with those companies that match my career goals and skills.” While there are a growing number of organizations that actively seek out employees on the spectrum, Calvin anticipates there will be many more opportunities as people have a more accurate awareness of autism. The reality for Calvin is it is difficult to know how organizations will react to the knowledge of a potential or current employee’s ASD diagnosis. Ultimately, autistic job applicants face a difficult decision when it comes to making the choice to disclose their diagnosis or not.

“I would only tell an employer about my autism if I knew that it was something specific that they were looking for in candidates, which some companies do. Otherwise I would keep it to myself because they may see it as a disability that they need to pay for without fully understanding the many benefits that an autistic worker can provide.” The decision not to disclose his diagnosis is made more difficult because Calvin acknowledges that he likely would be better accommodated if he shared this information with his future employer. There are potential benefits and disadvantages to sharing one’s diagnosis, but currently the negatives are more pressing for Calvin. “It would help [if employers knew about ASD diagnosis] because it increases the understanding for both sides, and it leads to better interaction and more patience for all involved. Unfortunately, there still exists a stigma with autism that is hard for neurotypical people to understand what it is like. When you hear the term ‘retarded’ or anything negative related to autism it is offensive. Autism doesn’t mean I’m mentally

unstable or challenged, it just means I think differently. Autism, except in extreme cases, is not a disability.” The fear of being stigmatized is the primary reason for Calvin’s decision to withhold his diagnosis from employers. Coworkers and customers are also not usually aware of Calvin’s autism. “As for telling coworkers, I will not tell them unless they are also very close friends or absolutely need to know. I can’t think of any likely scenarios where the latter would come up.”

Motivation of Autistic Employees

To gain a better understanding of employees with autism, it is important to evaluate their source of motivation, which may be different than other individuals. The Job Characteristics Model (JCM) (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) provides a theoretical framework for this purpose. The JCM identifies critical psychological states (i.e., felt meaningfulness, felt responsibility, and knowledge of results) as precursors to positive work outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, lower absenteeism and turnover, and higher performance (Renn & Vandenberg, 1995). In turn, these psychological states are derived from characteristics of the job itself. The five core characteristics of the job are skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Examining some of these characteristics and how they differently affect the motivation of employees with autism is a beneficial exercise for managers.

Meaningfulness of work, or felt meaningfulness, indicates that the work means something to the employee and is important. This meaningfulness is vital for intrinsic motivation. According to the JCM, meaningfulness is affected by skill variety, task identity, and task significance. Skill variety is especially relevant to managing employees with autism. Typically, jobs that require different types of skills and abilities are more meaningful than jobs that are routine or menial. However, employees with autism often derive significant meaning in repetitive tasks that other employees may perceive as demeaning. Too much skill variety can be overwhelming for any employee, particularly one diagnosed with ASD. In general, the best way to find the proper balance of skill variety is to work directly with the individual to understand the nuances of their motivation.

Responsibility for work outcomes is another critical psychological state in the JCM. Felt responsibility is driven by autonomy, or the degree to which the task provides freedom and independence to plan and complete the work. The theory indicates that the more autonomy or decisional control that an employee has over the work itself, the more motivating the work will be (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). However, for employees on the spectrum, too much autonomy may be demotivating. One autistic individual notes, “[m]any autistic persons face a similar problem: the inability to stand up as their own persons under the pressure of personal social autonomy of normal persons” (AutismOne, n.d.). Providing increased autonomy to autistic employees in accordance with the JCM may have a deleterious effect on the motivation of these unique employees.

The third critical psychological state in the JCM is knowledge of results, which is facilitated by feedback. Clear, detailed, and actionable feedback about the effectiveness of employees’ performance leads to an understanding of their work’s impact, as well as how it can be improved. Feedback can come from the work itself or external agents

(e.g., managers) (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). For autistic employees, feedback is likely to be the most critical of the five job characteristics of the JCM. One characteristic of autism is the need for structure and clear details of what is expected in a given situation (The National Autistic Society, 2016). Feedback can provide a person on the autistic spectrum these important details in terms of what is expected in addition to how well the employee has fulfilled those expectations. Feedback should be direct and delivered consistently, yet sensitively, in order to maximize the knowledge of performance for employees on the spectrum.

Calvin's Advice

Calvin knows that everyone with ASD is different and that every situation is distinct and complex. He also knows he has a unique perspective on autism and work, which may be beneficial to employers, coworkers, and others with autism. For employers, he focuses on awareness, consistency, and clarity of communication. "Advice I would give to employers would be to educate themselves on what autism is and how it can benefit them. Like any other employee, some strategies are more effective than others for getting the best work from me. A tip is that ambiguity should be minimized when possible and specific instructions alleviate confusion in situations that are open to interpretation. For situations that are ambiguous, a framework to start from is helpful. Also, frequent or sudden changes to a plan or goal can be especially unsettling for someone who values order. Be sure to explain the reasoning behind any change, provide warning if other changes are likely, and respect any input the employee has." For coworkers, patience and mutual understanding is key. "Be patient if a misunderstanding occurs and be sure to clear up all the points where the confusion originated." Although Calvin is not sure what others can learn from his situation, he shares advice for those who are on the spectrum as they try to enter the workforce and manage their careers. "Ask a lot of questions, don't make assumptions when a question will clear it up, and try to look from the perspective of your coworkers. Don't be discouraged. You have the skill to get a job and the ingenuity to become self-employed. It's about what's important to you and what works for your situation."

Discussion

The convergence of topics relevant to autism and work is extensive and continuing to grow. At this point, the in-depth study of many of these topics is in need of further investigation. This project offered insight into a few of these concepts that can advance the overall knowledge of maximizing the potential of all employees, including those with ASD. This paper took a dual focus of looking at one individual's story coupled with coverage of a few relevant topics related to autism in organizational life. Hopefully this can engender continued inquiry into this overlooked, but pertinent area of study.

The insight offered by Calvin's story provided a look into one individual's life with autism. Those with ASD who are transitioning from student life to their career have similar concerns as other job seekers: performing well in the interview, finding the right fit, and being prepared. But like anything in life for those with autism, the job search process is different because they see things uniquely. Calvin's narrative provided

powerful insight into these similarities and differences. This case and the accompanying overview of topics offered some clarity to the complex processes associated with autism in the workplace.

While limited, this project provided several implications for management research, practice, and education. Research on autism in the workplace should consider the multiplex nature of the disorder and how it interfaces with the work environment. These issues of motivation, search behaviors, communication, interview process, etc. are relevant to all employees, regardless of their ability. However, the general understanding of how they are distinctively affected by autism is limited, albeit growing. As research on these and other issues lag, the ability for practicing and prospective managers to better understand and manage employees on the spectrum is incomplete. Business education can be updated to better incorporate these ideas not only to maximize the potential of employees with autism, but also to educate students with autism about themselves as well. The influx of new potential employees on the spectrum into the job market is logically linked with an influx of business students that are on the spectrum as well.

Future Research

As mentioned above, much more in-depth and generalized analysis is needed to enhance the knowledge of autism and its effect on the workplace. This study, while a small step in that direction, did not focus on several key characteristics that should be considered. While numerous, a few that are notable include topics of social interaction (e.g., teamwork), mentorship, and training and development. A key characterization of those on the spectrum is difficulty with social interaction, including verbal and non-verbal communication challenges (Autism Speaks, n.d.). Understanding the perspective of those with autism and how to best manage team processes and construct work in teams is important. Another aspect of the study of work that is meaningful is mentorship and autism. Many organizations that have successfully employed those on the spectrum stress the importance of providing a mentor, or champion for that employee (Autism Speaks, n.d.). This provides someone that can offer structure, establish expectations, and clarify any misunderstandings. Also, research on proper training and development protocols best suited for individuals with autism will be useful in maximizing performance and satisfaction. Numerous training programs exist that can facilitate autism awareness training for the managers and coworkers of those with autism as well as the onboarding of new employees that are on the spectrum. Ongoing training and development of an employee with ASD can provide structure and manage expectations on a continuing basis.

Conclusion

By the publishing date of this article, Calvin was in the second round of interviews with an organization and position that excites him. He is trying to stay level-headed and de-emphasize the importance of the meeting, but admittedly it is difficult. His story is as unique as each individual on the spectrum, but his point of view illustrates the reality of living and working with autism.

This study extended the research on autism in the workplace, specifically related

to job search and interview behaviors. It is hoped that the information contained in this paper will benefit future and current employees with ASD, their managers, and ultimately their organizations.

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