

Neurodiversity in (Not Only) Public Organizations: An Untapped Opportunity?

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Abstract

This perspective shows how neurodiversity can increase public organizations' innovations and output quality. Studies from business and entrepreneurship fields are used to argue that public organizations may prosper if they recruit neurologically atypical individuals. Their unique thinking styles, coping strategies, and life experiences can lead to public services innovation. The management of public organizations through neurodiversity programs may gain competencies benefiting all employees. However, the promotion of neurodiversity cannot be achieved without demanding changes in organizational culture. The article also illustrates the benefits of neurodiversity using the example of a neurogenerative disease (toxoplasmosis).

Keywords

neurodiversity, policy entrepreneurs, innovation, public organization, *Toxoplasma gondii*

There are widespread and long-standing criticisms of governments' selection, hiring, and human-resources processes worldwide. Regarding the case of the U.S. civil service system, Thompson (2021; p. 584) writes: “narrowly

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defined jobs hamper the assignment of tasks, and byzantine hiring rules impede the procurement of needed skills.” There is also no doubt that public employees should be more diverse, more active in identifying social issues, and more innovative in creating initiatives to solve them, that is, taking risks as policy entrepreneurs (Teske & Schneider, 1994). Many public organizations and agencies are aware of these issues and try to reevaluate their job descriptions and capacities to provide reasonable accommodations for talented minority candidates and to reduce employment barriers to serve their constituents more effectively (Kellough & Naff, 2004; Pitts, 2009). This article wants to show that there is a significant untapped opportunity in these endeavors, in the employment of neurologically atypical individuals.

Research on personality and neurological disorders and psychiatric illnesses are primarily carried out within the theoretical framework of a “deficit.” The disease is seen as a set of symptoms deviating from normalcy, and representing a negative burden for the affected person; also, the disease status means an exculpatory or legally mitigating role in cases where individuals with psychiatric illnesses are charged with a crime or a misdemeanor (Shields & Beversdorf, 2021). As a consequence, the employment of mentally disabled people is considered a challenge, with a need for special laws (such as the Americans with Disabilities Act in the U.S.), norms, treatments, or subsidies from welfare and other government support programs (Kim, 1996). However, as management and entrepreneurship studies in recent years have shown, neurodiversity can, under certain circumstances, lead to higher levels of innovation and productivity within organizations.

Neurodiversity is described as an atypical neurological development, in extreme cases representing a psychiatric illness, as a normal human difference (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012; Ortega, 2009). Many people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, social anxiety disorder, autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), and other similar diseases and disorders do not only suffer from negative symptoms of the illness; they also excel in specific skills such as pattern recognition, memory or computational tasks, as well as in creativity and unconventional thinking (Baron-Cohen et al., 2009; Dawson et al., 2007; Soulières et al., 2011; Tafti et al., 2009; White & Shah, 2011). For example, a department of the Israeli Defense Forces analyzing aerial and satellite imagery has a group staffed primarily with people with ASD; “[i]t has proved that they can spot patterns others do not see” (Austin & Pisano, 2017; p. 100).

The evidence from the literature on this topic implies that the very symptoms associated with the disorders may become advantageous in some specific administrative, innovative, or organizational jobs. Governmental and public organizations, therefore, can and should use this talent. What makes

public administration so important for neurodiversity? Based on the framework of diversity paradigms in public organizations by Selden and Selden (2001), this effort should not be seen in the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm or similar affirmative-action perspectives. These paradigms focus on whether people with (neurological) disabilities are given an equal chance of obtaining employment in public organizations. This formalistic view of equal opportunity often precludes individuals from genuinely identifying with their work and the organization.

On the contrary, public organizations should value neurodiversity because it may bring higher motivation and satisfaction to neurologically atypical individuals and eventually enhance organizational performance (Selden & Selden, 2001). There are several ways how neurodiverse hiring may bring certain advantages to public organizations. First, neurodiversity enables public organizations to meet their mission and provide better access and services to their constituents. Neurologically atypical individuals can offer knowledge about neurodiverse populations and better serve their needs because they have specific knowledge and shared experiences (Roberson et al., 2021). This service motivation of employees in the public sector is also positively related to their organizational commitment and creates a motivated and loyal public workforce dedicated to their employer's mission and goals (Crewson, 1997; Patton, 2019). As public sector employees are less extrinsically motivated and prefer a better work-life balance (Buelens & Van Den Broeck, 2007), neurodiversity policies may also be cost-effective tools to attract motivated employees.

Second, neurodiversity may improve organizational processes by accommodating the varied needs, perspectives, and approaches to work by neurologically atypical individuals (Milliken & Martins, 1996). Indeed, there are long-standing calls for new ways how public organizations could provide more innovative and more agile solutions to societal problems (Mergel et al., 2021; van Buuren et al., 2020).

Third, with its mission of promoting the general social welfare, public administration organizations have many elements that make neurodiversity especially important (Wright, 2007); such as prosocial goals, non-profit status, and a web of institutions directly affecting the lives of neurodiverse people (i.e., health, education and social services). Public institutions driven by the goal of neurodiversity hiring may thus help to reinvent government administration not only by a more effective achievement of its goals, but also creating a change in organizational culture leading to higher inclusiveness and better support for individual talents (Spicer, 2004).

Undoubtedly, employing people with mental disorders will bring various types of complicated difficulties; for example, a lower self-regulation level

makes it difficult for adults with ASD or ADHD to complete long-term, complex, multistep tasks (Nadeau, 2005; Patton, 2009, 2019). An organization must also accommodate appropriate project management and human resources processes; however, these changes could ultimately benefit all employees (see Table 1 for an overview).

This article will not discuss at length whether neurodiversity and various levels of personality disorders and psychiatric illnesses represent only natural human variation and, as such, may not necessarily be perceived as a disease and treated; or, conversely, they are serious neurobiological diseases, the treatment of which will improve personal and societal well-being (Agafonow & Perez, 2020; Caplan, 2006; Kapp et al., 2013; Ortega, 2009; Shields & Beversdorf, 2021). There is no doubt that some individuals do not benefit from defect-based diagnoses; on the other hand, many conditions like lower-functioning, epileptic, or self-injuring autism are debilitating disabilities with severe life quality restrictions.

Regardless of what part of the spectrum of these views is accurate, the ethical and pragmatic demand for help and support for the disability community should prevail. Increasing the use of specific talents should be not only a compelling advantage for a public organization but an ethical thing to do, as the improved quality of life, economic security, and personal fulfillment that arise from employment would be beneficial from the perspective of the neurodiverse community and society as well (Flower et al., 2019; Krzeminska et al., 2019). There is a societal, ethical imperative in (at least partially) moving “the viewpoint of persons with disabilities that was based on a medical model of disability and rehabilitation to one based on removal of physical and attitudinal barriers and the provision of functional supports, a move that helped change views of disability as something having as much to do with the environment as the individual” (Krzeminska et al., 2019; p. 454).

This article aims to point out that there are no programs or even pilot studies in the public management and administration domain that would rigorously examine how neurodiversity can increase the effectiveness, productivity, or innovation of public organizations (even, the word “neurodiversity” did not appear at all in the *Administration & Society* journal until now). A parallel will be seen in business and entrepreneurship studies, where neurodiversity may sometimes lead to higher outcomes and innovation (Antshel, 2018; Moore et al., 2021; Wiklund, Hatak et al., 2018; Wiklund, Yu et al., 2018).

I argue that knowledge transfer is appropriate here because entrepreneurship and business ventures are, in many cases, similar to public and governmental activities because they all depend on an individual’s ability to see prospects for solving pressing problems that others have not recognized.

Table 1. Expected Experiences of Building a Neurodiverse Workforce in Administrative Organizations; Based on (Loiacono & Ren, 2018; Patton, 2019).

Challenges	Approaches and Solutions	Possible Benefits	Possible Issues
Identifying untapped talents	<p>Listen to neurodiverse candidates and try to make changes in hiring processes.</p> <p>Think about broader methods of hiring and evaluating candidates, like internships and work trials.</p> <p>Redesign the way people are evaluated; if there is no way to change that, create a special program.</p> <p>Develop programs and partnerships with NGOs and companies that can help identify and attract qualified neurodiverse candidates.</p>	<p>Increases qualified candidate pool for tasks or jobs; it enhances work performance.</p> <p>Increases diversity in the work environment, which could increase public administration effectiveness and productivity and its attractiveness to employees and constituents.</p> <p>Improves quality of life, economic security, and personal fulfillment of neurodiverse candidates.</p>	<p>Perceptions of unfairness on the part of other candidates will emerge when accommodations and special programs are granted to neurodiverse candidates.</p>
Enhancing (new) talents	<p>Be open and reduce the stigma around neurodiversity.</p> <p>Adjust organizational processes and practices to neurodiverse employees' specific needs (not all employees may disclose or identify with being neurodiverse, but adjustments may benefit them).</p> <p>Provide supervisors and employees with training on neurodiversity, which helps them better support both neurodiverse and neurotypical employees.</p>	<p>Enhances work performance.</p> <p>Increases diversity in the work environment, which could increase public administration effectiveness and productivity and its attractiveness to employees and constituents.</p> <p>Reinforces good leadership and management practices.</p> <p>Improves quality of life, economic security, and personal fulfillment of neurodiverse employees.</p>	<p>Neurologically atypical employees will be unresponsive to supervision.</p> <p>Neurologically atypical employees will not integrate fully into the organizational culture; organizational cohesion and goals will be in jeopardy.</p> <p>Some behaviors and habits will often be perceived as incivility or rudeness, leading to hostile work relationships.</p> <p>Perceptions of unfair and unequal treatment on the part of coworkers will emerge when accommodations are granted to neurologically atypical employees.</p>

Besides, a unique case study of a neurodegenerative disease caused by a mind-altering parasite infection will show how an induced neurologically atypical thinking style may lead to (entrepreneurial) innovation and success. The article concludes with a proposal for involving the neurodiversity movement in public organizations and what ethical dilemmas may arise.

Neurodiversity and the Ways of Growth

The term “neurodiversity” and the corresponding neurodiversity movement are credited to Judy Singer, a sociologist and activist diagnosed with Asperger syndrome (Ortega, 2009). In the late 1990s, the movement’s goal was to destigmatize autistic spectrum disorders (achieving the social acceptance of individuals’ autistic identity) and secure civil rights for all those diagnosed with the disorders. Nevertheless, neurodiversity is now associated with a broad spectrum of neurological or neurodevelopmental disorders, such as ADHD, bipolar disorder, dyslexia, epilepsy, social anxiety disorder, or Tourette’s syndrome (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). Neurodiversity doesn’t mean denying disability. Among other things, neurodiversity advocates are trying to break down barriers to the employment of people based on negative attitudes and stereotypes about their disorders. They try to not only normalize and advocate the disorders, but want to empower affected individuals through independent living, study, or work training programs and the provision of other functional supports.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of various illnesses and (a spectrum of) disorders with different symptoms, psychological, developmental, and neurobiological basis, into one concept makes it difficult to demonstrate in a singular way what challenges or opportunities the affected individuals face. For these reasons, a practical approach is offered through the contextual perspective, as Wiklund, Hatak et al. (2018, pp. 182-183) wrote: “. . . what is functional and dysfunctional in terms of human characteristics and behavior is largely a matter of context. . . [the person–environment fit literature]. . . states that people are attracted to work environments that present work cultures, values, requirements, and demands that match their own personalities, needs, and skills.”

The basic idea of the approach is a simple assumption that there are unique opportunities based on the different ways of being and perspectives of people with special talents, that is, neurodiversity premiums. As a seminal study on problem-solving contests showed, technical and social marginality may often lead to individual success. Individuals in the establishment’s outer circle performed better than insiders (Jeppesen & Lakhani, 2010). As Harvey Blume famously ended his article in *The Atlantic*, “Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general.

Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment?" (Blume, 1998).

However, given the considerable heterogeneity of disorders and diseases, their symptoms, and their varying intensity (not to mention identities and self-understanding of neurodiverse individuals themselves), this cannot be seen as a systematic approach (Sarrett, 2016). For an illustration, the total number of specific diagnoses in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th Edition) is 157, and the list was reduced from 172 diagnoses in DSM-IV (McCarron, 2013). Even more narrowly specified diagnoses are too broad; for example, ASD has a massively broad spectrum. Making any claims about the skills or strengths shared by even some, let alone most people on this spectrum, will always be a gross simplification.

Instead, the person-environment fit movement seeks to pragmatically achieve positive outcomes for otherwise generally negatively assessed personality characteristics or illnesses. Thus, a particular characteristic of a neurologically atypical individual should not be viewed as good or bad; people are just differently abled. The approach aims to identify occupations, environments, or tasks where specific characteristics can best be applied. For example, approach-based disorders (e.g., bipolar disorder), are associated with increased creativity, whereas avoidance-based disorders (e.g., anxiety or depression), are associated with reduced creativity (Baas et al., 2016). Therefore, individuals with various mental disorders could stand out in activities and jobs that correspond to their unique strengths (creative and stressful tasks vs. calm and rule-based ones).

Most neurologically atypical individuals-environment fit studies come from the field of entrepreneurship and the technology sector, which offer broader latitude in creating job tasks and enabling a work environment that suit an individual's particular needs the most. For example, people with autistic spectrum disorders demonstrate intellectual disability, have difficulty with social communication and interaction, have restricted interests, and show repetitive behaviors which, when disturbed, lead to irritability (Lord et al., 2018); however, they demonstrate superior performance on some cognitive tests, and there is also evidence that they show computer-sciences and mathematical talents. A pure disease model is thus clearly misleading (Cowen, 2011). As stated by Annabi et al. (2017; p. 5501), "technology companies benefit from the unique talents of employees on the autism spectrum, such as attention to detail, high level of focus, comfort with doing repetitive behavior, and ability to visualize problems."

ADHD is notoriously associated with inappropriate levels of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, which cause impairment to study performance, social skills, driving, and occupational functioning; however, it is

also associated with creativity, cycles of high productive activity, or experiences with high positive affect (Biederman & Faraone, 2005; Radel et al., 2015; White & Shah, 2006). These tendencies of individuals with ADHD may lead to higher entrepreneurial motivation and action than in the general population (Lerner et al., 2019). ADHD is also related to various other aspects of an entrepreneurial mindset (Moore et al., 2021). More specifically, “[s]uccessful ADHD-type entrepreneurs are those that combine passion for developing and founding but lack passion for inventing. This echoes the idea that the ADHD-specific difficulty sustaining focused attention (urgency) is mitigated by the sustained focus that is induced by passion for developing, and that the ADHD-specific difficulty persevering is balanced out by perseverance that is induced by passion for founding” (Hatak et al., 2021, pp. 1704–1705).

Similarly, research on dyslexia (reading/writing disorder) suggests it is associated with a particular type of visual-spatial talent. People with dyslexia may have an enhanced ability to process visual-spatial information holistically rather than locally (von Károlyi et al., 2003). This specified cognitive profile is likely valuable in some businesses (Wiklund, Hatak et al., 2018). Moreover, those who successfully overcome their difficulties develop coping strategies that may prove to be helpful. Logan (2009) confirmed that dyslexic entrepreneurs implement strategies to manage their weaknesses, which eventually help them in the new venture creation process.

The evidence mentioned so far concerns developmental diseases and disorders that can be considered innate personality characteristics. However, is the argument also relevant for induced neurologically atypical thinking? The following section will give an example of a neurodegenerative disease caused by a mind-altering parasite infection that affects much of humanity. The personality changes induced by it are harmful and stir up negative stereotyping. However, this example should *provocatively* show how induced neurologically atypical decision-making or sense-making has unexpectedly positive effects on innovation and, eventually, organizational success. The case study may convince public administration scholars that acquired neurodiverse thinking could lead to the proliferation of policy entrepreneurs (Teske & Schneider, 1994).

Case Study: Toxoplasmosis and Innovativeness

Toxoplasma gondii is a unicellular parasite that causes acute toxoplasmosis in humans, a disease with flu-like symptoms. After the acute phase of the infection, the parasite forms cysts—especially in the muscle and nerve tissue, in which form it survives until the death of its host. Infection rates are relatively

high worldwide (Tenter et al., 2000), exceeding a third of the population, even in developed countries (e.g., Australia, Austria, Germany, Spain). However, the final host of *T. gondii* is cats and other felines (members of the family *Felidae*). Only in them can the parasite sexually reproduce and spread further through their excrement. Intermediates are mainly mice and rats, but basically every warm-blooded animal. In short, the goal of *T. gondii* is for the cat to catch the host in which it lives.

Extensive literature shows that *T. gondii* can manipulate its host's behavior to be more likely to be caught by a cat (Lamberton et al., 2008; Webster, 2007). Infected mice start to be less afraid of open spaces, move atypically fast or slow, and stop being fearful of cats' urine. Several mechanisms are explored for how a parasite affects the host's neuronal and hormonal systems: the anatomical location of cysts, the modulation of neurotransmitters, and the neuroinflammatory response—the latter mechanism now having the most support (Johnson & Koshy, 2020).

The parasite affects the behavior of mice and probably all of its intermediate hosts (Webster et al., 2013). The first study on parasite-induced changes in human behavior was published 27 years ago. Since then, studies have identified several specific areas in which infected people differ from uninfected people. Infected subjects had an increased risk of traffic and work accidents, an impairment of various aspects of memory and attention, or increased aggression. There is also a change in personality characteristics. For example, some *Toxoplasma*-positive subjects have lower novelty-seeking scores, lower impulsiveness, or lower extravagance. Nevertheless, infected men score also significantly lower in conscientiousness and self-control than uninfected men (a trend in the opposite direction was observed in women). Moreover, the effect of toxoplasmosis has been identified in the onset of psychiatric and neurodegenerative diseases. Robustly, albeit with relatively little effect, toxoplasmosis increases the likelihood of schizophrenia. The most reported behavioral deviations are related to greater impulsivity and aggressiveness of infected individuals; for reviews, see, for example, Flegr (2007, 2013), Houdek (2017a), and Martinez et al. (2018).

Before discussing how toxoplasmosis can affect innovativeness or productivity, a few cautions are needed in regard to the findings presented so far. All studies on the effect of *T. gondii* on human behavior change are correlative in nature, as infectious experiments cannot be performed on humans. Therefore, it is not possible to determine beyond a doubt whether an infection leads to a change in behavior in people or whether individual personalities or types of behavior lead to an infection. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the duration of infection exacerbates behavioral aberrations (Flegr, 2013). There is also significant publication bias in the field, as small studies use

convenience samples and usually find positive results; however, large-scale and population studies using census data typically find small or no effects (Houdek, 2017a). The findings are often contradictory (Johnson & Koshy, 2020; Worth et al., 2013). Moreover, the manifestation of the infection is different in women and men, probably because of *T. gondii* influences on testosterone metabolism (Flegr et al., 2008); and dependent also on blood Rh factor (Flegr et al., 2013; Novotná et al., 2008).

As stated, the infection can amplify impulsivity and (in some cases) sensation-seeking, or risk-taking behaviors in humans. The predictions arise that it could be related to managerial, organizational (Houdek, 2017a, 2017b), or entrepreneurial roles (Johnson et al., 2018). Johnson et al. (2018) confirmed that toxoplasmosis infection is associated with a tendency to major in business-related fields among U.S. university students. Moreover, the infected business major students were more likely to be interested in management and entrepreneurship (relative to other business subdisciplines such as accounting, finance, or marketing). Based on data on the professionals attending entrepreneurship events, *Toxoplasma*-positive individuals had higher odds of successfully starting a business. Finally, the study found a positive association between *T. gondii* infection prevalence in a country and the proportion of people engaged in entrepreneurial activity or intending to start their own business.

Regardless of the impetus of these findings, they are also limited, for example, they say nothing about the performance of eventual business ventures established by *Toxoplasma*-positive individuals. Nevertheless, using longitudinal datasets based on a sample of all ventures in Denmark and the medical records of childbearing women (as women utilize medical testing for toxoplasmosis during pregnancy), Lerner et al. (2021) found that *Toxoplasma*-positive women are 29.2% more likely to enter into entrepreneurship, 26.6% more likely to found multiple ventures, and 134% more likely to start a venture by themselves compared to *Toxoplasma*-negative individuals. Although they have a higher variation in business performance across time, they can achieve a higher aggregate performance level (i.e., entrepreneurial earnings as salary by the entrepreneur and retained earnings). Using the fine-grained data of specific individuals for over a decade, the study essentially confirms that *T. gondii* affects a host's decision-making and personality. Following the infection, people are significantly more likely to venture, and the infection is associated with an overall positive effect on venture performance. Based on this evidence, it is reasonable to expect that greater involvement of neurodiverse people, whether their neurospecificity is acquired through disease or is innate, can spur positive changes in public administration organizations.

How Neurodiversity Could Be Public Organizations' Advantage

Some governmental bodies and highly innovative companies, such as SAP, Microsoft, E.Y., or JP Morgan Chase, implemented initiatives for inclusive hiring of neurologically atypical individuals to obtain business benefits from their unique characteristics and, along the way, they encountered benefits as well as challenges (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Krzeminska et al., 2019). The reason for employing neurologically atypical individuals did not necessarily have to be the specific use of their talent, but also activities involving public relationships or corporate social responsibility, that is, it offers public relations and employee engagement benefits for a company that strives to be viewed as highly inclusive, ethical and prosocial (Di Pietro et al., 2012). Nevertheless, as reported by Austin & Pisano (2017): “. . . managers say they are already paying off in ways far beyond reputational enhancement. Those ways include productivity gains, quality improvement, boosts in innovative capabilities, and broad increases in employee engagement” (p. 99). Despite these programs' development, the neurologically atypical population remains largely underemployed or unemployed (Annabi & Locke, 2019).

Although there are many programs for employing people with disabilities, the author of this article does not know of any systematic study that would look at programs for engaging or hiring neurologically atypical individuals in public service and governmental organizations. Indeed, in the U. S., federal and state agencies have been committed to universal workforce diversity through equal employment opportunity and affirmative action laws or voluntary diversity programs. Now, they experience a higher level of diversity than private organizations (Choi & Rainey, 2010); the Department of Veterans Affairs or the U. S. Postal Service may be strong examples (Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2012). Public administration scholars and practitioners have also become gradually more interested in the benefits of workforce diversity that affect work-related outcomes (Kellough & Naff, 2004; Sabharwal et al., 2018; Will et al., 2018); and their work has usually shown that public organizations perform better when they are diverse and inclusive (Pitts, 2009).

Nevertheless, in the general management literature, there is not-so-clear evidence on the positive association between organizational diversity and performance (Milliken & Martins, 1996). The essential contextual factors of organizational culture, diversity climate, team, and decision-making processes affect the strength and direction of the association between diversity and organizational performance; however, mediator or moderator variables are often ignored in diversity research (Joshi & Roh, 2009; van Knippenberg

et al., 2004). An exception is, for example, a study by Choi and Rainey (2010), who found that racial diversity relates negatively to organizational performance; however, the effect is positive when moderated by management policies and practices. They conclude: "Although policy makers and public managers may understand the importance of workforce diversity very well, they may not realize the crucial need for effective management practices to enhance the positive impacts of diversity on organizational performance" (p. 116).

The diversity programs must be fine-tuned and adapted to the organization's environment's specifics to function well (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Indeed, employing neurologically atypical individuals and their functional accommodation into organizational processes brings challenges; they usually do not have the expected communication skills or the ability to network, they are not team players, and so on. Therefore, an organization must adapt its recruiting, hiring, and personal development practices to hire and retain these talents. It is necessary to deviate from the established procedures.

The Specialisterne, a Danish consulting company in which the majority of employees have ASD diagnosis and that originated neurodiversity employment programs, offers several reasonable practices (Wareham & Sonne, 2008; p. 27): "It is a paradigm that demands entrepreneurial creativity of the manager to carve out space in the market that welcomes the talents of the employee that might otherwise be deemed unusable in a traditional company. . . ." As summarized by Austin and Pisano (2017), the paradigm implies that the organizations should first enter relationships with organizations committed to helping people with disabilities (NGOs, support groups, etc.). They help with the prescreening of talent and with providing mentorship and ongoing support. Non-traditional assessment and training processes are necessary to ease the social difficulties experienced by many neurologically atypical individuals. Besides, the organization should set up a support ecosystem and train its current employees to understand what to expect from neurologically atypical coworkers.

Finally, new methods for managing the careers of neurologically atypical employees should be implemented as the goal is to provide feasible long-term public service career paths that could allow them to be integrated into the mainstream of the governmental organization. The change in organizational culture brought about by these measures can be costly (possibly even prohibitive), but it can also bring organizational and management development. As Krzeminska et al. (2019) stated: ". . . managing neurodiverse employees forces managers to shift their thinking toward designing customized working conditions that maximally activate individual talents; and this

thinking, if generalized to all employees, results in greater productivity per employee and in aggregate” (p. 456).

A motivating and supporting environment can eventually reduce impairment in neurologically atypical individuals. As is the case with people with ADHD: “In highly stimulating contexts—those that provide novel, challenging, and fast-paced tasks with concrete feedback and incentives—individuals are able to engage in tasks productively. It is as if they are no longer impaired by ADHD. . .” (Lasky et al., 2016, p. 161).

Despite the possibility of the rosy picture of neurodiverse public organizations painted by the findings above, poor supervisory relationships (Richards, 2012), isolation and exclusion (Müller et al., 2003), and a lack of understanding and support in employment settings appear in companies with a neurologically atypical population (Baldwin et al., 2014); see also Annabi & Locke (2019). It is still necessary to test different ways to create neurodiverse organizations and better understand how neurologically atypical individuals face the risks and opportunities their employment brings. Especially regarding public service, governmental or non-governmental organizations should see the imperative to test how to employ and socially integrate highly talented but stigmatized and marginalized neurologically atypical individuals.

The Ethical and Practical Conundrums of Neurodiverse Hiring

From the *general* perspectives of the philosophical traditions of utilitarianism, deontology, or justice, there is no universal reason why public administration organizations should not employ a neurodiverse population; that is, as defined by Moore (2014) and developed by others (de Graaf et al., 2016), neurodiverse recruitment has *public value*. The preceding passages have shown that the utilitarian criterion should be met because the recruitment of neurodiverse people improves the quality of their lives, economic well-being, and personal fulfillment that arise from employment, whereby their productivity or innovativeness should offset the cost to public organizations of this change. On the other hand, if institutions are principally concerned with the idea of the just rather than the good, they should also give respect to neurodiverse people’s rights. Again, the neurodiversity movement and its public acceptance have shown at this point that discrimination based on diagnosis alone is not defensible in principle.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of the *actual* implementation of neurodiverse hiring, many ethical or organizational dilemmas will arise that will require pragmatic solutions. According to the introductory framework of

paradigms of diversity in public organizations (Selden & Selden, 2001), many benefits of neurodiverse hiring can be expected to be fulfilled. However, there is, for example, a risk that neurologically atypical individuals may feel exploited if it is clear they were hired only with the expectation of meeting the needs of neurologically atypical constituents. They may perceive that opportunities in other parts of a public organization would not be perceived as a fit for them. A much more significant risk is that neurodiversity may not improve organizational processes, and accommodation of neurologically atypical individuals' needs and work approaches may create several practical conundrums in public organizations (see Table 1).

First of all, the Golden Rule of Ethics—the principle of treating others as you want to be treated—isn't likely to be helpful guide in neurodiversity employment programs, given that some neurologically atypical individuals don't mind being treated the way that they treat others. For example, people with ASD do not perceive social nuances and suffer from empathic deficits; they are perceived as lacking emotional intelligence and having difficult personalities; their directness in expression can be considered as rudeness or even inappropriate behavior (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004); however, they accept the same behavior toward themselves.

On the other hand, people with severe ADHD may not pay full attention to their colleagues, organizational processes, or project deadlines, yet they may require a responsible approach from others; moreover, this will be a necessary condition for their functional accommodation into organizational projects. Besides, comorbid disorders are common in adults with ADHD and include substance use disorders, depression, or anxiety disorders (Adamou et al., 2013). Both issues will worsen interpersonal relationships and organizational cooperation. The texts of people with dyslexia can be full of errors and nonsense, which could be perceived as disrespect or inexcusable negligence, especially in public administration, management, or finance (Taylor & Walter, 2003).

Ethical dilemmas will arise as to what extent the understanding of neurologically atypical employees will be needed. Current employees and other stakeholders will ask whether a neurologically atypical personnel's accommodation leads to unfair and unequal treatment of other people in the organization. However, neurologically atypical employees will need others to try their best to understand how they experience the world and know their specific ways of communication, self-regulation, emotion, and other needs. The public organization must be prepared to provide this training, and employees must be truly ready to show compassion; as Persson and Savulescu (2018), write, "since empathizing with others motivates concern for their welfare, a reflectively justified empathy will lead to a likewise justified altruistic

concern” (p. 183). The neurodiversity program may work when these conditions are met; otherwise, it will not be a success story.

Public organizations will also face the dilemma of how intensively to adapt organizational culture and processes so that these dilemmas do not jeopardize their cohesion and goals. There is a critique of how much and for whom the organizations must adapt; Lim writes: “[a]ccommodation does not involve mere acceptance of differences and non-interference, but active efforts to ensure that the group of people in concern [i.e., neurologically atypical people] navigate the world without unreasonable disadvantage. Applying this recognition to the neurodiversity movement, their initial exclusion of low-functioning autistics is unwarranted. . . [Eventually, d]ifficulties may prove [to] be so great and costly to overcome, that we eventually decide against it” (Lim, 2015, p. 571). This argument is based on the introductory duel of two principles: whether neurodiversity should be perceived as a disease or, conversely, only atypical neuronal development, which gives rise to different types and levels of sensing, thinking, and behaving—that is, it is not abnormal—and neurologically atypical individuals should have the right to be employed.

However, accepting a public organization’s commitment to employing neurologically atypical individuals does not mean that it would have to hire everyone at all costs. At the same time, it does not mean that we must accept the thesis that neurologically atypical people are ill, must be treated, and are dependent on welfare. As Jaarsma & Welin writes in the case of people with ASD: “[I]t is unproblematic to advocate accommodation for intellectually able autistic individuals and treatment to counteract the harmful effects of the combination of autism and intellectual disability, for example, social isolation leading to depression. We do not believe that treatment is disrespectful to all autistic individuals” (Jaarsma & Welin, 2015; p. 684). Recruiting neurologically atypical individuals will have to be a compromise between their needs and the needs of public organizations and various dilemmas will be solved by trial and error. For example, it is already clear today that the rise of online and remote work has allowed people with ASD to do a job without otherwise challenging complications and potential ethical missteps. The Internet has freed them from the necessity of interpreting the body language of others. They are free from the overwhelming norm of eye contact and save the energy demands of managing their body language (Davidson, 2008). It can be expected that similar incremental improvements will occur in other aspects of organizational life. On the other hand, public organizations should not hire neurologically atypical candidates unless there is honest motivation and a realistic way to create incrementally suitable conditions.

Another ethical risk is that some neurologically atypical job candidates or even existing employees may require acceptance of their specific thinking and manner of behaving to the extent that it would harm the public organization or its goals. As the evolutionary biologist Edward Hagen writes (in the case of delusional states), “An adaptation to deceive and exploit social partners should be present in all individuals, but only activated in those for whom the benefits of deception outweigh the costs. Among individuals already suffering severe social failure, the benefits of deception and exploitation will almost always outweigh the costs because there are few or no costs. What would such a deceptive, exploitative adaptation look like? First, it should cause individuals suffering severe social failure to signal to others that they need social benefits, and that they can provide social benefits in return. These individuals should behave in ways that are difficult to consciously imitate” (Hagen, 2008, p. 191).

As mentioned in the introduction, mental and psychiatric illnesses are collections of symptoms, and accurate diagnosis, especially in borderline cases, is often arduous or impossible. However, this criticism of the employment of neurodiverse people misses its mark for at least two reasons. First, public organizations commonly struggle with counterproductive working behavior and are equipped with processes to deal with lying and fraud cases, although they do not always successfully solve them (Houdek, 2020; MacLane & Walmsley, 2010; Marcus et al., 2016). Indeed, it can be more problematic from a public relations point of view or even politically incorrect to let go of a person who has or pretended to have a psychological or psychiatric illness; however, organizations would learn to deal with similar cases. Second, a neurodiversity policies’ purpose is not to give employees unnecessary relief but to adapt the work environment and job tasks to suit their idiosyncratic needs and achieve higher productivity. Suppose it turns out that employees can meet their work objectives under modified or adapted conditions; in that case, it is more of an opportunity for the organization to introduce such measures than an issue.

Conclusion

Studies from business and entrepreneurship were used to show that civil service and public organizations may prosper if they recruit neurologically atypical individuals. Their unique perspectives, thinking styles, coping strategies, and life experiences can lead to service innovation and better organizational outcomes. Besides, the management of organizations through neurodiversity applications will gain competencies that can be positively used for all employees.

However, the promotion of neurodiversity cannot be achieved without ethically challenging, nuanced, demanding, and costly changes in organizational culture of public agencies. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the studies on which the argument for the benefits of neurodiversity for organizations is based are usually qualitative, one-off case studies, and the research field suffers significantly from publication and survivorship bias. Therefore, it is not easy to generalize the results into truly evidence-based best practices for public organizations, as they are highly context-dependent.

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