

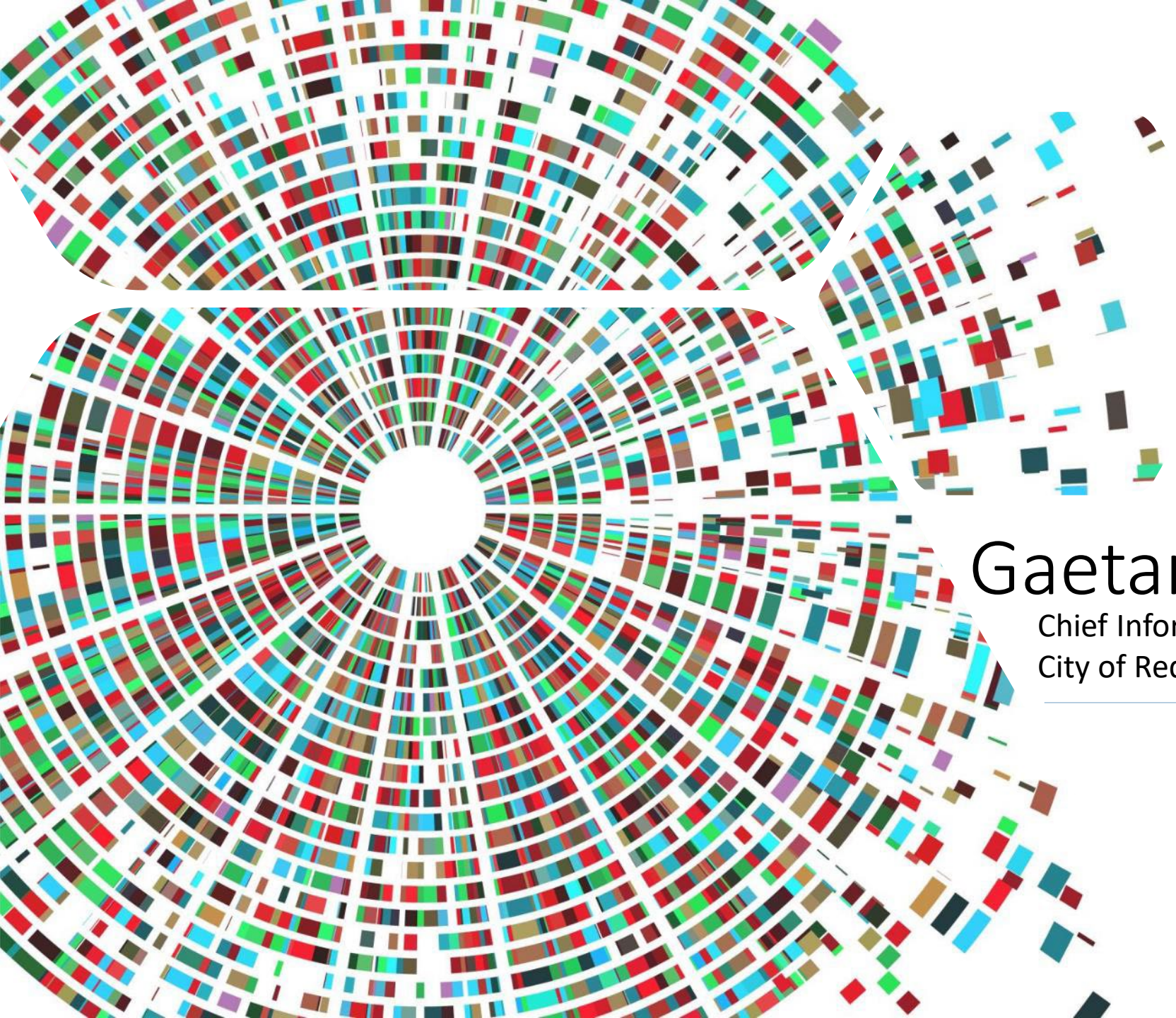


Neurodiversity and **Autism**

**A guide for IT
leadership**

+

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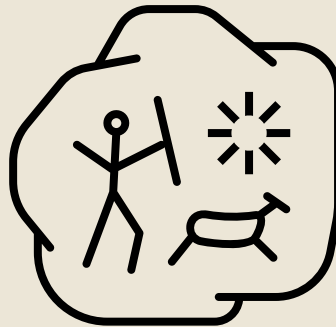


Intentions

Awareness

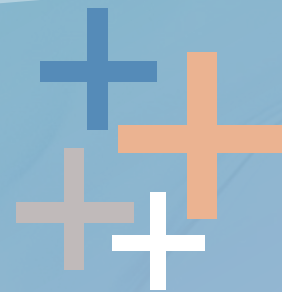
- Autism & Neurodiversity terms
- “Welcome to the Spectrum”

Myth breaking



Manager's Toolkit

- Communication
- Disclosure
- Interviews
- Good managers are...



A Word Of Warning

I'm not a doctor or psychological expert

I have opinions that will come out

Triggering? I'm around to talk afterwards



Neurodivergences



Autism (ASD), savant syndromes

**Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
AD/HD**

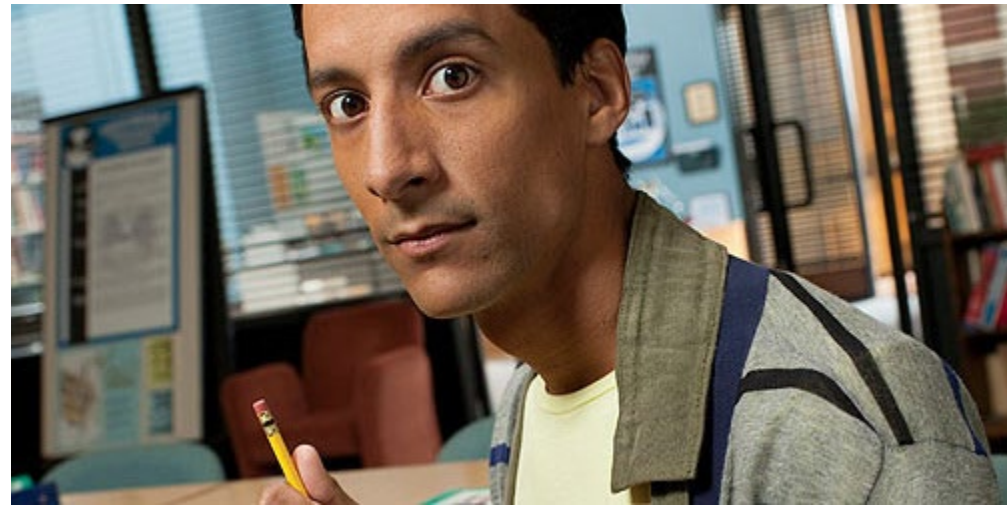
Dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia

**Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination
Disorder (DCD))**

Bipolar, Obsessive compulsive

Tourette's

Fragile X Syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, Williams syndrome, Rett Syndrome, PDD-NOS, and so on.



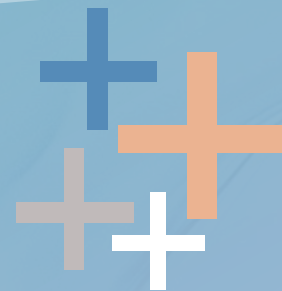
Who are they? “They” = “Us”

- 15-20% of the Canadian workforce are neurodiverse
 - 16% dyslexic, dyspraxic
 - 5% ADHD
 - 5% with a developmental disorder
 - 1-2% Autism (likely ~3-4%)
- General mental illness and stress is on the rise.
 - 1 in 5 Australian professionals experience mental illness this year
- 600,000 noticeably neurodivergent adults in Canada
- 8-12% of I.T. in the U.K. identified as having autistic traits

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/infographic-autism-spectrum-disorder-highlights-canadian-survey-disability.html>;

Australian Disability Council. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fq_MhpZ31yA





An Autism Primer


Terminology & Definitions

*Welcome to the **Spectrum***

*"The world needs a neurodiverse workforce to help try and solve some of the big problems of our time."
– Richard Brandon*



Autism – a dynamic disorder



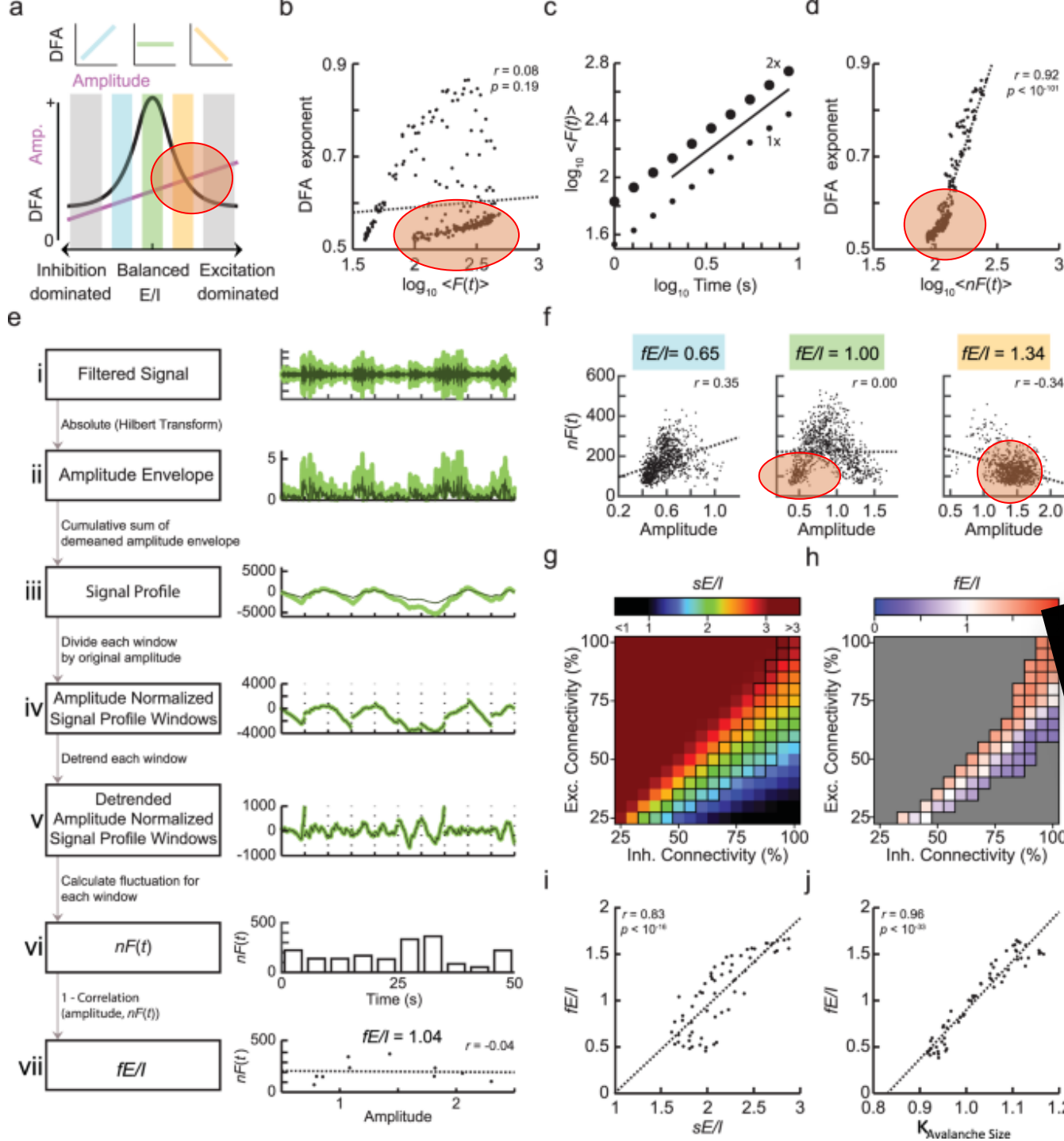
“ASD is a **developmental disability** caused by differences in the brain... a genetic condition. Other causes are also being researched.

People with ASD may behave, communicate, interact, and learn in ways that are **different than most other people”**



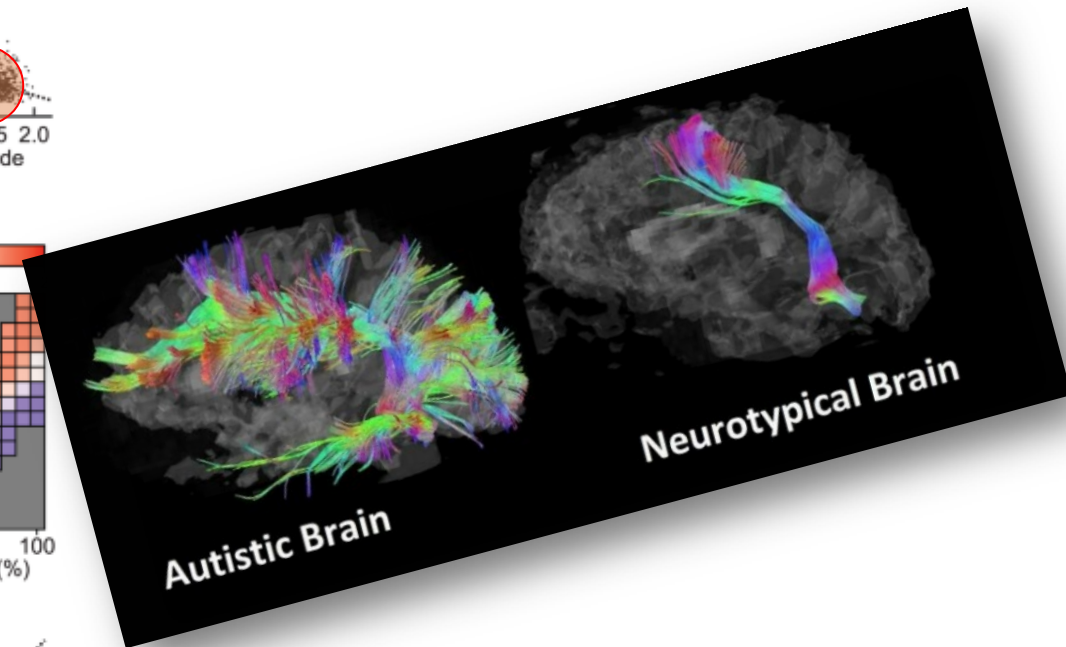
Myth

*“We’re all a bit diverse... neurodiverse.
I’ve always been a bit autistic myself”*



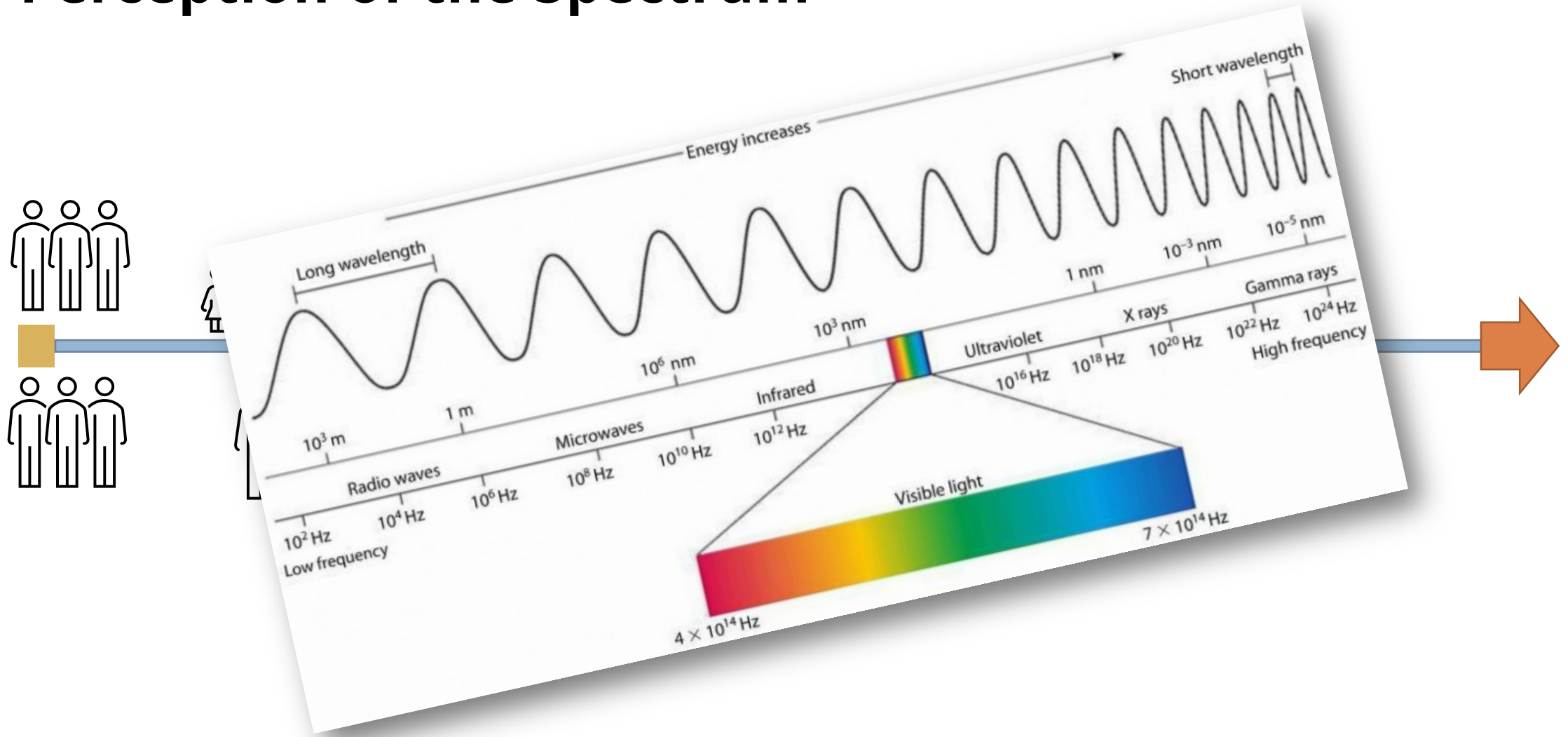
“It’s Real”

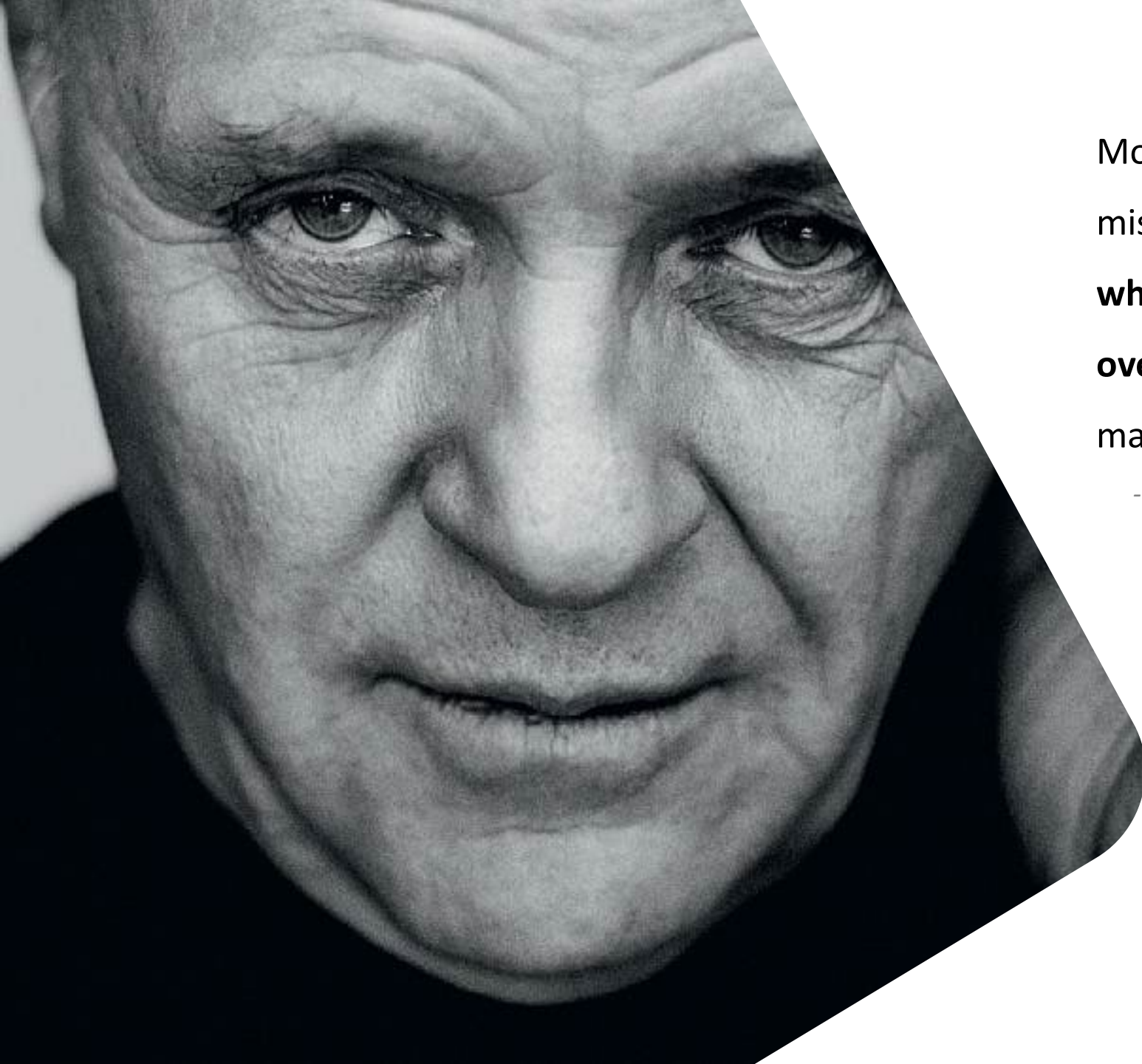
“Measurements of excitation- inhibition ratios in ASD using critical brain dynamics”





Perception of the Spectrum

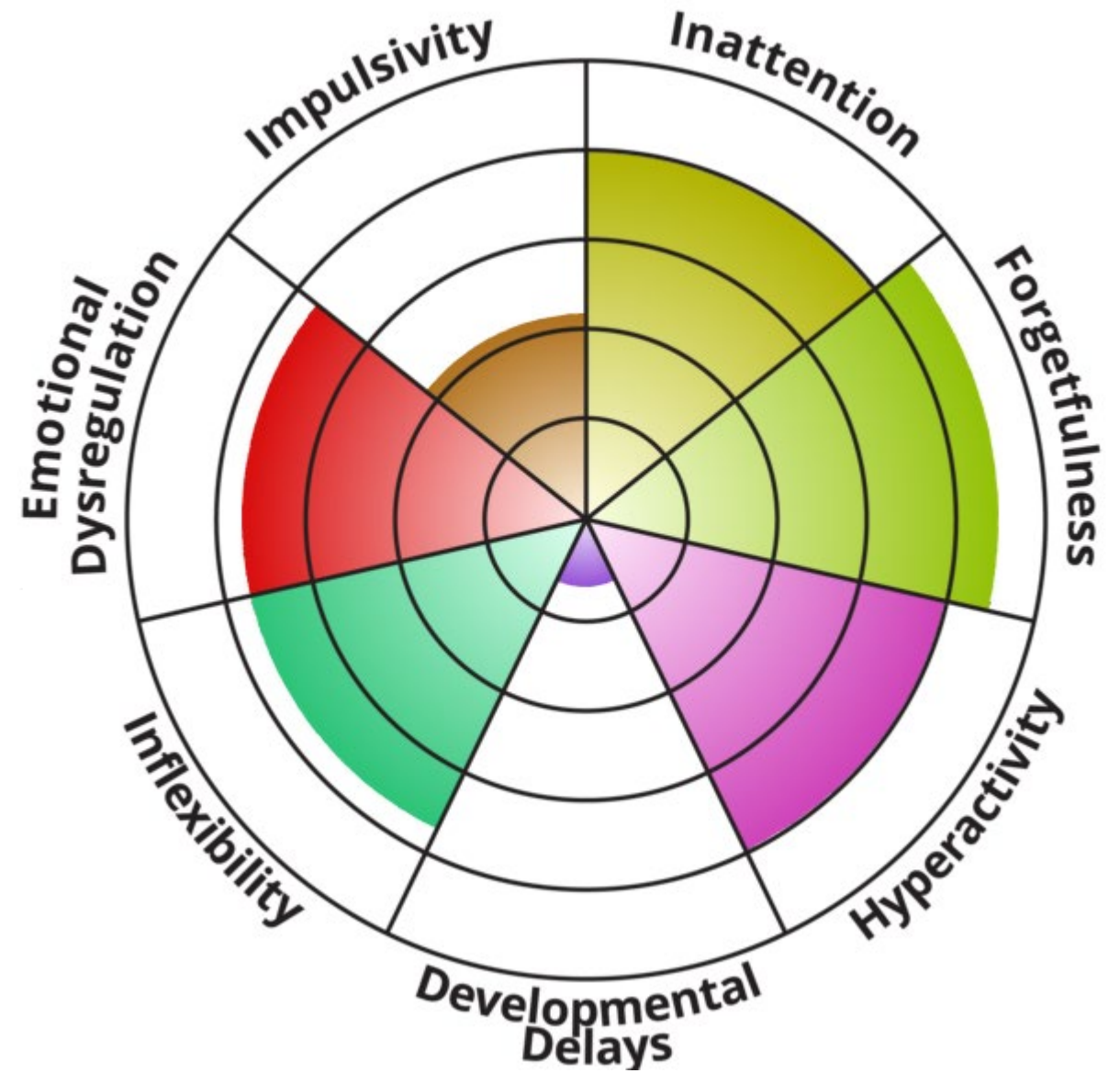
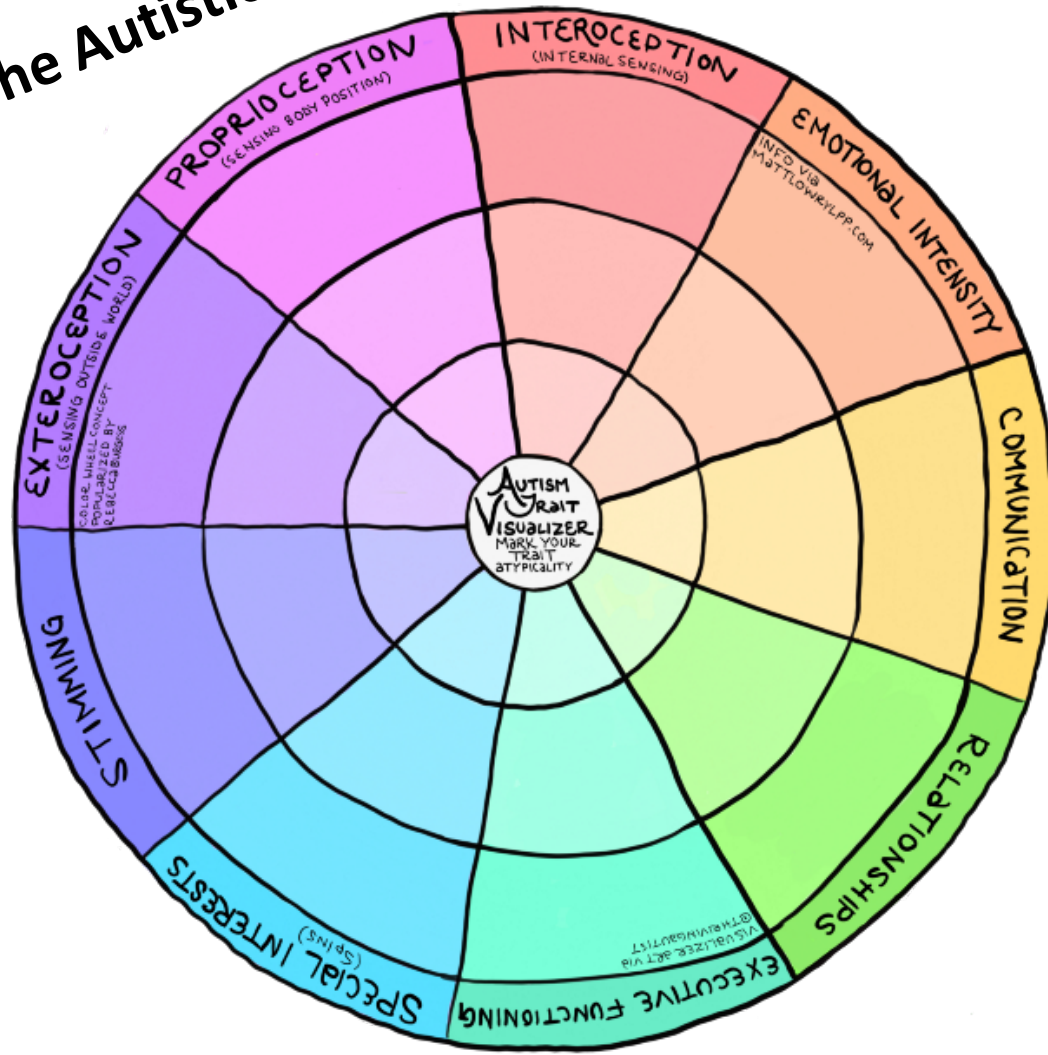




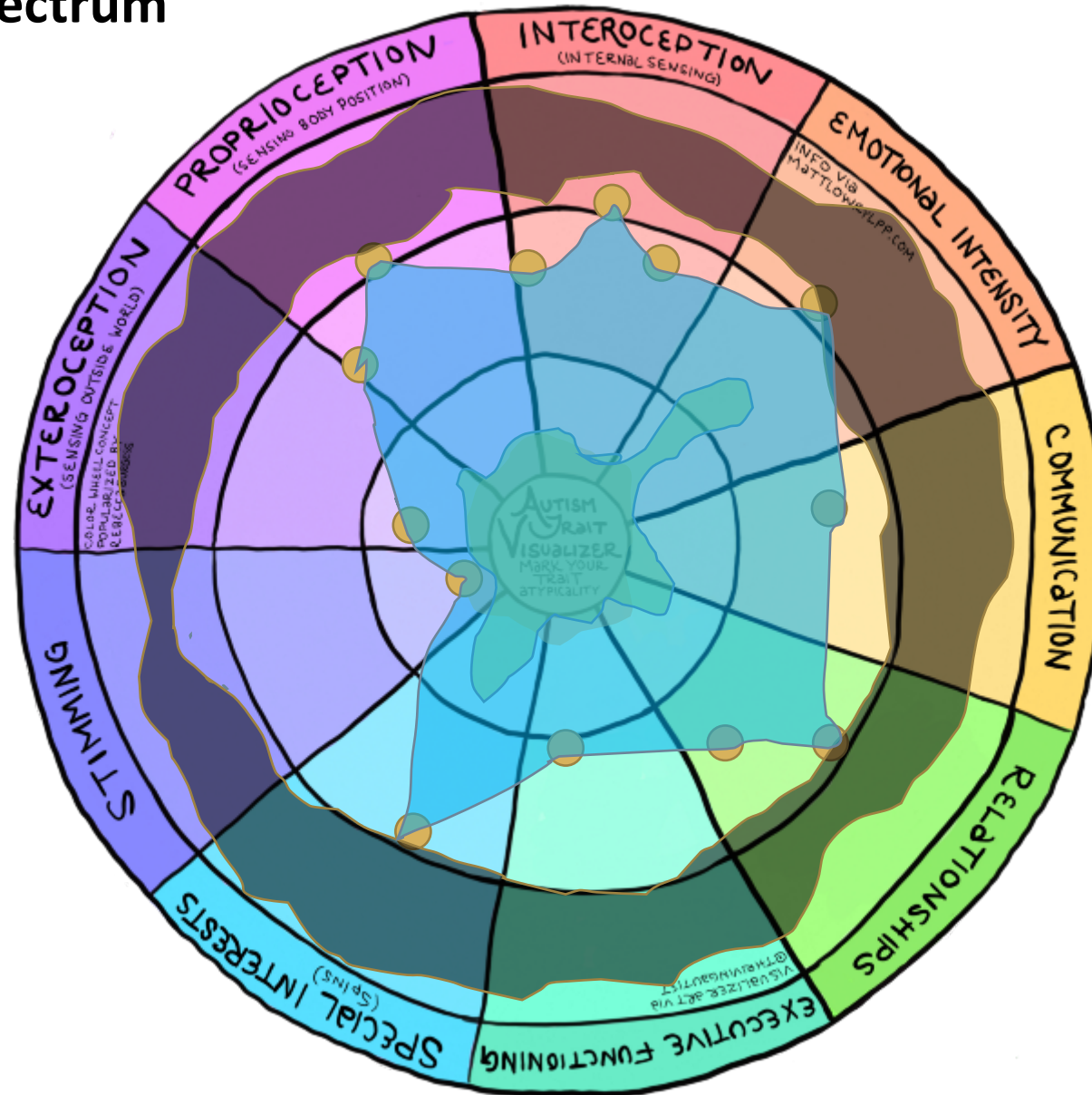
Most disabilities are about what is missing... but autism... is as much about **what is abundant as what is missing**, an **over-expression** of the very traits that make our species unique."

- Paul Collins, *Not Even Wrong: Adventures in Autism*.

The Autistic Spectrum



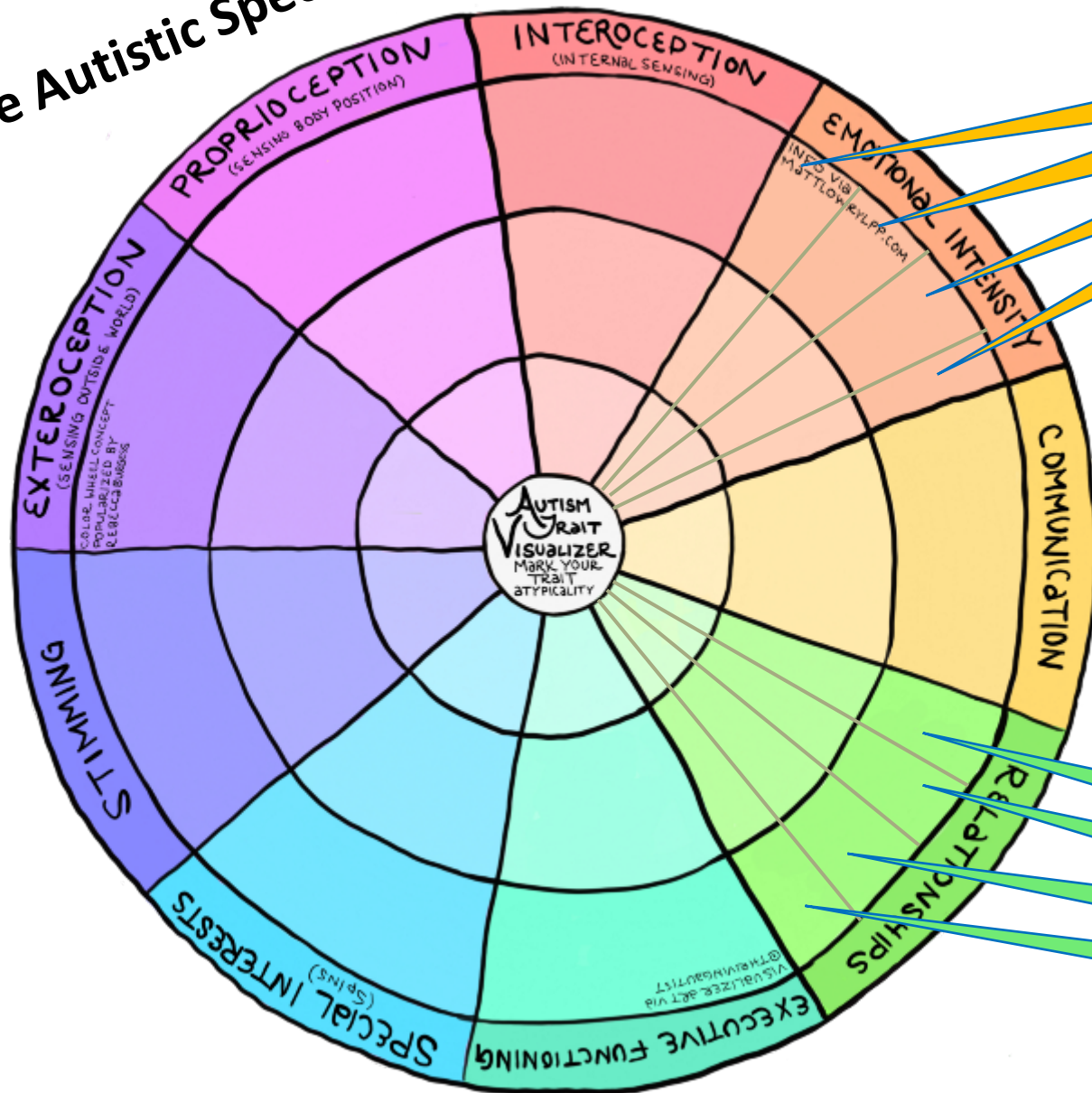
The Autistic Spectrum



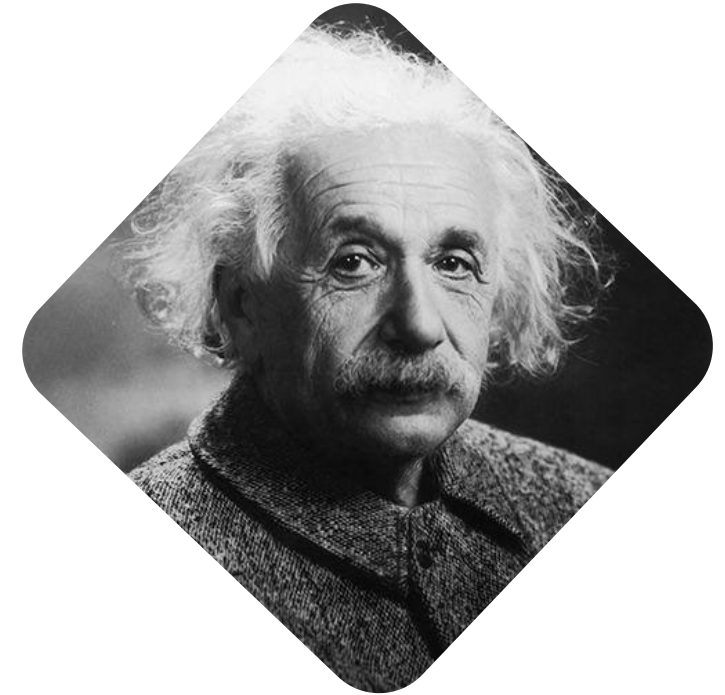
"[So-called] Mild autism doesn't mean one experiences autism mildly... It means YOU experience their autism mildly. You may not know how hard they've had to work to get to the level they are."

-Adam Walton-

The Autistic Spectrum



- Meltdowns – neurologically different from “tantrums”
- Shutdowns/flooding
- Situational mutism
- Hypo-reactivity



- Prosopagnisia
- Rejection sensitivity
- Masking
- Rudeness/Misunderstanding

Strengths in Autism

1. **Problem Solving & High Detail Focus** – consistently perform higher than average on the Embedded Figures Test¹. Higher scoring as average or above average on IQ tests.
2. **Loyalty** – Retention rate much higher than average, up to 90%²
3. **Boosting Culture** – we find our friends in our purpose. NDs tend to come “pre-inclusive”. Wider acceptance circle.
4. **Higher than average authenticity and integrity.**
5. **Expertise** may be built in. **SPINs for the WIN.**

1. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27312717/>

2. <https://www.razorfish.com/articles/news/razorfish-vmg-purpose-research/>
<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20160106-model-employee-are-autistic-individuals-the-best-workers-around>



Strengths in ADHD

1. **Ability to hyperfocus on things of interest**
2. **Spontaneous and flexible**
3. **Good in crisis**
4. **High boosts of energy**
5. **Sprinters, not marathoners**





**If you've met one
person with autism,
you've met ONE
person with autism.**

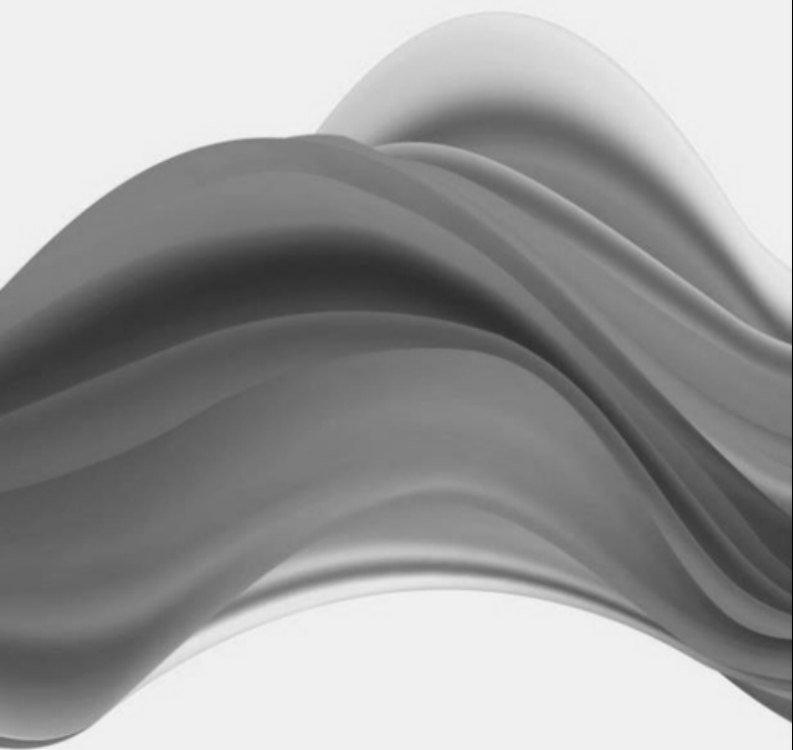
- John Elder Robison

Neurotypicals have mental sunglasses on, filtering out a great deal of extra light.



Autistic don't – and can be overwhelmed by senses that push too much detail at once.









Sensory Stories by Nicole

@sensorystories_

My "high functioning autism" is basically everyone else seeing me as "completely normal but maybe just a bit picky/particular"... while internally it's me in constant sensory overload, social overload, and fighting against my executive dysfunction to just do stuff

12:42 PM · 28 Feb 23



Manager's Toolkit



For starters - supporting

General thoughts and expectations

- Take ND employees seriously
 - Avoid infantilizing NDs
- Use SMART goals
 - Specific | Measurable | Attainable | Realistic | Time-bound
 - Trust your staff, do checkups, demand their best
 - Micromanagement triggers high anxiety
- Ask what would be helpful **adjustments**
 - Environmentally, pacing, interactions
- Support needs, triggers, recovery techniques
 - Quiet rooms, focus spaces



Strategies

The Manager's Toolkit



Best practices, best means of support

Organizationally

Update your DEI policy; or departmental guidelines supporting DEI. Review hiring, onboarding practices; consider Sunflower/etc. programs

Leadership

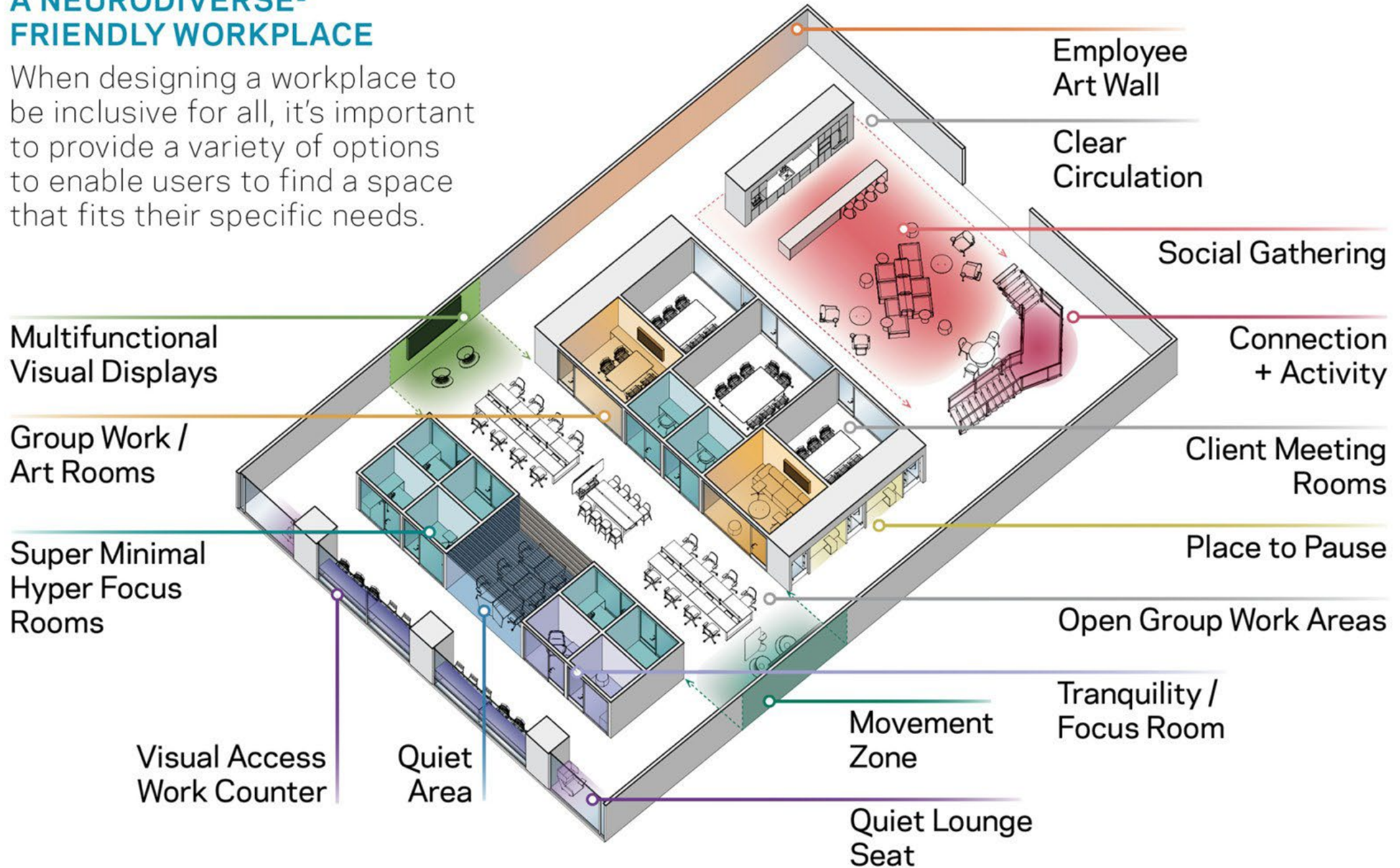
Take training on Neurodiversity in the Workplace. Consider a speaker for your lunch/learns sessions. Build stronger management programs (better managers = better for all)

Environment

Reconsider spaces; use visualizations (maps for complex spaces); diversify types of spaces (loud areas, quiet areas). Consider how group, social activities are managed.

A NEURODIVERSE-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

When designing a workplace to be inclusive for all, it's important to provide a variety of options to enable users to find a space that fits their specific needs.





Tools and Techniques



AUDITORY
White/pink/
grey noise
8D Sound



Good Managers = ND savvy managers

- Asking *all* employees the good questions:

“what do you need to be successful and productive at work?”

“What barriers exist?”

- Social options: full, partial, duty-based, early entrance/exits
- Respect the levels of awareness, disclosure, adjustments for medical
- Know and promote what’s really needed to accomplish the job
 - Expectations, tasks, results

Give good information ahead of time:

- “This meeting could be emotional as we discuss...”
- Agenda: “Ice Breaker for the first 10 mins” + bio-breaks!
- “This week is tougher with the topic of X happening, please be prepared...”



Interviews, Onramping

Strategies and assumptions

- Autistics do badly in the hiring system
- Oblique, coded language in the ad, job description
 - Too many mandatories... when they're not
- Many of our immediate first-impressions are based on social queues and assessment of "chemistry"
(cf. Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*)
- This does not mean "not hiring-to-fit", it means defining what's need to another degree of accuracy and inclusion.

*Understanding
the
perspective*



What to do when someone discloses

- Don't ignore it, do acknowledge it.
- Don't doubt them.
- Don't expect them to educate you.
- Do be curious, learn more.
- Don't be *nice*. Don't be *cruel*.
 - – don't apologize for something you didn't know.
- Do share what my disclosure means to you.
- Do embrace the differences, include me.

Tell me more, what does that mean to you?

What should I know about... how to support, what this means...

Affirm – 'we know you – we're glad you're a part of our team'.

What kind of disclosure are you deciding?

~~I'm so sorry. You're so brave! Oh, that's sad. I don't know what I'd do if it was me.
You don't look autistic. Are you sure?
Everyone's a little autistic...~~





Myth

*Neurodiversity is expensive
or difficult to support*

“Autistics are the ultimate square pegs, and the problem with pounding a square peg into a round hole is not that the hammering is hard work. It’s that you’re destroying the peg.”

– Paul Collins

“We don’t want the hole to be square. We just want it to be a bit bigger so we can fit in.”





Examples of our Future

SAP

Autism at Work program (2013) and as of late 2019, reported a **90% retention rate**.

J.P. Morgan

A research set of 300 autistic employees (frontline to executive) were **48% faster** and **92% more productive** than neurotypical staff

Israeli Analytics

The Roim Rachok Program (“seeing into the future”) focusses on hiring autistics (and NTs) able to assess large scale amount of data, photos, information and provide intelligence. High-detail, repetitive, “mind-numbing” work with high value.

Microsoft & Google

More and more tech giants now have specifically tailored interview processes and on-ramping techniques to support neurodiversity.

Other companies... Allianz, Auticon 2/3s staff), Experian, GlaxoSmithKline, IBM, Dell, Ultronauts (75% staff), DXC Tech; Westpac; Walmart; MacQuarie...

<https://businesschief.com/human-capital/top-7-companies-hiring-and-nurturing-neurodiverse-talent>
<https://www.capitalonecareers.com/able-at-capital-one-how-associates-with-disabilities-encourage-diverse-thinking-101-divi-cul>

There is a direct link between organizations with mature DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) and business performance.

“Diverse organizations are more profitable, more innovative, and do a better job of retaining top talent... The same strategies that drive inclusion and diversity also drive organizational performance.”

<https://www.forrester.com/blogs/inclusion-and-diversity-research-five-surprising-things-we-learned/>

Use These symbols

FOR AUTISM

@AUTISTIC TRUTH



RAINBOW INFINITY SYMBOL
FOR NEURODIVERSITY



GOLD INFINITY SYMBOL
FOR AUTISM

Please don't use these



THESE SYMBOLS ARE OFFENSIVE TO MAJORITY
OF AUTISTIC PEOPLE

autism awareness

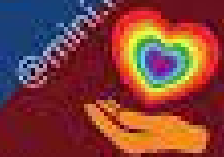
person with
autism



disease

autism
speaks

cure



early intervention

functioning
labels



tragedy

VS

accommodations

pride



epidemic

collaboration

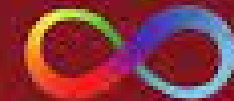
autistic

#lightitupblue



free stimming

centering autistic voices



inclusion

#redinstead
#lightitupgold

autism acceptance

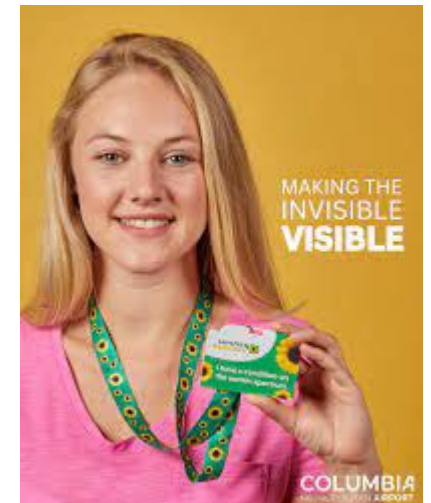
#REDinstead
Autism Acceptance Month

Resources

UBC – Autism and Neurodiversity in the Workplace

<https://circa.educ.ubc.ca/autism-in-the-workplace/>

- **Ready Willing and Able.** <https://readywillingable.ca/> From business cases, policy writing to projects in support of inclusive workplaces.
- **CAI.IO.** <https://www.cai.io/neurodiverse-solutions/diversify>
- **Specialisterne.** <https://us.specialisterne.com/> - support employers tap into neurdiverse workforces
- **Autism CanTech!** - <https://autismcantech.ca/> - Canadian Autism in the workplace organization. Also do inclusivity and accessibility workshops.
- **Melitculon IT Consultancy** (Calgary). <https://www.meticulon.com/> - supports inclusion training and employment solutions. Many services are covered by government funding and busuries
- **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower** <https://hdsunflower.com/>
 - Created in 2016 by Gatwick Airport, now includes airports, municipalities and more businesses.
 - Edmonton, Vancouver, Toronto Airports...
 - Training and kits.
- **Corporate programs:**
 - MS's Neurdiversity Program
<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/inside-microsoft/cross-disability/neurodiversityhiring>
 - Walgreen's https://www.walgreens.com/topic/sr/sr_disability-inclusion.jsp (up to 10% of their workforce)



Business Cases

- Bustle (2017). *Employers Rarely Hire People With Disabilities. Here's Why They Should*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7KTODIJGWg&feature=youtu.be>. Randy Lewis (CEO) of Walgreens talks about the advantages of hiring disabled employees and their experience (and program)
- [Focus Professionals Services – Impact on Corporate Culture and Productivity](#) provides a short video and information on why neurodiversity benefits the corporate culture and productivity
- Rethinking DisAbility in the Private Sector (Gov of Canada business case for hiring)
<https://canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/consultations/rethinking-disabilities.html>
- Monster Canada. <https://hiring.monster.ca/resources/workforce-management/workplace-diversity-equity/hiring-people-with-autism-spectrum-ca/> Benefits of hiring people on the spectrum
- Monster Canada. <https://hiring.monster.ca/resources/workforce-management/workplace-diversity-equity/> Workplace Diversity and Equity Program
- Society for HR Management (SHRM). <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/1016/pages/companies-see-high-return-on-workers-with-autism.aspx> Companies see high return on workers with autism.

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