

# HOST

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## Module 4

### Support Management

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Module Title	Module 4: Support Management
Learning Objectives	<p>Module 4 aims to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Educate learners on inclusivity for employees with autism in hospitality.</li> <li>2. Train learners in managing autism-friendly teams.</li> <li>3. Provide information on autism's impact in the workplace.</li> <li>4. Offer guidelines for tailored training and social inclusion.</li> <li>5. Teach the applications of serious gaming and gamification</li> <li>6. Understand the basic principles and design of the HOST Board Game</li> </ol>
Learning Outcomes	<p>Through Module 4, learners will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrate competence in creating an inclusive environment for employees with autism.</li> <li>2. Exhibit competence in leading and managing autism-friendly teams.</li> <li>3. Acquire knowledge of the unique challenges and strengths of employees with autism in the hospitality sector.</li> <li>4. Develop skills in implementing tailored training sessions and social inclusion strategies.</li> <li>5. Utilize tools for continuous evaluation and adaptation of the work environment.</li> <li>6. Facilitate collaboration and understanding among diverse team members.</li> <li>7. Understand the value of serious gaming and gamification</li> </ol>

## Introduction

In recent years, Autism-related NGOs, Researchers, Therapists, and Socially Responsible Enterprises, have been emphasising the need to 'expand' early-life interventions that focus on the developmental support of people with Autism. This expansion aims for a comprehensive approach that ensures support throughout the Employment Cycle and beyond. However, a notable percentage of individuals with Autism, even in the hospitality industry, often find themselves in roles that may not fully harness their unique abilities. These challenges in securing and sustaining meaningful employment can be traced back to:

- The lack of access to vocational education and training tailored for their needs.
- Communication challenges, especially in guest-centric roles.
- Existing biases and misconceptions about autism.
- A gap in understanding from employers in the hospitality sector.
- Absence of job roles and tasks descriptions that consider their unique strengths.
- Work environments that aren't always sensory-friendly.
- A dearth of dedicated organizational resources for sustained support.

Overcoming these barriers is possible through Vocational Education and Training (VET) tailored for managers in the hospitality sector. This equips them with the necessary skills, knowledge, competences, and tools to provide enduring support to staff with Autism. In the context of this Supported Employment Cycle, this Module will delve into essential units such as training measures tailored for specific staff groups, promoting social inclusion, defining and evaluating an autism-friendly work environment, and honing team management skills in autism-friendly teams.

## 1. Unit 1: Concept Development and Implementation of Training Measures for Specific Staff Groups (i.e. with Autism Syndromes) and/ or All Staff

In the hospitality sector, the guest's experience is at the center of everything. Every staff member working in this field, from the chefs to the front desk staff, plays a big part in this. Some of these employees might have autism, which means they see and experience the world differently. By understanding what makes these individuals special and also what challenges they might face, managers can ensure they do their job well and help guests have a memorable experience. Just like

how a chef might need special tools to cook a dish, employees with autism might need some special training that fits their needs. With this training, they can become invaluable members of the team.

## 1.a. Guidelines for Developing Training Measures

In the hospitality sector, creating the right training for employees with autism means understanding their strengths, seeing things from their viewpoint, and helping them where they need it. As we delve into the guidelines for developing training measures, it's essential to remember that autism is a spectrum and so every individual is different. As such, a one-size-fits-all approach might not yield the desired results. For this reason, it is important to tailor the training to match the staff's needs.

1. **Understanding Individual Needs:** Before starting any training program, it's crucial to understand the unique needs of employees with autism in places like hotels and restaurants. Talking to them directly, watching how they work, and gathering feedback can help with this.
2. **Collaborative Approach to Training:** Engage with experts in the field of autism and, when possible, with autistic employees. Their insights can provide directions for crafting effective training tailored for the hospitality industry.
3. **Hands-on Learning:** Given the practical nature of the hospitality sector, emphasize hands-on training sessions. Role-playing, for instance, can be an effective tool to help employees navigate the complex social interactions they might encounter.
4. **Feedback and Refinement:** Establish a robust feedback mechanism. This means collecting their thoughts, opinions, and suggestions about the training to refine and improve it based on their feedback.

## 1.b. Best Practices

- **Effective Communication:** While communication is a universal skill, in the hospitality sector, it takes on added significance. Ensure that employees are trained to understand and convey information effectively, catering to diverse customer needs.
- **Empathy and Customer Service:** Equip employees with the skills to recognize and respond to a range of customer emotions. This is pivotal in ensuring memorable guest experiences.

- **Navigating Team Dynamics:** In the hospitality sector, teamwork is key. Provide training that helps create a synergistic effect within a diverse team.
- **Continuous Learning and Adaptation:** Given the dynamic nature of the hospitality industry, foster a culture of continuous learning. This ensures that employees are always equipped to meet the industry's evolving demands.

## 2. Unit 2: Adaptation and Implementation of Specific Social Inclusion Measures

The hospitality sector thrives on human interactions, making it essential to create an environment where everyone, especially those with autism, feels valued and included. A diverse and inclusive environment enriches the workplace and in turn, enhances service quality and guest satisfaction.

### 2.a. The Significance of Social Inclusion for Individuals with Autism in Hospitality

Every position in hospitality plays a crucial role because each staff member, at some point, interacts with guests. Ensuring that every link in this chain, especially employees with autism, feels valued and integrated is vital. Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, the guest experience is shaped by every interaction. Recognizing the unique strengths and perspectives that autistic employees bring can elevate this experience, making it even more memorable for guests.

Some of the benefits of fostering an inclusive environment for individuals with autism include:

- **Diverse Perspectives:** People with autism often have unique ways of viewing situations, leading to innovative solutions and a deeper understanding of guest needs.
- **Enhanced Guest Experience:** An inclusive staff environment often translates to better guest interactions. When employees, including those with autism, feel they belong, they excel in their roles.
- **Positive Brand Image:** Establishments that prioritize inclusivity for all, including those with autism, are more appealing to both potential employees and guests.

## 2.b. Tailoring Social Inclusion Strategies for Individuals with Autism in Hospitality

- **Training:** Organize sessions that focus on understanding autism and its impact on individuals. Equip staff with knowledge about autism, promoting understanding and empathy.
- **Clear Communication:** Establish guidelines for effective communication, considering the unique needs of individuals with autism. This might include using clear language, avoiding potential misinterpretations, and using visual aids when necessary.
- **Physical and Social Environment:** Think about creating quieter areas or scheduling tasks during less busy times to cater to the sensory preferences of those with autism. It's also important to nurture a welcoming atmosphere where everyone appreciates each other's uniqueness and lends a helping hand when needed.

## 2.c. Action Steps for Promoting Inclusivity for Individuals with Autism

- **Fair Recruitment:** Ensure that recruitment processes are transparent and unbiased, actively considering individuals with autism.
- **Mentorship Initiatives:** Pair new hires with seasoned employees, especially beneficial for staff with autism, to facilitate smoother integration.
- **Regular Reviews:** Periodically assess the effectiveness of inclusion initiatives, gather feedback, especially from staff with autism, and make necessary adjustments.

By prioritizing social inclusion, especially for individuals with autism, the hospitality industry can offer a welcoming and enriching environment for all.

## 3. Unit 3: The definition of an Autism-friendly Work and Training Environment

### 3. a. Characteristics of an Autism-friendly Work Environment

Autism affects individuals in various ways, especially concerning sensory and social interactions. Recognizing these unique needs and making necessary adjustments ensures that employees are comfortable and therefore productive.

1. **Sensory Accommodations:** Many individuals with autism experience sensory overload. Hospitality establishments can get busy and noisy, especially during peak season. As such, it's essential to offer relief from overwhelming stimuli. This can be achieved by:

- Minimizing sensory overload, such as reducing background noise.
- Allowing the autistic staff to have a break when they feel overwhelmed

2. **Clear Communication:** Effective communication is crucial. For individuals with autism:

- Communication should be clear and direct.
- Emphasize written instructions or visual aids when possible.

3. **Flexibility and Routine:** Changes in schedules can be challenging for individuals with autism. The importance of routine and predictability is paramount. Offering flexibility in scheduling and work arrangements, while maintaining a consistent routine, can be beneficial.

4. **Inclusive Culture:** The workplace culture should be inclusive and accepting of neurodiversity. This includes:

- Education and training for colleagues to better understand and support individuals with autism.
- Promoting an environment that values and accommodates the unique strengths and challenges of individuals with autism.

5. **Supportive Management:** The role of managers is crucial in creating an autism-friendly workspace. Their responsibilities include:

- Identifying when someone might be feeling overwhelmed.
- Offering the right kind of support or adjustments.

That's why equipping them with the right training is so important.

## 4. Unit 4: Evaluation and Adaptation of an Autism-friendly Work and Training Environment

Creating an autism friendly work and training environment is a journey rather than a destination. As such, ensuring the appropriate environment is only the first step. Continuous evaluation and adaptation are critical for maintaining and improving the effectiveness of the

environment. This unit delves into the methods and strategies hospitality management can employ to evaluate and refine any autism-friendly initiatives.

#### 4.a. Methods for Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Autism-friendly Environment

To ensure that the hospitality environment is truly autism-friendly, it's essential to have a systematic approach to evaluation. Here are some methods:

1. **Feedback Collection:** One of the most direct ways to understand the effectiveness of any initiative is to hear from those it impacts. Regularly collecting feedback from all employees, with a particular emphasis on those with autism, can provide invaluable insights. This feedback can highlight what's working, what's not, and where there might be room for improvement.

2. **Observational Assessments:** Beyond just feedback, taking the time to observe the work environment can shed light on potential areas of improvement or challenges that might have been overlooked. This can be especially beneficial in the hospitality sector, where interactions with guests and team dynamics play a significant role. Observing how employees with autism navigate their roles and interact with others can provide a clearer picture of the environment's effectiveness.

3. **Performance Metrics:** While numbers aren't everything, they can provide a tangible measure of how well an environment is serving its employees. By monitoring the performance and job satisfaction levels of employees, especially those with autism, it's possible to gauge if the environment is conducive to their productivity and well-being. In the hospitality sector, this could translate to metrics like guest satisfaction scores, efficiency in service delivery, or even retention rates of employees with autism.

#### 4. b. Feedback Mechanisms and Continuous Improvement Strategies

1. **Surveys and Questionnaires:** Utilize structured tools to gather comprehensive feedback from employees. It's crucial to ensure anonymity in these tools, as it encourages honest and candid responses. The feedback collected can provide insights into the effectiveness of the current strategies and areas that might need improvement.

2. **Regular Review Meetings:** It's beneficial to organize periodic meetings where employees can openly discuss their experiences in the work environment. These meetings serve as a platform for



them to share their perspectives, challenges faced, and offer suggestions for improvement. Such interactions can foster a sense of belonging and ensure that their concerns are addressed promptly.

**3. Action-Response System:** It's not enough to just collect feedback; there needs to be a system in place that ensures action is taken based on the feedback provided. This system should be transparent, where employees can see tangible changes or improvements made based on their suggestions. This not only instills confidence in the feedback process but also ensures that the work environment continuously evolves to meet the needs of all employees, especially those with autism.

By using the right listening tools, employers can effectively gather feedback, making it easier for employees to convey their feelings and experiences. Analysing this data can help identify what's working well and what areas need attention. Acting on this information while it's still relevant ensures that the work environment remains conducive and supportive for all, especially for those with autism.

## 5. Unit 5: Team Management Skills (in Autism-friendly Teams)

In the hospitality sector, teams are the backbone of service delivery. When these teams include members with autism, understanding and managing them effectively becomes paramount. This unit delves into the dynamics of such teams and offers strategies to ensure they operate smoothly and efficiently.

### 5. a. Understanding the Dynamics of Neuro-diverse Teams

Autism introduces a unique blend of strengths and challenges in the workplace. Recognizing and understanding these nuances can pave the way for a more conducive work environment. For example, individuals with autism often have their distinct communication styles. That is, they might prefer clear and direct instructions, and sometimes, visual aids too can be a great help to them. The sensory experiences, which are a constant in the bustling environment of hospitality, can be particularly intense for some with autism. For this purpose, simple adjustments, like modifying the lighting or creating quiet zones, can enhance their comfort. Additionally, social interactions, which are the essence of the hospitality sector, can pose challenges. Ensuring interactions are structured and predictable can make a world of difference.

## 5. b. Strategies for Effective Team Management

Before implementing any strategies, it is important that all team members have a basic understanding of autism. Simple training sessions can be a starting point, fostering understanding among the team. Communication, especially in the hospitality sector, needs to be crystal clear. For those with autism, this could mean a preference for written instructions or the use of visual aids to ensure there's no room for ambiguity. The dynamic environment of hospitality can be overwhelming in terms of sensory inputs. Thoughtful considerations, like creating a quiet corner can be beneficial. Moreover, change, while inevitable, can be unsettling for some. Maintaining a routine or giving a heads-up about upcoming changes can help in making transitions smoother. Lastly, every team member, irrespective of their role, is vital. Ensuring everyone feels valued can be achieved through team activities and regular feedback sessions.

For managing neurodiverse teams effectively, managers in hospitality should ensure that constructive feedback is:

- Clear
- Specific
- Centered on behavior rather than personal attributes.
- Highlighting strengths while addressing areas for improvement fosters growth
- Helpful for aligning team members with organizational objectives

For individuals with autism, feedback that is direct and free from ambiguities can be particularly beneficial, guiding their professional development and ensuring they remain aligned with team goals.

## 5. c. Promoting Collaboration and Understanding Among Diverse Team Members

Team-building activities, such as group brainstorming sessions or problem-solving challenges, can be instrumental in enhancing collaboration. Training sessions that focus on understanding different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives can further enhance the inclusivity of the team. Lastly, open channels of communication, where team members feel comfortable sharing their experiences and concerns, can ensure a harmonious work environment where everyone feels heard and understood.

## 6. Unit 6: Developing Staff through Gamification and Serious Games

Serious gaming and gamification stand out as effective learning strategies embraced by educational communities worldwide. As the name suggests, both approaches leverage game mechanics to elevate the learning experience, making them adaptable to diverse educational objectives, including information dissemination, behavior training, and attitude transformation.

### 6. a. Gamification and Serious Gaming

Employing game mechanics allows for a shift in learners' attitudes toward potentially dull or seemingly useless content, transforming it into an engaging and meaningful format. For employees in the hospitality sector that have busy day to day schedules, a game can remove some of the mental barriers that come with 'learning activities'. They might still see it as useless before playing, but at least its fun! Afterwards, the intention is for learners to understand the purpose of the activity.

It's essential to recognise that there's no one-size-fits-all formula for adapting learning content into a serious game, as what engages and holds meaning for one group may differ for another. This consideration is paramount when developing a learning intervention based on gamification or a serious game.

One of the key advantages frequently harnessed in gamified approaches is the allowance for players to make mistakes during the learning process. While making mistakes may be disheartening in traditional testing or task performance scenarios, it is foundational to play. Just as nobody becomes a pro soccer player on their first kick, learners benefit from the freedom to experiment with their choices in a playful learning environment. This might be difficult to organize in a hospitality setting. There is always a customer you are disappointing if you try something new and it fails.

**Gaming provides a way to practice without compromising relationships with customers, guests, colleagues and managers.**

Playful learning also offers the advantage of removing individuals from their comfort zones and offering fresh perspectives. Employees entrenched in specific work methods may resist trying something new. The HOST Serious Game addresses this by immersing players in the context of someone else's story. Providing advice to another character allows for clearer thinking about a situation, akin to the willingness to feed a pet even when too tired to cook.

## 6. b. The Difference between Serious Games and Gamification

- **Serious Games:** Serious games are designed with a primary purpose beyond entertainment. They leverage game mechanics to engage and educate players, addressing specific real-world issues or imparting meaningful skills. In this case, the serious game for the hotel sector aims to improve workplace inclusiveness for individuals with autism. The game becomes a tool for experiential learning, allowing players to navigate scenarios and make decisions that mirror challenges in their actual work environment.

The HOST Serious Game falls clearly into the category of Serious Game, it is a stand-alone product (and activity), not an integrated part of the day to day work activities. In this case the choice was made for a Serious Game, because one of the main goals was stimulating the conversation and reflection around inclusivity in a group context. The context of the intervention is highly influential in choosing between Serious Gaming and Gamification, and one should not be seen as 'better' than the other. They are different means for different goals.

- **Gamification:** Gamification involves integrating game elements into non-game contexts to enhance user engagement and motivation. It's not a complete game itself but rather a strategy to make tasks or processes more enjoyable and compelling. An example would be to add competition or point based rewards systems to the work environment in order to stimulate certain behaviour.

One of the most popular and well-known examples of gamification is the app Duolingo. This application cleverly uses badges, points, leaderboards and streaks to make the core activity (language learning exercises) appealing. It is not a 'game' with its own structure or rules; it doesn't change anything about the regular language learning activities. Rather; it changes everything **around** the activity to make it appealing.

### Key Differences:

#### 1. Form:

- **Serious Games:** Complete, standalone games with a specific purpose and narrative.
- **Gamification:** Incorporates game elements into existing processes or activities.

#### 2. Purpose:

- **Serious Games:** Primary goal is education or addressing real-world issues.
- **Gamification:** Enhances engagement and motivation in non-game contexts.

### 3. Structure:

- **Serious Games:** Typically have a defined structure, storyline, and set of rules.
- **Gamification:** Can be more flexible, adapting game elements to suit the context.

### 4. Interactivity:

- **Serious Games:** High level of interactivity, involving players in decision-making and problem-solving.
- **Gamification:** Enhances user interaction but may not involve complex decision-making as in a complete game.

## 6. c. Developing Hospitality Staff with Autism through the HOST Board Game

Research by Mazurak (2013) has shown that boys with autism spend almost double the amount of time per day on videogames than boys with typical development. The same research shows that certain videogames have a higher risk of causing negative symptoms within this target group (such as inattentiveness or irritability). This tells us that gaming is likely to find acceptance within the target audience of people with autism, but there should be care in the type of game that is designed. Particularly role-playing games with a focus on long-term reward schemes are a risk factor for this audience.

Therefore, Serious Gaming applied as a one-time group intervention can be a better solution for people with autism, in comparison to gamification applied over long periods of time. The reward schemes and social competitions that are often used for gamification in the work place can lead to obsessive behaviour patterns focused on achieving gamification goals, and losing track of the core activity (performing the job). This could lead to negative interactions with customers and should therefore be avoided.

The HOST Serious Game has therefore been designed as a one-time group intervention, with repeatability like a 'conventional' board game. It has been designed to accommodate the needs of people with autism in order to help them develop job-related and interpersonal skills, through the following measures:

- **Clear structure:** The games structure is explained at the beginning of the game and stays consistent throughout the playing session. This makes the game predictable, easy to learn and easy to manage between players. Experienced players expedite the learning process of new players by explaining the fundamentals in advance.

- **Turn-taking:** Taking turns is a social norm that can be more difficult for young people with autism. Negative experiences with this in early life can lead to increased reluctance to partake in unclear turn structures in later life (when can/should I speak up?). Therefore, the HOST serious game has been designed to optionally have game sessions facilitated through a trainer or manager that makes sure everyone gets a chance to share their opinion. The game also has a clear turn structure, where every turn one person is 'in the lead'.
- **Role-playing:** There is an element of role-playing, as the hotel in the board game is a fictional place. And all characters have set backgrounds and characteristics. Research by Mazurak (2013) shows that this type of games is preferred by people with autism. This creates an 'emotional division' between the content in the game and the real work place. This should help neurodiverse player teams to share their thoughts in a carefree way.
- **Close to reality:** While roleplaying is an element, the content in the game is about hospitality. This helps to transfer the outcomes of the game experience to one's own work, as there is not a layer of abstraction. This removes the struggle for people with autism to distinguish between the literal and the figurative, the abstract and the concrete; the situations that are presented to players reflect reality-based scenarios.

## 6. d. Design and Mechanics Choices of the HOST Board Game

The HOST Board Game has been designed with consideration of the following aspects:

- ***Do the unique benefits of gaming match with the staff development goals?***

The main benefits of gaming (experiential learning, safe environment, context shift) are unique to interventions/group activities such as the HOST Board Game. The Game Designers considered the training and social needs of neurodiverse teams, which were extracted through target group surveys during the HOST Project Implementation. The Game Designers targeted toward the design of a board game that directly benefits players and actually matches with their development goals. For example; as research indicated, the target audience is already highly motivated to learn about certain subjects, therefore the content of the board game has been tailored specifically to accommodate addressing problems and challenges related to everyday work in a hospitality organisation. Furthermore, 'making mistakes' is part of the learning process and game completion, in order to encourage interpersonal learning, motivation to improve, as well as to maintain player interest to replay the game in future sessions.

- ***Why design a Board Game? Wouldn't another tool be more effective?***

Informed by research and target group survey data, the HOST Board Game Designers and HOST Project consortium delivered a physical board game. This decision was weighed against the educational effectiveness of the specific format; it aligns with the educational goal of having players sit together and reflect collaboratively on inclusion while engaging in interpersonal learning, team-building and exchange of ideas and opinion.

- ***Will the target audience be enthusiastic about this form of intervention?***

According to target audience research, the target audience of the HOST Board Game has an aversion to games as a learning method. During the design of the visual style and the game mechanics, the designers ensured that the game not only 'looks good', but is also 'serious' enough with relatable content, scenarios, roles and game mechanics that reflect the inner workings of a real hotel. To achieve this, the game designers and the HOST Project consortium:

- Promote the game as an 'educational tool'**, rather than a traditional board game game. Naming and first impressions have a big influence on acceptance during a play session. The HOST Board Game has been design with this in mind starting from the naming, but also the visual style.
- Engaging with Hospitality Managers and HR Experts to promote the game;** they are often seen as the authority on effective learning methods by staff, and therefore the organisation and implementation of game sessions (and subsequently continuous professional development in general) are perceived as an integral part of their job.
- Create ambassadors within the VET and Hospitality communities, throughout development and training seminars;** creating ambassadors of the HOST Board Game is achieved by involving members of the VET and Hospitality Communities in Europe, from the very beginning of the development process of the game, all the way through to its delivery. If peers are willing to ambassador for the game, others might be more willing to give it a try.

## 7. Summary

This module has given learners a roadmap on supporting all employees, especially those with autism. It covered the steps to create and implement training, ensuring everyone feels a sense of belonging, and making a workplace that suits people with autism. It also provided ways to check if these measures are working and tips on leading teams with members with autism. With this

information, managers can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for their teams and enhance their effectiveness.

Finally, this module has also shown learners the benefits of Serious Gaming and Gamification. It has presented a short introduction into the areas of design that were included when considering the implementation of the HOST Board Game. Furthermore, this module presented arguments for design choices made in the HOST Serious Game in order to improve the effectiveness during implementation.



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