

Organizational maturity model to support the employability of neurodiverse individuals

1. Purpose of the project and reasons for undertaking the research

Neurodiversity refers to the diversity in human cognition, which is a natural phenomenon, and refers to individuals whose neurological predispositions are not typical. It can be defined as any type of cognitive processing or a way of making sense of the world that deviates from “typical” ways of thinking and being. The neurodivergent community includes i.a. individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, or Tourette's syndrome. Some estimations suggest that up to 20% of the population might have neurodivergent conditions. The professional situation of neurodiverse community representatives is varied. Some of them can work successfully, while others face problems with finding and keeping employment, as a result of, i.a. difficulties in the area of interpersonal communication and social interactions, coping with stress, and sensory hypersensitivity. According to some estimations, in the United States, the unemployment/underemployment rate for individuals on the autism spectrum is greater than 90%. Representatives of this group also have to face discrimination, negative attitudes, and stereotypes from supervisors and co-workers, which also affects their professional situation.

As a result, the project aims to: 1) Identify and analyze key barriers to employability and the benefits of employing neurodiverse individuals. 2) Identify the components of the process of achieving organizational maturity for the employment of neurodiverse individuals, along with their determinants. 3) Develop an organizational maturity model to support the employability of neurodiverse individuals (Neurodiversity Organizational Maturity Model - NOMM).

2. Research description

Research activities were planned based on methods triangulation and divided into several stages. Two research tasks will be carried out under the first stage. First, desk research focused on an analysis of previous studies on economic, social, and psychological benefits and barriers of hiring neurodiverse employees, along with a multi-context interpretation of normative acts concerning the issues of employability of the neurodiverse community. Secondly, 12 semi-structured interviews with field experts (including therapists, job coaches, representatives of HR associations, NGOs, and scientists) will be conducted. Interviews are aimed to identify and explore the determinants of organizational "propensity" and "readiness" to employ neurodiverse individuals. On this basis, the study will be carried out in the next stage, with the use of Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI). The research sample will include about 1000 companies within three selected sectors of the economy: Information Technology (IT), Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), and manufacturing. The choice of economy sectors is dictated by the high potential to employ a group of neurodiverse individuals due to the nature of professional tasks performed. This research will identify companies that are aware of neurodiversity and potentially ready to hire or already employ neurodiverse individuals. As a result, companies will be selected for the next stage of the research, in the form of a case study. It will be a multivariate comparative analysis with an indication of good practices. The research sample will include 3 successful companies in the area of employability of neurodiverse people. As part of the case study, the research will include semi-structured interviews, with i.a. employees of the HR department, managers, and neurodiverse employees. There will also be an observation of possible workplace accommodations or specific work practices supporting the functioning of neurodiverse staff. The last element of the study will be documentary research - an analysis of the company's documentation in the area of neurodiverse individuals employment.

3. The most important expected effects of the project

Based on the research material gathered at earlier stages of the research:

- 1) Key barriers to employability and the benefits of employing neurodiverse individuals will be identified and analyzed.
- 2) The components of the process of achieving organizational maturity for the employment of neurodiverse individuals, with their determinants such as organizational propensity and organizational readiness will be characterized.
- 3) Organizational maturity model to support the employability of neurodiverse individuals (Neurodiversity Organizational Maturity Model - NOMM) will be developed.