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Module 1

General Information About the Autism Spectrum

Author: The Autism Society of Latvia (Latvijas Autisma apvienība)

Latvia

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Module Title	Module 1: General Information about the Autism Spectrum
Learning Objectives	<p>Module 1 aims to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educate learners on the definition of the Autism Spectrum; 2. Describe the general characteristics of people on the Autism Spectrum; 3. Educate learners on the challenges people on the Autism Spectrum face at work; 4. Describe the Roles and Responsibilities of Management; 5. Describing CSR.
Learning Outcomes	<p>Through Module 1, learners will be able to perform the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support autistic staff at work; • Identify characteristics of people on the Autism Spectrum; • Know about social inclusion at work; • Understand the context of CSR.

Introduction

The module aims to inform learners about autism, help identify the typical needs of staff with autism, and promote understanding and effective support among colleagues and employers. Another objective is to clarify any legal and social responsibilities of the employers in accommodating staff with autism. This module also aims to help organisations learn how to adapt and incorporate social responsibility policies aimed at creating a more inclusive work environment for staff with autism.

The module explores the typical needs of staff with autism, emphasising the importance of empathy, support, and effective communication. It also discusses employers' legal and social responsibilities when involving staff with autism and provides practical recommendations for integrating these considerations into the company's social responsibility policy.

Learning outcomes: gain a comprehensive understanding of autism in the workplace.

Unit 1: What is Autism

Autism, formally called autism spectrum disorder, is a behaviourally defined neurodevelopmental disorder which affects the way a person experiences the world and communicates with others. Characterised by social and communication difficulties, as well as repetitive behaviours and sensory hyper- or hyposensitivities, it is usually diagnosed in early childhood but can be identified at any age. People on the autism spectrum have varying language and intellectual capabilities, ranging from profound intellectual disability to superior levels. It is estimated that around 1-2% of the world's population is on the autism spectrum. There are approximately 7 million autistic people in Europe. (Autism Europe, 2020)

“Spectrum disorder” means that each affected person is different. Contrary to popular belief, the autism spectrum is not linear ranging from “mildly autistic” to “severely autistic”, but rather encompasses various traits which manifest differently in each individual. These traits include (but are not limited to):

- differences in social understanding and social behaviour (difficulty in forming typical social relationships),
- communication differences which may include a complete absence of spoken language, as well as atypical speech patterns and differences in nonverbal communication,
- repetitive behaviours which may include repetitive body movements as well as narrow interests, a limited range of activities, inflexibility and a need for control and predictability,
- sensory processing differences,

- executive dysfunction,
- differences in information processing, attention and focus,
- a “spiky” cognitive profile with an unusual disparity between strengths and weaknesses,
- difficulties with abstract thinking,
- abnormal motor skills, posture and gait,
- alexithymia,
- impaired proprioception and interoception,
- “meltdowns” and “shutdowns” in response to overwhelming situations.

1. a. Understanding the Characteristics of Autism

Social and Communication Difficulties

“Individuals with autism exhibit persistent deficits in initiating and sustaining social communication and reciprocal social interactions that are outside the expected range of typical functioning given the individual’s age and level of intellectual development. Specific manifestations of these deficits vary according to chronological age, verbal and intellectual ability, and disorder severity.” (ICD-11, 2022)

Autistic people may have impaired social awareness and have trouble modifying behaviour according to context. They can speak and use language unconventionally, show atypical nonverbal behaviours and miss others' nonverbal cues, as well as interpret language literally and struggle to engage in conversation. They may have difficulties understanding others' thoughts, emotions, and perspectives, struggle with social-emotional reciprocity, and have difficulties developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships.

Repetitive Behaviours

Repetitive behaviours are another characteristic feature of autism. They can take different forms, including repetitive and stereotyped body movements (e.g. pacing, rocking, finger flicking, hand-flapping, leg bouncing, hair twirling, tapping), a narrow focus on one or more special interests, an unusual obsession with objects or parts of objects (e.g. repetitively spinning, flipping, organising objects or needing to carry a specific object around), or particular kinds of sensory stimuli (e.g. listening to the same music over and over or turning lights on and off).

In a broader sense, repetitive behaviours also include a lack of adaptability to new experiences, which provoke distress, and behavioural rigidity. This can manifest as strict adherence to routines and rules, inflexibility of thought, as well as excessive stubbornness.

Sensory Processing Differences

Individuals with autism can be either hypersensitive or hyposensitive to various sensory stimuli: lights, colours, sounds and noises, textures, odours, tastes, temperatures, motion, balance, as well as internal stimuli (pain, hunger, thirst, etc.). Consequently, they can have atypical reactions when exposed to ordinary stimuli. An individual with sensory hypersensitivity may become distressed when exposed to particular stimuli.

An individual with sensory hyposensitivity may seek out additional sensory input. This can manifest as a fascination with lights, patterns and reflections, enjoyment of loud music and other sounds, rubbing against fabrics and materials, squeezing into tight spaces, sniffing things and people, a preference for strong flavours and spicy foods, and even tasting and eating inedible objects, as well as a high pain tolerance and excessive jumping, swinging, and rocking.

It is common for an autistic person to experience both hypersensitivity and hyposensitivity towards various stimuli, and a person's sensitivity can vary from day to day.

Executive Dysfunction

Executive functioning refers to skills such as planning, organisation, working memory, inhibition and impulse control, emotional regulation, flexibility, and others. For an autistic person, compromised executive functioning can make it difficult to handle daily tasks.

Information Processing, Attention and Focus

Autistic people have a “bottom-up” processing style — an enhanced attention to detail rather than the whole concept. They might pick up on nuanced details, intricate patterns, or specific aspects of a matter. This eye for detail can be a considerable advantage in job positions which require meticulous precision. Conversely, because the autistic brain is constantly taking in so many tiny nuances, it can struggle to sort and integrate the information, leading to sensory overload. It can also be harder for an autistic person to see “the big picture”.

Another characteristic feature of autism is intensely focused attention. Autistic people may struggle to direct their attention to other matters, however, thanks to their passionate interests and intense focus, many autistic people are autodidacts and have an extensive knowledge of the subjects they are interested in.

Uneven Cognitive Development

Individuals with autism often show a “spiky” cognitive profile with distinct strengths and weaknesses. “Spiky” cognitive profiles can cause some confusion. It is essential to recognise that an

autistic person's abilities vary from domain to domain. For example, a highly verbal and intelligent person may still experience a lot of struggles with organisation and planning, be very sensitive to loud noises, or have a specific learning difficulty such as dyscalculia.

Motor Skills, Posture and Gait

There may be atypicalities in how people on the autism spectrum move. They can also experience difficulties with coordination. Both gross motor skills can be affected, causing clumsiness and difficulties performing certain tasks which require balance skills and postural stability, as well as fine motor skills. Furthermore, autistic people can exhibit an “odd” gait, which can look differently from individual to individual. Step width can be unusually short or long, the person may have a “bouncy” walk, step on tiptoes, have a jerky walking speed, and suddenly run, skip and jump.

Alexithymia

Many people on the autism spectrum experience alexithymia. According to various sources, this rate can be as high as 50% (estimations differ). Alexithymia is the inability to recognise one's own or another's feelings, as well as to express emotions.

Proprioception and Interoception

Some individuals on the autism spectrum may have impaired proprioception and experience difficulty processing and integrating sensory input related to their bodies' outward position and movement. Interoception, on the contrary, refers to internal sensations and signals — physical and emotional. An autistic person who struggles with interoception may not recognise when they are hungry, thirsty, tired, need to go to the bathroom, or physically feel a strong emotion (for example, anger or fear). Interoception commonly co-occurs with alexithymia.

“Meltdowns” and “Shutdowns”

Meltdowns and shutdowns are two different kinds of extreme reactions that autistic people may display in reaction to overwhelming experiences. Common triggers are sensory overload, changes in routine, excessive demands, and communication difficulties. An autistic meltdown is an intense emotional outburst which can involve panicking, screaming, crying, and self-injurious behaviours. Meltdowns typically end once the triggering stimuli/stressors are no longer present. During a shutdown, the autistic person may become unresponsive, withdrawn, immobile or appear mentally and emotionally “switched off.” It can take a longer time to emerge from a shutdown.

The best solution for meltdowns and shutdowns is prevention — reducing stress and overwhelm. In the case of a meltdown/shutdown, it is best to provide a calm environment for the

individual to recover. Reduce demands and sensory stimuli. Speak in a slow, quiet voice. Explain what is going to happen next. Do not touch the person or try to reason and argue.

Comorbid Conditions

Some individuals on the autism spectrum have comorbid neurodevelopmental and neurological disorders such as specific learning difficulties (such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, non-verbal learning disorder, or others), attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, epilepsy, tic disorders, as well as psychiatric disorders — mainly anxiety disorders and depression.

1. b. Common Myths and Misconceptions

~~Autism is a disease or illness.~~ Autism is neither a disease nor an illness, but a neurodivergence. The autistic brain works differently from a non-autistic brain. It can be said that autistic people have a different operating system. Some autistic people view their autism merely as a difference, and many others identify as disabled. It is up to each autistic person to define how they experience their condition.

~~Autism is a childhood condition.~~ Autism is a lifelong condition, but the characteristic features emerge in the developmental period, henceforth usually warranting a diagnosis in childhood. A diagnosis can also be made in adolescence or adulthood. Some behavioural manifestations of autism tend to become less pronounced as an individual ages, or they can be “masked” or compensated for with learned behaviours.

~~Only boys and men are autistic.~~ For a long time, it was thought that mainly boys were autistic and autism in girls was very rare. Autistic girls and women, particularly those without an intellectual disability, often do not fit autism stereotypes and go undiagnosed. The latest estimated autistic male-to-female ratio is 3:1.

~~Autistic people lack feelings and empathy.~~ Autistic people experience the same emotions as non-autistic people do. However, they can express their feelings differently, or their mimics and gestures might not correspond to their feelings. Additionally, a large percentage of autistic people have co-occurring alexithymia which makes it difficult for them to identify and name their emotions.

~~Autistic people are loners who are not interested in socialising.~~ Socialising and making friends can be a lot harder on the autism spectrum, but most autistic people do want friends and relationships. Many admit they're feeling lonely.

~~All autistic people are good in mathematics and other STEM subjects.~~ Just like non-autistic people, autistic people can have their talents, strengths, and passions. While some autistic people

are truly fascinated by maths and numbers, many others can be bad at maths but excel in arts, literature, or any other discipline.

~~Autistic people either have an intellectual disability, or they are geniuses.~~ People on the autism spectrum exhibit a full range of intellectual abilities.

~~All nonspeaking autistic individuals have a profound intellectual disability.~~ While it is more common for nonspeaking autistic people to have a co-occurring intellectual disability, it is important to not underestimate a nonspeaking person's capabilities and to explore various alternative methods of communication which can include sign language, picture cards, text-to-speech devices, and various AAC devices. Nonspeaking autism advocates emphasise that their lack of speech is caused by a neuromotor impairment, rather than a cognitive one. Given the right tools, a nonspeaking person can express their needs and desires and fully reach their potential. Additionally, nonspeaking does not always mean nonverbal. Many nonspeaking autistic individuals do communicate using words — they learn to read, write or type, use the computer and in some cases even show academic success.

~~Nonspeaking or minimally speaking autistic people don't understand what is being said to them.~~ Just because someone is nonspeaking or has limited speech does not mean that they lack comprehension. Many nonspeaking autistic individuals have intact receptive language skills, meaning they can understand spoken language.

~~Repetitive body movements are unacceptable and have to be discouraged.~~ Repetitive behaviours are a hallmark feature of autism. They serve important functions, for example, self-soothing and self-regulation, and thus do not need to be discouraged. However, repetitive behaviours may sometimes be harmful. In this case, it is best to find the source of the distressed behaviour, eliminate it and/or direct the individual's attention to something else.

~~Autism is caused by vaccines.~~ Numerous researches have been conducted, and the idea that autism is caused by vaccines has been scientifically debunked. What is more, it has been discovered that the paper originally promoting the idea was deliberately based on faulty data. A clear cause of autism has not been identified, but it is believed to be a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

~~Autism is overdiagnosed.~~ When autism was first described in 1943, it was considered to be a rare condition. Currently, it is estimated that 1-2% of people are on the autism spectrum. The increase in diagnoses is caused by a better understanding and recognition of autism and broadened diagnostic criteria.

~~Everyone is a little bit autistic.~~ Some behaviours and traits that are more prevalent among autistic people can also be observed, in varied degrees, in the general population. But having some of those traits (e.g. disliking social chit-chat or having a passion for a narrow subject) does not make

a person “a little bit autistic”. A thorough evaluation is required to make an autism diagnosis, and those who meet the requirements have specific difficulties that have a big influence on their day-to-day functioning. Saying that “everyone is a little bit autistic” trivialises the unique experiences of autistic people and belittles their struggles.

Unit 2: Challenges Autistic People Experience in the Workplace

2. a. A Lack of Access to Employment

It is estimated that approximately 20% of autistic people in the European Union are employed. (Autism Europe, 2024) Autistic people face many barriers to employment. For example, hiring bias. Even though many autistic people have thorough expertise and skills required for a job, they may lack communication and persuasion skills and not be “team players”, thus not fitting the stereotypical idea of a “good employee” and getting overlooked by recruiters. Similarly, people on the autism spectrum may have no opportunities for career advancement despite their contributions and qualifications. They may also receive unjust performance evaluations that fail to take into account their challenges in the workplace. Other barriers are being denied essential accommodations and a lack of autism awareness and support in the workplace. In addition, in some cases companies hire autistic individuals only to fill quotas for employing people with disabilities and do not offer realistic career prospects or necessary adjustments.

2. b. Communication and Social Interaction Challenges

Autistic people frequently report difficulties with having to participate in team building and other social activities, navigating relationships with colleagues, understanding unwritten rules and expectations, making sense of business hierarchy and authority, participating in group events, communicating with clients and customers, doing small talk and social chit-chat, and having to take and do phone calls.

2. c. Sensory Sensitivities and Inaccessible Environments

Sensory processing disorder is a characteristic part of autism, and difficulties processing sensory information can make many environments intolerable and inaccessible for an autistic person. In such environments, people with autism experience an inability to focus on work tasks, distress, sensory overload, and even physical pain. This can cause a meltdown or shutdown.

2. d. A Lack of Consistency, Routine, and Clear Expectations

It can be difficult for people on the autism spectrum to fit into a typical working rhythm, as well as to understand what is expected of them. Unclear instructions may cause anxiety and confusion. Changes in routine can provoke distress. Additionally, disruptions and interruptions may be frustrating, as it is difficult to get back to the task — because of their narrow attention tunnel, autistic people struggle with switching attention and multi-tasking. Because of all the daily stressors, autistic people may also have varying energy levels and tolerance towards sensory stimuli, which might cause difficulties in being consistent with productivity.

2. e. Health Issues

Exhaustion and Burnout From “Masking”

For autistic people, it can be very tiring to try to keep up with typical expectations. The demands of daily life can be overwhelming, and many autistic people struggle to stay on top of things. As a result, autistic people often report feeling depleted after doing “ordinary things”.

Moreover, many people on the autism spectrum, particularly those without an intellectual disability, feel compelled to “mask” and hide their differences by trying to imitate non-autistic behaviour. Over time, the strain of the demands of daily life and masking can lead to autistic burnout. “Autistic burnout is a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic life stress and a mismatch of expectations and abilities without adequate support. It is characterised by pervasive, long-term (typically 3+ months) exhaustion, loss of function, and reduced tolerance to stimulus.” (The National Autistic Society, 2022)

Anxiety and Depression

Navigating life as an autistic person can be challenging. Autism is not a mental health condition, but many autistic people do develop mental health problems, the most common being anxiety disorders and depressive disorders.

2. f. Ableism and Discrimination

Despite significant advances in scientific understanding, there remains much to learn about autism spectrum disorder, as the condition is still relatively poorly understood and surrounded by myths and stereotypes. There are significant gaps in autism awareness in the general public, and many autistic people confront bullying, ableism, and discrimination, including in the workplace. It is common for autistic individuals to not disclose their diagnosis out of fear of rejection and to try to appear as non-autistic as possible, which is damaging in the long term.

Autistic people might be targets of intimidation, harassment, or mockery in the office as a result of their behaviour and communication style. Many individuals feel pressured to suppress repetitive behaviours, particularly repetitive body movements, and other “odd” mannerisms. In fact, repetitive body movements help an autistic individual to regulate their nervous system, maintain attention and focus and reduce sensory overload.

If not bullied directly, an autistic person can still experience microaggression, e.g. insensitive remarks, jokes, or teasing. Many people on the autism spectrum struggle to “read between the lines” or understand jokes and might not realise that they are being ridiculed. Additionally, it can be very hard for an autistic person to defend themselves because of social and communication difficulties.

Non-autistic employers, managers or colleagues might also underestimate an autistic individual's capabilities and not assign them tasks or projects, even though the individual would be capable of completing them. Moreover, non-autistic employees might presume that their autistic coworkers lack comprehension and not speak directly to them. This can lead to exclusion from crucial conversations and social interactions in the workplace, along with a lack of opportunities to share ideas and make decisions, resulting in sensations of isolation and disappointment.

Unit 3: Legal and Social Responsibilities of Employers

3. a. Reasonable Accommodations

It is essential to take a person-centred approach and address the specific needs of each individual to support their well-being best and enhance productivity in the workplace. Have an open dialogue with the person about their strengths, challenges, and preferences in the workplace, and work together to develop a suitable accommodation plan. Specifically, ask about their sensory processing challenges — which types of sounds, lights, textures, or smells cause overwhelm. Ask about difficulties with social interactions — if the person struggles with understanding social cues or figurative language, if some types of interactions are particularly stressful. Ask about executive functioning challenges. Get to know the person by asking about their special interests. Talking to a family member or support worker who knows the person well may also be helpful.

Setting Reasonable Expectations

Find tasks that match the employee's strengths and interests. Autistic individuals might thrive in positions that demand meticulousness, reliability and adherence to protocols like handling documents and inventory, food preparation, or maintaining cleanliness standards.

Provide training and continuous support to help the employee feel self-assured in their role. Autistic people are usually highly anxious in new settings, thus it is important to give them time to develop their skills gradually.

Accommodations for Social Interactions

For individuals on the autism spectrum, talking to new people can be an overwhelming and anxiety-inducing experience. They may underrepresent themselves during a job interview. Ask clear questions about their previous experience, education, and expectations from the job. As a recruiter, focus on the candidate's hard skills and experience directly required for the job. Give the candidate more time to process their answers and allow for alternative communication methods, such as e-mail or instant messaging services. In your interactions, avoid open-ended questions, vague ideas, sarcasm and figurative speech. Try to make your message as clear as possible. Address the person directly. If the person struggles with speaking, give them more time or encourage written communication. Be patient.

Consider alternatives to traditional team meetings or group activities like providing written updates or conducting virtual check-ins. Offer to keep in touch via e-mail or messaging services instead of phone calls. An incoming phone call is unexpected, and it can be hard for an autistic person to switch attention and communicate effectively. Alternatively, schedule a call at a set hour.

Prepare social scripts for communication with clients and customers. Do not forget to include instructions for unexpected situations (e.g. who to contact in case of an emergency or when something is unclear).

Structured Environment, Clear Communication and Feedback

Individuals on the autism spectrum often find comfort in routine and predictability. It is crucial to warn about changes promptly and explain what is going to happen. Visual aids may be helpful as they provide a clear understanding of the situation, and a structured work environment may help to alleviate anxiety and increase productivity. Develop a clear outline of your expectations from the employee and provide work instructions using written or visual aids such as visual schedules, checklists, calendars, and apps. It is important to help the individual to prioritise tasks and break them down into smaller steps. You can also break down complex information to enhance understanding. Be open to answering questions and providing clarification when needed. Finally, give constructive feedback on the employee's work, providing additional instructions if necessary.

Many autistic people struggle with time management and focus. Sometimes they have trouble switching attention and remain so deeply focused on their work that they forget to take a

break. Others have co-occurring ADHD and need help staying on track. Having a schedule divided into fixed parts, including scheduled meetings and breaks, can be helpful. Scheduled breaks and visual prompts may also help an autistic person who struggles with proprioception or interoception to remember to stretch, move, go to the bathroom or drink water.

Sensory Considerations

Given the countless sensory experiences in the HoReCa industry, it is paramount to recognise and accommodate the sensory sensitivities the staff members might have to create a welcoming workplace for both the staff and customers.

If necessary, encourage staff members to use sensory aids such as noise-cancelling earphones or earplugs and create a quiet space for them to take a break and decompress. Throughout the workplace, use natural light as much as possible. Provide multiple sources of artificial light. Consider installing dimmers. Make sure to avoid flickering lights, bright overhead lighting, flashing LED signs, strobes, and daylight light bulbs. Designate a secluded area with reduced visual and auditory stimuli.

If employees are required to wear uniforms in your establishment, seek to provide comfortable garments in sensory-friendly fabrics with no tags or rough stitches or allow for reasonable swaps or modifications. Some autistic people struggle with thermoregulation and may be hyper- or hyposensitive to hot or cold temperatures. Ensure that the uniform can be adjustable to suit the individual's needs.

Additionally, autistic people may have an increased level of sensitivity to specific scents such as strong cooking aromas and cleaning items or detergents with a pungent odour. Install a good ventilation system and arrange a supply of fragrance-free washing liquids.

Many people on the autism spectrum also have a limited diet. Offer menu options for people with dietary sensitivities or preferences — it will not only serve the employees but also attract customers with particular dietary needs. Consider providing a selection of different flavours, textures, and presentation styles to fit varied sensory requirements.

Finally, provide training and support for managers and colleagues on how to create a sensory-friendly environment. Offer resources and guidance on recognising and responding to sensory overload.

Flexibility

While scheduled breaks throughout the shift may help employees manage sensory overload, it is essential to allow for additional breaks and a flexible schedule if needed. In some cases, allowing

the individual to work from home at their own pace would be beneficial (if possible). Reduced workload or working hours might also be useful in decreasing exhaustion and preventing burnout.

What is more, many autistic people enjoy repetitive work, but it is also important to provide opportunities for task variation, particularly for people with co-occurring ADHD to maintain interest and increase productivity.

3. b. Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace

What are Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)?

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are three essential notions forming a policy designed to welcome and accommodate people from various backgrounds in an organisation. Diversity refers to all the ways in which people are different. It encompasses all identities (racial, sexual, gender, disability, socioeconomic, cultural, religious, etc.) and ways of being. Equity — not to be confused with equality — is a notion wherein resources are distributed according to needs. Inclusion refers to welcoming, respecting and supporting all individuals with all identities, where everyone feels empowered and valued as their authentic self.

For everyone's well-being, it is essential to establish a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and discrimination in the workplace. A secure system for reporting concerns can significantly help managers make the adjustments necessary to improve the atmosphere in the workplace and the employees' mental well-being and satisfaction.

Neurodiversity Training and Awareness in the Workplace

Neurodiversity refers to neurological diversity — the variety of human brain function. Within this framework, there is no “right” or “wrong” way of experiencing and interacting with the world, and all the experiences are equally valid and a natural part of human cognition. Nevertheless, being neurodivergent (diverging from the “neurotypical”) can be not only a difference but also a disability.

Neurodiversity training in the workplace can be an important step towards inclusivity. With 1-2% of the population being on the autism spectrum and many others having other types of neurodivergence, every bigger workplace likely features neurodivergent employees. Neurodiversity awareness and training would not only increase others' understanding of their neurodivergent counterparts and lessen misunderstandings and conflicts but also make the neurodivergent individuals feel seen, appreciated and valued for who they are. It is, however, essential to recognise that, while diversity is about celebrating the collective, each neurodivergent individual is unique. Everyone should be allowed to define themselves and share their story without any preconceived notions. In addition, many neurodivergent individuals experience daily challenges and might benefit

from others' support. Neurodiversity training would ensure that employees know how to help each other in times of need.

Benefits of Having an Inclusive Workplace

- Embracing diversity
- Enhanced creativity and innovation

A diverse staff with diverse viewpoints can generate a wider range of ideas. Skilfully blended, these ideas can lead to creativity and innovation that benefits both the individual and the organisation. Employing staff with autism can be a strategic advantage, as their unique perspectives will broaden the scope of ideas and possibilities.

- Improved employee satisfaction

It is an important statement when a company shows it values its employees' lives and experiences. This might be particularly relevant for people on the autism spectrum who often feel alienated and excluded. In turn, feeling appreciated and valued in the workplace increases the employees' motivation to help the business succeed.

- Legal and ethical imperatives

Being neurodiversity aware in the workplace sends a strong message of inclusion and acceptance. By creating a culture that values diversity and celebrates individual differences, organisations foster a sense of belonging and respect for all employees.

Furthermore, being an inclusive business increases the reputation of the company. Organisations that prioritise diversity and inclusion, including the work of individuals with autism, tend to have a better reputation in the marketplace and with clients, customers and investors. Providing equal employment opportunities also ensures compliance with anti-discrimination laws and regulations. By recognising neurodiversity and hiring people with differences and disabilities, organisations demonstrate their commitment to promoting ethical and legal standards.

Unit 4: Adopting Social Responsibility Policy

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as the companies' responsibility for their impacts on society — becoming socially responsible by integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business strategy, following the law and in close collaboration with their stakeholders, with the aim of maximising the creation of shared value for their owners/shareholders as well as for civil society. (European Commission, 2022)

Implementing a Social Responsibility Policy increases competitiveness, improves risk management, reduces costs, increases access to capital, improves customer relationships, improves

human resource management, increases the ability to innovate, and stimulates greater social and environmental responsibility.

Employing autistic individuals aligns with the Social Responsibility Policy goals of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. It shows a commitment to equal employment opportunities and helps build a more inclusive community.

Summary

In the module, a general outline of what autism is and entails has been made. Common myths and misconceptions surrounding autism have been debunked, and common challenges and barriers that autistic people face in the workplace are outlined. Additionally, reasonable accommodations for autistic people working in the HoReCa sector are suggested. The module also touches upon strategies for creating an inclusive and supportive work environment and its benefits.

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