

THE RISE OF NEURODIVERSITY IN MANAGEMENT



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In the era of population decline, businesses are facing a growing challenge to find and retain top talent. One promising solution is to embrace neurodiversity in the workplace. Neurodiversity refers to differences in cognitive functioning, including autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and dyslexia. People with neurodiversity often have unique skills and perspectives valuable in the workplace, including creativity, attention to detail, and problem-solving ability.

A global trend of declining populations has led to a growing focus on crisis response solutions at both government and corporate levels. The "population decline crisis" is now a top priority in many countries. As a result, businesses and organizations must be prepared to adopt more diverse and inclusive talent acquisition and employment practices.

[Reference]

The Meaning of the Population Crisis - "Population Decline" Era

According to the United Nations World Population Prospects 2022 report published in July of the previous year, it can be noted that the low birthrate crisis in the Asian region is particularly severe. When listing the total fertility rates (as of 2021) of 238 countries in ascending order, six countries, including Hong Kong (1st place, 0.75 births), South Korea (2nd place, 0.88 births), Singapore (5th place, 1.02 births), Macau (6th place, 1.09 births), Taiwan (7th place, 1.11 births), and China (10th place, 1.16 births), are within the top 10.

American economist Harry Dent coined the concept of the "population decline." He named the phenomenon of slowing population growth rates due to factors such as population aging and low birthrates, especially the rapid decline in the proportion of the working-age population (15-64 years old). In reality, the population decline has necessitated a more proactive response, such as the snowball effect of societal aging, labor shortages, and the vicious cycle of declining birthrates leading to economic growth contraction, affecting various aspects of our society, including economic growth, social safety nets, and cultural diversity.





For example, individuals who have been overlooked for employment opportunities in the past can be seen as hidden talent pools. In this era of declining populations, it is more important than ever to focus on nurturing and expanding the workforce for women who have experienced career gaps, senior citizens, and individuals with disabilities. **We should no longer view employment solely from a social welfare perspective, but also as a way to enhance productivity and innovation.**

Despite a challenging economic climate, the job market for people with disabilities is flourishing. This shift is driven by a confluence of factors: increased government mandates, heightened social consciousness, and evolving employer attitudes. As a result, companies are now vying for the talent of individuals with disabilities,

recognizing the unique value they bring to the workforce.

The tightening labor market has created a compelling business case for disability inclusion. Employers are realizing that people with disabilities possess diverse skills and perspectives that can enhance innovation and productivity. Additionally, government policies are increasingly incentivizing businesses to hire and accommodate workers with disabilities.

[Reference]

Changes in the Disabled Population and Trends in Employment Environment 1: **Changes in Expectations for Disabled Employment**

As the proportion of the disabled population increases within the overall population, particularly among young adults, there is a growing trend to fill the workforce with individuals with disabilities who can contribute to productivity through appropriate consideration and support in various sectors, or support productivity improvement in the existing labor force.

Especially in recent times, advanced countries and leading companies have begun transitioning towards securing exceptional talent pools that had been overlooked in the market so far, based on factors such as "individual characteristics in recruitment processes," "digital work systems," or "flexible work arrangements."



Asian governments have implemented mandatory employment quotas for people with disabilities to increase their employment rates. However, these efforts have had limited success. Many companies continue to pay fines instead of meeting the quotas, and the employment rate for people with disabilities remains significantly lower than that of non-disabled individuals. However, recent changes in the socio-economic environment and the business landscape are now leading to a more rapid transformation of the disability employment market. Demographic shifts, a tightening labor market, and evolving employer attitudes are all contributing to a greater demand for workers with disabilities.

The employment of people with disabilities is increasingly important to companies as they strive to meet **ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance)** goals. This is due in part to the growing awareness of disability inclusion and the increasing pressure from investors and consumers for companies to be more socially responsible. Companies are recognizing that **hiring people with disabilities is not only the right thing to do, but it also makes good business sense. People with disabilities bring a diverse range of skills and perspectives to the workplace, which can lead to increased innovation and productivity. Additionally, hiring people with disabilities can help companies to improve their reputation and attract top talent.**

The focal point for companies striving for sustainable growth: Enhancing workforce diversity strategies.

Diversity and inclusion are becoming top priorities for companies around the world. This is evident in the growing number of HR reports and discussions that are focused on these issues. **Companies are realizing that a diverse workforce is essential for innovation, productivity, and profitability.** They are also recognizing the importance of **creating an inclusive workplace where everyone feels valued and respected.**

The employment of people with disabilities is a key part of diversity and inclusion efforts. People with disabilities bring a unique set of skills and perspectives to the workplace. They can also help companies to tap into new markets and attract customers. However, companies need to be intentional about creating an environment where people with disabilities can thrive. This means providing accessible workplaces, offering assistive technology, and providing training on disability awareness.

Companies also need to reconsider their hiring practices. They should be looking for talent based on skills and abilities, not on disability status. This means using inclusive language in job postings, conducting accessible interviews, and providing accommodations as needed.

Companies that are committed to disability inclusion will be well-positioned to attract and retain top talent.



The employment of people with disabilities is a win-win proposition. It benefits both individuals and businesses. When people with disabilities are given the opportunity to participate in the workforce, they can achieve their full potential. They can also contribute to the success of their employers. By embracing disability inclusion, companies can create a more equitable and prosperous society for all.

Asian nations, including South Korea, have traditionally been slow to embrace diversity in the workplace. However, there are some signs of progress. In Japan, the IT industry has been a leader in employing individuals with developmental disorders. These individuals have proven to be valuable assets to Japanese IT companies. They are often highly skilled in areas such as data entry, software testing, and web development. Their unique perspectives and problem-solving abilities can also help companies to develop innovative products and services.



Embracing Neurodiversity in the Workplace

The term "Neurodiversity" is still relatively new, but it is quickly gaining traction in the workplace. Neurodiversity refers to the diversity of human brains and thought processes. It encompasses a wide range of conditions, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyslexia.

Neurodiversity is a mindset that considers differences in the brain, nervous system, and various derived characteristics as individual diversity. It promotes mutual respect for these differences and seeks to harness them for the benefit of society. Neurodiversity is a form of human diversity that deserves to be valued and respected. Neurodiverse individuals bring unique skills, perspectives, and talents to the workplace. They can be highly creative, analytical, and detail-oriented. They can also be excellent problem-solvers and communicators.

[Reference]

Understanding Neurodiversity

The concept of neurodiversity, as discussed in this column, refers to supporting individuals with neurodiversity such as dyslexia, autism, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, dyscalculia, and dyspraxia to harness their potential in the workplace.

Estimating the exact figures related to the neurodiverse population is challenging, but the Neurodiversity Hub suggests that individuals with neurodiversity worldwide may account for at least 10% of the total population.

According to a 2019 study by Deloitte Australia, ADHD is estimated to affect approximately 3% of adults aged 15 and above, with potentially more cases going undiagnosed.

What's crucial in the context of neurodiversity is that it understands phenomena stemming from developmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and learning disabilities, not as deficiencies or weaknesses but as "natural and normal variations in the human genome" or "diversity." It goes beyond eliminating discrimination based on individual characteristics, which is a concept in conventional diversity, and brings a unique significance by contributing to economic value through the acquisition of neurodiversity. This can result in new ideas, innovations, and enhanced productivity, ultimately contributing to a company's growth.



In countries around the world, employers are recognizing the value of neurodiversity in the workplace. There are many successful cases where neurodiverse individuals with exceptional abilities are being actively utilized in the workplace, demonstrating their potential to improve business performance. **This goes beyond accommodating disabilities to recognizing and leveraging their unique strengths.**

In Japan, there is a growing trend of actively employing neurodiverse individuals. Japanese companies are investing in neurodiversity training programs, creating inclusive workplaces, and using specialized recruitment strategies. **The Japanese government is also supporting these efforts by providing funding and resources.**

These initiatives are part of a broader effort to recognize the potential and unique strengths that individuals with neurodiversity can bring to the workplace. They not only aim to promote diversity and inclusivity but also seek to tap into the untapped potential of neurodiverse individuals for innovation and improved productivity, ultimately contributing to business success.

[Reference]

Nomura Research Institute (NRI) Research Report for the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry of Japan: Feasibility Study of Initiatives for "Neurodiversity" in the Digital Field to Accelerate Innovation Creation

In Japan, both the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry and the Nomura Research Institute have conducted in-depth research and analysis of various international cases, the job characteristics of individuals with developmental disabilities, and the stages of employment. They have presented evidence that neurodiversity goes beyond the moral dimension of eliminating discrimination against people with disabilities and can substantially benefit companies and economic development.

Moreover, they have launched a one-year pilot project for neurodiversity employment, providing empirical evidence through the success stories of participating companies. This practical demonstration has garnered even more attention.

Based on these findings, Japan is actively introducing and rapidly expanding neurodiversity talent development programs. These initiatives are driven by the recognition that, considering trends such as low birth rates, an aging population, and changes in the industrial structure, individuals with developmental disabilities can play an active role in securing human resources. The government and major corporations are taking proactive steps to increase opportunities for neurodiverse talent in the workforce.



A New Paradigm for Talent Acquisition: Leveraging Neurodiverse Talent

Neurodiverse individuals have long been overlooked by the corporate world. Individuals with neurological conditions like autism and ADHD have not been considered in most corporate human resource strategies.

Many countries are witnessing a sharp rise in young adults with developmental disabilities like autism and ADHD. There's also a troubling trend of young adults facing social challenges without formal diagnoses. They struggle with relationships, communication, and adapting to a competitive society. This leads to concerns like social isolation, mental health issues, and employment difficulties, resulting in their isolation from both the job market and society as a whole.

The increasing number of young adults with disabilities and social impairments necessitates adapting recruiting strategies and mindsets. This means recruiting more young adults from underrepresented groups and creating more opportunities for neurodiverse employees to develop their skills. By creating a more inclusive and supportive workplace, businesses can benefit from the contributions of all young adults, regardless of their background or abilities.

Silicon Valley is a leader in the employment of neurodiverse individuals. Many tech companies in Silicon Valley have implemented programs to recruit, train, and retain neurodiverse employees. These programs have been successful in helping neurodiverse individuals find meaningful employment in the tech industry.

Neurodiverse individuals excel in areas like attention to detail, focus, and concentration. This makes them a great fit for roles like software development, data analysis, and quality assurance. Companies are increasingly recognizing their value and actively seeking them out for such positions.

[Reference]

Utilization and Success Cases of Neurodiversity in Advanced Industries Beyond Microsoft

In the case of Microsoft, they have employed individuals with autism who excel in concentration, analytical thinking, and IT skills. These individuals have been involved in tasks requiring repetitive work for extended periods and developing and testing AI models using logical reasoning, resulting in outstanding job performance. With proven cases of productivity enhancement like this and the increasing demand for AI-related businesses, Microsoft is expanding employment into more diverse areas. Global companies in advanced industries such as IBM, HPE, and Dell Technologies are also adopting and spreading similar practices.





Population Decline Demands Innovative Corporate Solutions

The world is facing an impending population decline. This means that there will be fewer people available to work in the future. **To remain competitive, companies will need to find new ways to attract and retain talent.** One way to do this is to tap into the **"hidden talent market"** of individuals with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities often have unique skills and abilities that can be valuable assets to businesses. For example, they may be highly detail-oriented, have a strong attention span, or be able to focus for long periods of time.

However, many companies are hesitant to hire individuals with disabilities because of negative stereotypes.

It is important to shift perceptions about neurodiversity and to recognize the value of these individuals. Companies can do this by providing training for their employees in neurodiversity and by creating an inclusive workplace where all employees feel welcome and valued.

By tapping into the "hidden talent market" of individuals with disabilities, companies can find new ways to innovate and remain competitive in the future.



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