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TALENTED Handbook

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TalentED Handbook

INTRODUCTION

TalentED Handbook Outline

The main goal of this handbook is to be a comprehensive resource that helps employers, educators, and policymakers create inclusive workplaces for autistic individuals. By understanding the specific situations and tailored approaches of each country, stakeholders can better appreciate the diverse needs and potential contributions of autistic individuals, leading to a more inclusive and productive workforce.

This handbook provides a detailed understanding of autistic adults in the labour market. It starts with an overview of the current situation, including relevant policies, good practices, and the challenges faced by autistic adults. It also covers their learning preferences and challenges to give a deeper understanding of their experiences. Next, a detailed chart highlights the unique strengths and areas for growth of autistic adults. This is followed by job profiling cards that describe roles tailored to these strengths, helping with informed career decisions. Additionally, a selection of specific jobs ideally suited for autistic adults is provided, focusing on opportunities in green, digital, and social sectors. The handbook ends with a summary of the insights gained throughout the document.

The handbook is structured as follows:

- **Introduction**: Overview of the handbook's purpose and the employment landscape for autistic individuals.
- **Understanding Autistic Adults in the Labour Market**: Detailed insights into policies, challenges, and learning preferences to foster a deeper understanding of autistic adults' experiences.
- **Autism Strengths & Weaknesses Chart**: A detailed chart highlighting unique attributes of autistic adults, aiding in the identification of their strengths and areas for growth.
- **Job Profiling Cards**: Descriptions of job roles tailored to leverage the strengths identified in the Autism Strengths & Weaknesses Chart, facilitating informed career decisions.
- **Autism Fitting Job Map**: A curated selection of specific jobs ideally suited for autistic adults, focusing on opportunities in green, digital, and social sectors.
- **Conclusion**: Summary of the insights gained throughout the document.

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Developing this handbook was a collaborative effort, based on extensive research conducted in seven countries. This research included surveys and interviews with 140 stakeholders, including autistic adults, their families, and professionals who support them. The aim was to understand employment statistics, challenges, opportunities, and innovative strategies related to the labour inclusion of autistic people. The findings were compiled into country reports and an executive report, providing a comprehensive overview and facilitating comparative analysis.

The sections of this handbook will explore these findings and offer practical tools and strategies to improve employment prospects for autistic individuals. By applying these recommendations, organizations can create more inclusive environments that support the unique needs of autistic individuals while utilizing their strengths for mutual benefit. This comprehensive approach seeks to foster a society where everyone, regardless of neurological differences, has the chance to succeed in their professional lives.

Development and methodology

The methodology used to create this handbook was thorough and detailed, aimed at understanding the employment situation for autistic individuals. First, we reviewed existing literature to gather current knowledge and identify any gaps. Next, we conducted field research by engaging directly with a diverse group of stakeholders in the seven countries involved in the project. This included structured interviews and surveys with autistic individuals of working age, their families, and professionals who support them. We then carefully analysed the data to find common themes, challenges, and opportunities. The insights from this analysis helped us develop practical tools and strategies tailored to the needs of autistic individuals in the workforce. This collaborative and evidence-based approach ensures that the handbook is based on real-world experiences and provides practical recommendations to improve employment outcomes for autistic individuals.

Employment landscape for autistic individuals

Autism Europe has highlighted the high levels of discrimination faced by autistic individuals in all areas of life (Autism Europe, 2020). Despite the EU's efforts to ensure no one is left behind, autistic adults globally face significant disadvantages, including lower employment rates and education engagement compared to people without disabilities and those with other forms of disabilities. This leads to high unemployment, which starts early and affects their personal and social lives, quality of life, and participation in society (Chen et al., 2014). Additionally, the lack of adequate education and training opportunities for autistic adults in Europe hinders their professional development and makes it harder for them to find work.

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However, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) presents both unique challenges and exceptional opportunities within the workforce. As awareness of autism increases across Europe, the employment landscape for autistic individuals remains varied, influenced by national policies, societal attitudes, and support systems. This handbook is designed to address these challenges by providing practical guidelines and strategies to support the employment of autistic individuals, fostering their inclusion and participation in the workforce.

In Greece, vocational training options like the Higher Vocational School for People with Disabilities exist, but the employment rate for individuals with disabilities, including autism, remains low. Estonia offers vocational schools and programs for autistic individuals, but the lack of autism-specific policies and comprehensive support services complicates their employment prospects. New employment reforms have exacerbated the situation for individuals in the spectrum and other neurominorities, particularly through compulsory social activity requirements for social benefits eligibility. Lithuania faces challenges in collecting reliable data on the employment of autistic adults, partly due to the recent recognition of adult diagnoses. The available information is often inaccurate, and gathering reliable statistics is further complicated by factors such as stigma and the absence of centralized data. Bulgaria lacks official statistics and specialized support for autistic individuals. While initiatives like the Centre for Social Rehabilitation and Integration aim to improve social skills, broader systemic changes are essential for enhancing employment prospects. Germany, despite high educational attainment among autistic individuals, faces low employment rates. Structured and individualized learning approaches are used in vocational training, but societal attitudes and insufficient support systems result in high unemployment rates. In Spain, organizations like the Spanish Autism Confederation work to improve employment outcomes for autistic individuals. Despite these efforts, high unemployment rates persist, highlighting the need for more comprehensive policies and support measures. In Portugal, initiatives such as the National Skills Grant and projects like "New Paths to Employment" strive to enhance employment opportunities for autistic individuals. However, the lack of specific data and stringent criteria for employment quotas pose challenges to their effective implementation.

Employment must be seen as an integral opportunity among the different social components, such as workers, employers, customers, community services, and professionals. These models must evolve by modifying attitudes and creating new networks of personal interrelationships for autistic people. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong developmental condition that typically affects a person's communication and interaction with others and their environment. All autistic individuals share two main areas of difficulty: social communication and stereotypical and repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, and activities. It is defined as a spectrum because the expression and severity of symptoms may vary significantly among individuals.

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Starting a new job is stressful for everyone. Nevertheless, autistic people may face additional challenges connected to their condition. Difficulties with social communication and interaction are often the most common barriers to workplace integration. Autistic individuals may be disturbed by close proximity to other workers and stressed by the expectation to socialize. Therefore, raising awareness among team members and managers is necessary to ensure that the needs of autistic employees are understood and respected.

Some individuals may also have difficulties expressing themselves verbally and understanding others. Literal thinking and misinterpreting non-verbal language also hinder mutual understanding. To facilitate communication with autistic employees, clear, concrete, and complete language should be preferred, avoiding double senses, irony, metaphors, or unnecessary gestures. A tutor acting as an intermediary between the autistic person and their collaborators can strongly support communication and promote the appreciation of diversity in the workplace.

Other challenges may be caused by sensory hypersensitivity. Noise, smells, and visual stimuli in the workplace may be very disturbing and, in some cases, may lead to anxiety or even a nervous meltdown. Employers can help by providing the employee with headphones, table lamps instead of sharp central lighting, or, where possible, a private office to minimize stimuli. Employers can also create a calm, safe space where

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the employee can spend their breaks or find shelter when feeling overwhelmed.

The inflexibility of thought can also cause troubles for autistic employees when facing changes in workday structure, unexpected tasks, or variations in work priorities. An autistic person may have difficulties switching their attention from one task to another upon request, feeling stressed and anxious. To help cope with the employee's stress, the employer should provide as much flexibility and autonomy in work planning as possible.

Employing an autistic person offers many benefits, similar to hiring any competent and loyal individual. Autistic people have many skills to offer and have talents in various areas from art, music, crafts, mathematics, and information technologies to gardening or pizza making. Typical strengths may include strong memory, adherence to rules, attention to detail, or the capacity to carry out repetitive tasks with great precision. Furthermore, the whole work team can benefit from greater neurodiversity by learning from differences, exploring new viewpoints, and evolving towards a more open and inclusive community. To appreciate an employee's strengths and not miss out on great talent, employers need to gain a better understanding of the condition, learn to recognize its symptoms, and respect individual differences.

With the right education, training, and support, autistic individuals can be outstanding employees (Walsh et al., 2014). The TALENT ED project aims to promote equal access to education and employment for autistic individuals to achieve their social integration. To achieve this, the project specifically aims to:

- Develop tailored guidance and upskilling tools for autistic adults.
- Stimulate their motivation and increase their engagement in lifelong learning and employment.
- Enhance their ability to make informed educational and professional choices and understand their employment rights.
- Improve their ability to enter and succeed in the open market by developing key employment competences, soft skills, and stress coping skills.
- Equip vocational education and training (VET) educators with valuable knowledge, skills, and innovative tools to support and empower autistic adults during their transition to the labour market.
- Raise awareness of the strengths, abilities, and unique qualities of autistic adults, challenge false stereotypes, and promote reasonable accommodations.

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Understanding ASD Adults in the Labour Market

Understanding the employment situation for adults identified in the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is important for creating fair and supportive workplaces. This chapter explores how autistic adults are doing in the job market, what policies and practices are helping them, the challenges they face, and how they prefer to learn.

Across various European countries such as Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, and Portugal, autistic adults face diverse experiences within the labour market. Despite differences in societal attitudes and policy frameworks, all share a common thread: a significant disparity exists between the employment rates of autistic individuals and those without disorders. Challenges in securing employment, maintaining job stability, and accessing adequate support persist, reflecting a broader issue of societal inclusion and acceptance.

These countries employ a range of policies and practices aimed at improving the employment prospects of autistic adults. Supported and protected employment initiatives, vocational training programs, and legislation addressing discrimination and vocational rehabilitation demonstrate efforts to create more inclusive workplaces. Additionally, specialized recruitment agencies, job coaching, and tailored support services aim to bridge the gap between autistic individuals and employment opportunities.

Despite policy efforts, autistic adults encounter multifaceted challenges in the labour market. These include stigma, discrimination, inadequate support services, and difficulties in navigating the application process and job interviews. Moreover, societal misconceptions and limited understanding of autism often hinder effective integration and exacerbate employment disparities. Understanding and addressing these challenges are essential for fostering inclusive workplaces and ensuring equal opportunities for autistic adults.

Autistic individuals exhibit unique learning preferences and challenges that impact their employment experiences. While some excel in tasks requiring attention to detail, others struggle with social interactions and adapting to changes. By addressing these comprehensively, stakeholders can work towards fostering equitable workplaces for autistic employees.

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Current status of adults with ASD in the labour market and society

The employment landscape for autistic individuals with varies widely across Europe, reflecting differences in national policies, societal attitudes, and available support systems. This section provides an overview of the current situation in several European countries, highlighting the unique challenges and initiatives present in each context.

In Greece, individuals in the spectrum constitute a minor portion of the workforce, and official statistics on their employment rates are lacking. Estimates are based on broader data on disability employment trends, indicating a decline in overall employment rates for individuals with disabilities since 2008. The National Confederation of People with Disabilities reports that only 23.7% of adults between 20-64 years old with disabilities are employed in Greece, with even fewer individuals with severe disabilities finding employment. The unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities in Greece surpasses 30%, underscoring the significant challenges faced by autistic individuals and other disabilities in the Greek labour market.

In Estonia, Wisevoter data (2023) indicates that there are 369 individuals diagnosed with ASD per 100,000 people, totalling around 5000 diagnosed cases in the country. However, due to data protection laws, there is no official registry tracking the exact number of autistic individuals. The Estonian educational system and support services lack adequate provisions for autistic individuals, exacerbating their challenges in accessing necessary support and rehabilitation services. New employment reforms, including compulsory social activity requirements for benefits eligibility, further complicate the situation. Concerns about human rights violations, such as involuntary hospitalization and neglectful treatment, persist due to inadequate resources and support in mental health institutions.

In Lithuania, according to the Institute of Hygiene, there were 4,082 autistic people in Lithuania in 2021. This means that one out of 135 children in Lithuania is diagnosed with one of the autism spectrum diagnoses. Kristina Košel-Patil, the chairman of the board of the Lithuanian autism association "Lietaus vaikai", pointed out that in eight years - from 2013 to 2021 - the number of autism cases increased by almost 400 percent (Kristina Košel-Patil, 2023). However, official data on the employment situation of autistic adults remains limited due to factors such as stigma and the recent recognition of adult diagnoses. Unemployment rates for individuals with disabilities are higher than for those without, and less than 10% of people with autism spectrum disorders are employed (EESC, 2017)."

In Bulgaria, according to the World Health Organization, the average percentage of people with disabilities is around 20%. However, there are no specific statistics related to autistic individuals due to various factors such as difficulties in diagnosis, limited

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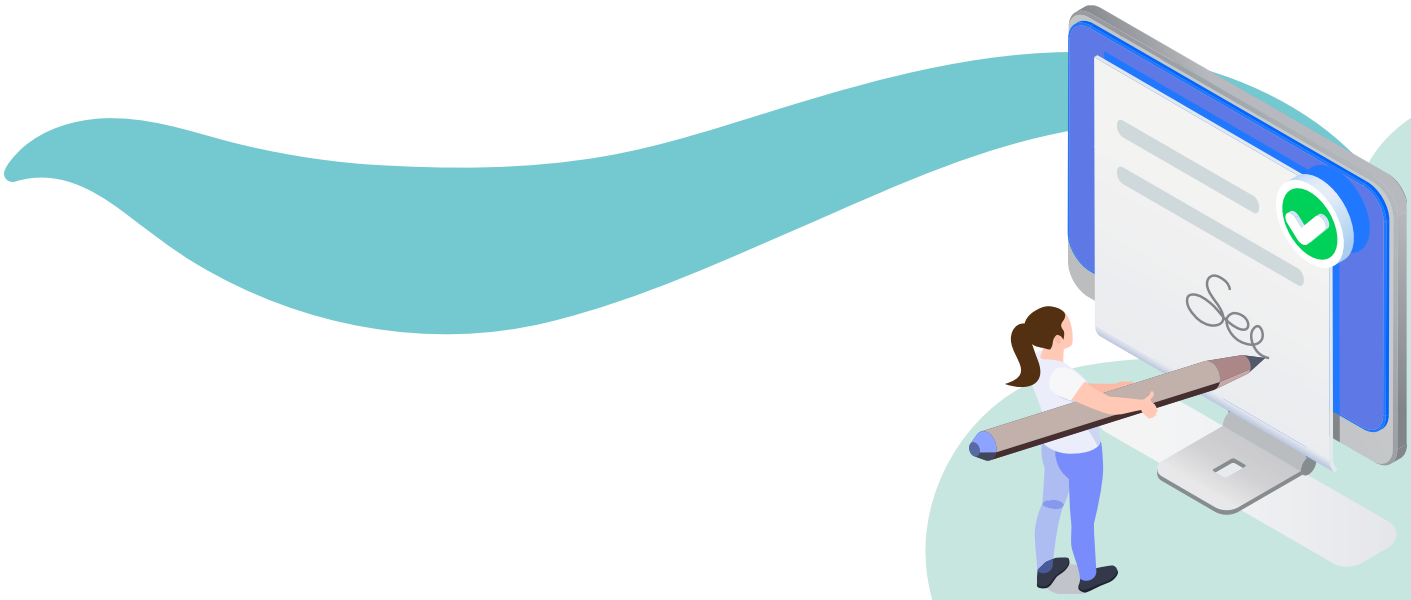
clinics authorized to provide diagnoses, lack of coordination among existing centres, stigma, and a focus primarily on diagnosing children with ASD rather than young adults and adults. Despite these challenges, there's hope for change, as a recent study by scientists from the Department of Cognitive Science and Psychology at New Bulgarian University aims to identify the prevalence of autism symptoms among adults. While the official data from this research is yet to be published, initial findings from over 3000 collected responses suggest a global prevalence rate of 1-2% among autistic individuals.

In Germany, despite making up a small proportion of the labor force, autistic individuals face disproportionately high unemployment rates, even with above-average levels of education. Approximately 800,000 autistic people live in Germany, and according to a study by the University of Regensburg (Diverscon Impact Report, 2017), around 85% are unemployed. Despite good to excellent education, including successful degrees, the employment rate for this population remains below 10%, significantly lower than for both people with and without disabilities.

In Spain, nearly 90% of autistic individuals are unemployed, marking them as the disabled group with the highest unemployment rate in the labour market. Limited political actions and reforms targeting autistic individuals, especially in adulthood, further exacerbate the situation. Organizations like the Spanish Autism Confederation are actively advocating for reforms to promote access to employment for autistic individuals through training initiatives for both individuals and companies. As a result of these efforts, 279 autistic individuals have received training, and 67 entities have been provided with guidelines for hiring autistic individuals.



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In Portugal, attention to the employability of individuals with autism has only recently gained traction, with limited practical implementation. In a study involving approximately 300,000 school-aged children (ages 7 to 9) across the country, Oliveira (2005) concluded that the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was 1 case per 1,000 children, suggesting around 1,238 affected young people aged 20 to 29. The study also estimated an annual increase of 150 new cases, potentially due to either a genuine rise in the ASD population or improved diagnostic methodologies. A more recent study (Rasga et al., 2020) found a prevalence rate of 0.5%, rising to 3.3% in schools with special support units, highlighting the need for continuous monitoring and expanded resources, especially for the transition to adulthood. Despite studies, official statistics on the autistic population are lacking. While sporadic support initiatives exist, companies often fail to recognize the potential of autistic individuals as valuable hires, resulting in precarious employment opportunities. Oliveira (2005) suggests that few individuals within the autistic population achieve a sufficient level of social autonomy, with around half being entirely dependent on parents or caregivers. Nevertheless, some of these individuals could be integrated into the workforce, particularly in roles involving specific and repetitive tasks—a belief that some companies are beginning to adopt and invest in.

More general data shows that unemployment among people with disabilities in mainland Portugal surged by 30.5% between 2011 and 2021, a trend largely influenced by the pandemic. This increase was more pronounced among women (+63.1%) compared to men with disabilities (+9.8%). In contrast, unemployment in the general population decreased by 43.2% during the same period, with declines seen in both men (-47.7%) and women (-39.2%) (Persons with Disabilities in Portugal – Human Rights Indicators 2021, ODDH Report 2021).

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Policies and good practices related to training and employment

The European Union (EU) has laws and instruments to protect the rights of people with disabilities, including autistic people, and to help them find and keep jobs. These laws aim to ensure equal opportunities, prevent discrimination, and provide support for training and employment. Important laws and policies include:

- **The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**: This charter guarantees the rights of all EU citizens, including the right to non-discrimination and inclusion of people with disabilities in all areas of life, including employment.
- **European Disability Strategy 2010-2020**: This strategy focused on removing barriers in employment, education, and training for people with disabilities. The new strategy for 2021-2030 continues these efforts, promoting equality and participation.
- **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)**: Ratified by the EU and its Member States, this convention mandates the promotion, protection, and ensuring of full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by people with disabilities. This includes the right to work and employment.
- **Council Directive 2000/78/EC**: This directive sets a framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, prohibiting discrimination on various grounds, including disability.
- **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**: The ESF+ is a key financial tool that supports employment-related projects, including those aimed at improving the employability of people with disabilities through training, upskilling, and employment support services.
- **The European Pillar of Social Rights**: This pillar outlines 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. It includes provisions for equal opportunities, active support to employment, and inclusion of people with disabilities.

The European legal framework lays the groundwork for national policies and initiatives designed to improve job opportunities for autistic individuals. Across the seven countries studied, there are different approaches to support autistic people in the workforce. Some countries have well-developed legal frameworks and support systems, while others are still working on creating inclusive practices. The **Talent ED project** aims to contribute to these efforts by providing insights and resources for educators, employers, and policymakers. The project has conducted research to understand

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and improve the employment situation for autistic individuals in Europe. This research included a review of existing literature, field research, and consultations with around 140 stakeholders, including autistic people, their families, and professionals in seven countries: Greece, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, and Portugal. This section provides a summary of the policies and good practices related to training and employment for autistic individuals in these countries.

In **Greece**, there are two main types of employment support for autistic people: Supported Employment and Protected Employment. Supported Employment involves providing jobs within psychosocial support structures and social enterprises, where disabled people, including those with autism, are required to be members. Protected Employment includes workshops and centres that offer structured environments for learning skills and gaining work experience. The Hellenic Manpower Employment Organisation offers grants to encourage private and public enterprises to hire autistic individuals.

Policies:

- National Strategy for the Social Integration of People with Disabilities: Focuses on improving accessibility and inclusion in various sectors, including employment.
- Employment Subsidy Programs: Offer incentives for companies to hire individuals with disabilities, including autistic individuals.

Good Practices:

- Supported Employment Programs: Provide job coaching and tailored support for autistic individuals to help them integrate into the workforce.
- Vocational Training Centers: Offer specialised training programs that cater to the strengths and needs of autistic individuals.

Estonia has been working on inclusive education policies since the 1990s to integrate children with special educational needs (SEN) into regular schools. Vocational schools in Estonia offer specialized programs for autistic individuals, focusing on social skills, creativity, and job-specific knowledge. Despite these efforts, autistic people still face discrimination and challenges in accessing education and training that leads to employment. More support services and trained staff are needed to improve their situation.

Policies:

- Work Ability Reform: Aims to enhance the employment prospects of people with disabilities by assessing their work capacity and providing necessary support.

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- National Employment Plan: Includes specific measures for the inclusion of disabled individuals in the labour market.

Good Practices:

- Job Coaching Services: Provide continuous support to autistic individuals in the workplace to ensure successful employment.
- Customized Training Programs: Developed in collaboration with employers to match the skills of autistic individuals with job market needs.

Lithuania has made positive changes by encouraging large foreign companies to adapt their hiring processes to be more inclusive for autistic people. These changes include removing traditional job interviews and focusing more on skills than formal education. Employment services in Lithuania, although limited, provide vocational counselling, job matching, and individual support at workplaces. The Valakupiai Rehabilitation Centre offers vocational rehabilitation and training. Organizations like the Lithuanian Autism Association and the Lithuanian Disability Forum advocate for better vocational training for people with disabilities.

Bulgaria's efforts to support autistic individuals in employment are not well-documented in the provided materials. More information and specific programs might exist, but further research is needed to provide a comprehensive overview of the policies and good practices in place.

Policies:

- Protection Against Discrimination Act: Prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment and other areas.
- National Strategy for People with Disabilities: Focuses on improving access to vocational training and employment opportunities.

Good Practices:

- Inclusive Employment Projects: Partnerships between NGOs and businesses to create job opportunities for autistic individuals.
- Vocational Training Initiatives: Offer practical skills training tailored to the needs and strengths of autistic individuals.

Germany has strong legal protections and support systems for autistic individuals in the job market. Key laws include the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG), Social Code III (SGB III), Vocational Training Act (BBiG), and the Severely Disabled Persons Act (SchwbG). These laws aim to prevent discrimination, promote vocational rehabilitation, and require companies to hire a certain percentage of people with

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severe disabilities.

Policies:

- Federal Participation Act (Bundesteilhabegesetz, BTHG): Aims to enhance the participation of people with disabilities in all areas of life, including employment. This act focuses on providing individualized support and services to help disabled individuals integrate into the workforce.

- Social Code IX (SGB IX): Provides a comprehensive legal framework for the inclusion of disabled individuals in the labor market. It covers various aspects, including vocational rehabilitation, workplace adaptations, and support for both employees and employers to ensure successful employment outcomes.

Good Practices:

- Integration Offices: These offices provide support and advice to both employers and employees, facilitating the employment of autistic individuals. They offer services such as job coaching, workplace adjustments, and mediation to resolve any issues that may arise.

- Supported Employment Programs: These programs offer personalized job coaching and workplace adjustments to support autistic individuals. They focus on matching the strengths and skills of autistic individuals with suitable job roles and providing ongoing support to ensure job retention and success.

Spain has taken significant steps to support autistic individuals through the Spanish Strategy for Active Employment Support. This strategy recognizes autistic people and provides customized job-seeking help. It includes a quota system requiring companies to hire a certain percentage of workers with disabilities and grants for self-employment. Various organizations work to address the employment challenges faced by autistic individuals, promoting inclusive practices and providing necessary support.

Policies:

- General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Ensures equal opportunities and access to employment for people with disabilities.

- Employment Promotion Programs: Include specific measures to support the employment of autistic individuals.

Good Practices:

- Special Employment Centres: Provide sheltered employment opportunities and support services for autistic individuals.

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- Inclusive Business Networks: Encourage companies to adopt inclusive hiring practices and provide support for autistic employees.

In **Portugal**, the lack of specific data on the autistic population makes it hard to create tailored policies. However, there are initiatives like the National Skills Grant for Young and Adult autistic Individuals, which provides support through an online platform that connects autistic individuals with job opportunities. The Portuguese Autism Federation coordinates projects like "New Paths to Employment" and "Working in an Inclusive Society" to prepare autistic individuals for the workforce and educate employers about inclusive practices. There are employment quotas for people with disabilities, but many autistic individuals do not meet the strict criteria.

Policies:

- National Strategy for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities: Aims to promote equal opportunities and access to employment.
- Labour Code: Includes provisions for reasonable accommodation and non-discrimination in the workplace.

Good Practices:

- Employment Support Programs: Offer job placement and coaching services for autistic individuals.
- Vocational Training Centres: Provide specialized training programs that focus on the skills and needs of autistic individuals.

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Challenges faced by autistic adults

Autistic adults encounter significant challenges in accessing meaningful employment opportunities. From societal perceptions and stigma to limited support services and unclear benefit policies, autistic individuals often face barriers that hinder their inclusion in the workforce. This section explores the main challenges faced by autistic adults in Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, and Portugal, highlighting the need for comprehensive policies and tailored support services to improve their employment outcomes. Despite these challenges, there are promising initiatives and opportunities for greater inclusion and support for autistic individuals in the labour market.

In **Greece**, adults with autism face low employment rates due to societal perceptions and unclear benefit policies. While supported employment initiatives offer some hope, more comprehensive policies are needed to preserve disability benefits for working individuals and address employers' concerns about hiring autistic individuals. The national employment strategy for people with disabilities must be aligned with a benefits policy that ensures workers with any form of disability retain their benefits, as these are intended to cover the additional costs that disabilities create, not to meet basic subsistence needs (National Confederation of Disabled People of Greece, 2023).

However, initiatives like supported employment positions and targeted grant programs show promise in improving employment outcomes for autistic adults (14th Statistical Information Bulletin, NCDP, 2023).

In **Estonia**, autistic adults face obstacles in the job market, including difficulties in social interaction and adapting to workplace norms. Limited job opportunities and societal attitudes that don't fully accommodate their needs exacerbate these challenges. While there are some support services available, such as workplace adaptation and job interview assistance, they often fall short of addressing the unique needs of autistic individuals. However, there's potential for improvement through greater awareness and tailored support services.

In **Lithuania**, stigma and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities hinder their ability to find employment. Many autistic adults struggle to secure jobs due to concerns about their performance and independence. However, there are opportunities for improvement through initiatives like vocational counselling and job matching services, which can help autistic individuals access meaningful employment opportunities and support their integration into the workforce.

In **Bulgaria**, autistic individuals encounter significant challenges in finding employment due to widespread stigma and misconceptions about their abilities. Many face rejection and lack of support from employers and colleagues, making it difficult to

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secure and maintain jobs. Despite some legislative progress, such as the Disabled Persons Law, support services for autistic adults remain limited, with few organizations focusing specifically on their needs. However, recent initiatives like the Centre for Social Rehabilitation and Integration offer some hope for improved support and employment opportunities.

In **Germany**, autistic individuals encounter barriers throughout the job search process, from late diagnosis and stigma to challenges in communication and social interaction. Despite the country's efforts to promote inclusion through initiatives like inclusion companies and job coaching, many autistic adults still struggle to find suitable employment. However, the shortage of skilled labour presents an opportunity for companies to recognize the potential of autistic individuals and provide them with meaningful employment opportunities through tailored support services.

In **Spain**, autistic individuals encounter barriers in the job market, including rigid selection processes and lack of support in the workplace. However, recent initiatives like the Spanish Strategy for Active Employment Support and supported employment programs offer hope for improved employment outcomes. There's also potential for greater inclusion through measures like customized employment and labour enclaves, which provide tailored support for autistic individuals to access meaningful employment opportunities.

In **Portugal**, autistic adults face challenges due to a lack of specific policies and support programs tailored to their needs (Baptista, J. D. A. A., 2015). While there are some initiatives in place, such as the National Skills Grant and internship programs, they often lack effectiveness and fail to address the unique challenges faced by autistic individuals. However, legislative changes like the Law 4/2019 and initiatives like the online job platform offer hope for improved employment outcomes for autistic adults in the future.

The challenges autistic people face **when pursuing job opportunities** as well as their needs are individual and can vary greatly depending on where they are on the spectrum.

Starting with the application process, you may need help preparing for the interview. Through training at counseling centers, the conversation itself could be tried out and possible preparations for distractions could be minimized.

Another challenge could arise in the extensive social interaction in the company. This has led to the identification of sectors where responsibility to the customer is minimized. Roles that require independent work or limited interaction, such as document management, are considered more suitable. These roles allow autistic people to perform effectively without the added pressure of complex social dynamics.

Below we have classified some of the main challenges faced by autistic people in

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the workplace.

Job application process

The job application process itself can create many challenges for autistic adults to begin with. It tends to be very biased, often way too long or complicated with employers asking for unnecessary skills or having too many requirements with no relation to the job tasks in reality. Many job descriptions are unclear causing autistic applicants to not understand what is asked of them and what they must do essentially. Moving forward to the interview stage, some of the above-described challenges start to appear as well.

Communication specifics

Communication seems to be one of the biggest challenges. Autistic adults tend to get confused by too long sentences with unclear messages – people need to be aware of that and give them direct and clear instructions when assigning tasks to autistic employees. It is even better when instructions are provided in written and not verbally to avoid confusion. Some autistic people may appear shy and have difficulties asking questions, but it is important for them to know the context and why they have to do what they have to do. So, a proactive attitude in this aspect from mentors or colleagues could be beneficial. Another key point in communication is providing feedback – autistic adults really like (and need) receiving feedback on how they're doing and the lack of it is often discouraging. Again, when providing feedback, it is important for one to be direct and clear in what can/needs to be improved and how. Some autistic adults can be very emotionally intense and take up a lot of space energy-wise (e.g. women tend to be more bubbly and cheerful, which may be inadequate in a tense work setting sometimes), so it is also important to give them boundaries – this is part of this feedback they can highly benefit from. According to one of the psychologists we interviewed, it is rather exaggerated that autistic individuals don't understand metaphors and that their thinking is too literal, but it is true that they need to know what is meant when something is said. Same applies to their sense of humor – it may come off as too "spicy" or even rude sometimes because autistic people tend to be very blunt and direct. So, people need to be aware of these things in their communication with autistic adults.

Awareness of the others & acceptance

Because of many people not being aware of the above specifics, communication can be challenging, and autistic adults may sometimes struggle with feeling accepted in a team. It is important to note that autistic individuals have more neuro connections in their brains, which is why they can't filter out the input they receive – this means all the information that comes in on all levels (sensory, factual, emotional input etc.). This is the reason why they burn out more often and why they need to use stimming

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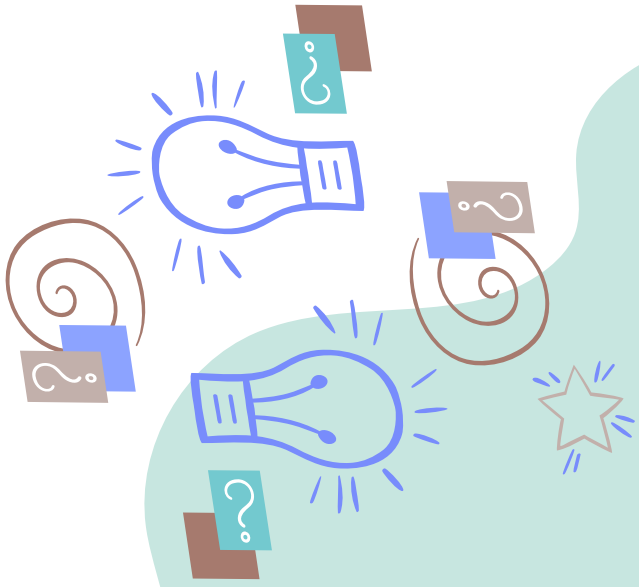
as a way to self-regulate – they focus on one sense in order for the overwhelmed sense to take a break. These types of self-stimulatory behaviours may sometimes look awkward to others and come off as not socially acceptable (e.g. when they look away when talking to you or fidget with their hands during a conversation). So, once again, people need to be aware of that and managers especially should receive proper training in order to create a social environment where autistic employees can feel understood and accepted.

Another issue that may arise, which was signaled by the psychologists we interviewed, is the misunderstandings created by the desire of autistic people to optimize work processes and procedures. As mentioned before, doing things for the sake of being done or following pointless steps in a process with don't have a clear purpose bothers autistic individuals, so they often strive to improve things and move towards efficiency. If this is not accepted as just that but as some sort of threat by managers or colleagues (as was the case with some clients of our interviewees), then this can create problems.

Such misunderstandings are named to be one of the reasons for the lower job retention rate among autistic individuals. Generally speaking, autistic individuals struggle with feeling accepted, heard, taken into consideration – so much so, that they feel the discomfort way more intensely than physical pain for example.

Physical work environment

Same goes for the physical conditions at the workplace, which were mentioned in the previous question. Flickering lights, too much background noise, open space offices with little privacy, poor communication within the team, lack of feedback can create challenges for the autistic employees. This is another reason why neurodiversity training is important for companies as well as providing easy access to needed resources.



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Learning preferences and challenges

When planning training, trainers need to consider the specific principles of adult learning. Understanding how people learn is essential to effective knowledge transfer and competence building during training. Learning can be defined as a transformative process of taking in information that, when internalized and mixed with what we have experienced, changes what we know and builds on what we do. It is based on input, process, and reflection.

The objective of learning is to change behaviours, thoughts, and feelings from the present state to the desired state defined as learning objectives. Change of behaviours (skills and competences), thoughts (knowledge), and feelings (attitudes).

Bloom's Taxonomy is a widely recognized framework for categorizing educational objectives and learning outcomes. Introduced in 1956 by Benjamin Bloom and his colleagues, this taxonomy provides a hierarchical model that helps educators design and assess learning experiences by classifying objectives into levels of complexity across three primary domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. In 2001, a revised version was developed by Anderson and Krathwohl, which updated some of the terminology and reordered the levels of the cognitive domain, making "Creation" the highest level instead of "Synthesis."Cognitive domain refers to knowledge (thoughts).

Cognitive Domain

This domain focuses on intellectual skills and includes six levels of learning, each progressively more complex:

- Remembering: Recalling facts or concepts (e.g., naming various emotions).
- Understanding: Comprehending and interpreting information (e.g., explaining social cues).

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- Applying: Using knowledge in real-life situations (e.g., applying coping strategies in a stressful situation).
- Analyzing: Breaking down information to understand its components (e.g., analyzing a social interaction).
- -Evaluating: Making judgments based on criteria (e.g., evaluating the effectiveness of a communication strategy).
- Creating: Combining elements to produce new ideas or solutions (e.g., designing a plan for group participation).

Affective Domain

This domain addresses emotional responses, attitudes, and values. Levels include:

- Receiving: Being open to new experiences (e.g., participating in discussions).
- Responding: Actively engaging with content (e.g., sharing thoughts in a group).
- Valuing: Recognizing the importance of learning and social interactions (e.g., demonstrating respect for others' contributions).
- Organizing: Integrating new values into one's belief system (e.g., prioritizing teamwork).
- Characterizing: Acting consistently with new values (e.g., exhibiting empathy towards peers).

Psychomotor Domain

This domain emphasizes physical skills and coordination. Levels include:

- Perception: Using sensory cues to guide actions (e.g., recognizing body language).
- Set: Being ready to take action (e.g., preparing for group activities).
- Guided Response: Performing tasks with support (e.g., practicing social scripts).
- Mechanism: Demonstrating increased proficiency (e.g., initiating conversations).
- Adaptation: Modifying actions based on circumstances (e.g., adjusting communication styles).

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When working with autistic adults, Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, B.S., 1956) can guide the design of educational programs that address their unique learning needs. Here's how each domain can be applied effectively:

Cognitive Techniques:

Incorporate varied instructional methods such as lectures, discussions, and hands-on activities that promote active participation. For example, using visual aids can enhance understanding and retention of information. Employing role-play scenarios can help autistic learners practice social interactions in a supportive environment.

Affective Strategies:

Foster an inclusive atmosphere that encourages emotional expression and connection. Use values clarification exercises to help individuals articulate their feelings and beliefs about social situations. Consensus-seeking activities can enhance collaboration and mutual respect among peers.

Psychomotor Approaches:

Integrate practice-oriented learning by connecting theoretical knowledge with real-life situations. Activities like simulations can help individuals apply skills in a controlled environment, while guided responses can provide necessary support as they practice new behaviors.

Characteristics Specific to Adult Learning

Understanding the characteristics of adult learners can further enhance the effectiveness of educational approaches for autistic individuals:

Pre-existing Knowledge:

Acknowledge and build upon the existing experiences of autistic adults. Encourage reflection on their knowledge to connect new concepts meaningfully.

Responsibility and Autonomy:

Respect the autonomy of adult learners by allowing them to take charge of their learning process. Providing opportunities for self-assessment and reflection can help them internalize and retain information.

Goal-oriented Learning:

Link learning outcomes to personal and professional goals. Understanding how new skills relate to their objectives can motivate autistic adults to engage in the learning process.

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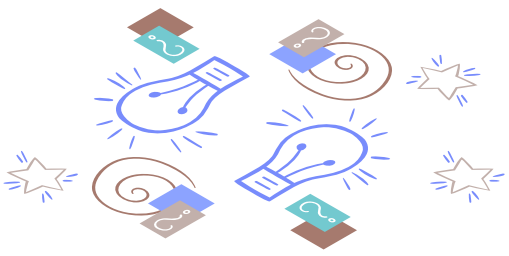
Practice-oriented Learning:

Emphasize the practical application of skills. Connecting theoretical concepts to real-life scenarios will help autistic adults understand the relevance of what they are learning.

Collaborative Learning:

Foster a collaborative environment where learners can interact, share experiences, and build relationships. This approach can enhance engagement and reduce feelings of isolation.environment, trainees will interact and build relationships with their peers and trainers, enhancing their learning.



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Accommodation and support at the workplace

Mentoring support

In order to ensure a clear and structured workflow and the easy integration of the autistic employees in the work environment, a good practice is to appoint contact persons or mentors to accompany them at least duirng their onboarding process (why not even afterwards).

Mentoring programs, such as those already in place in many companies, are crucial for autistic people to adapt to the work environment and adapt work processes (where possible) for the autistic person's benefit. This help is necessary because autistic people have different needs and individual solutions can therefore be found through the support of such a mentor.

Another crucial aspect is creating individual work plans based on each individual's strengths, needs and responsibilities. Through a mentoring program, the work plans can be adapted to the respective needs of both the employee and the company, and communication takes place with a permanent reference person.

Clear communication

Knowing the "why" is very important for autistic people when approaching a task, so it is very important to provide a good explanation of the big picture and point of doing a certain task (they need to see and know the impact of their actions). In spite of this, autistic individuals approach a problem from the bottom up – this is to say they need very precise instructions and very clear guidelines on what has to be done. They need to know the operational steps and need to feel involved in the process of their development – feel included. At the same time, they need to have freedom as regards how to do the task, while the deadline needs to be very clearly set. Autistic individuals often do not recognize hints and implications as neurotypicals do, so the people who work with them need to be very direct with their requirements.

Flexitime

Very important for the autistic employees is the flexibility and freedom to control the pace of their work process – including when to take a break. As already mentioned, breaks are essential for autistic people, because this is often how they self-regulate from the overwhelming and overstimulating sensory world around them. Overburdening their nervous system can be a huge problem, so taking unregulated breaks when they feel they need them is a must in their working schedule.

Work environment

Another accommodation they can greatly benefit from is having a secluded and

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quiet workplace, where they can focus (which they do really well). In this sense allowing a home office/hybrid arrangement is also helpful. In the office environment placing their desk by a window, providing a desk divider to isolate visual distractions and a noise cancellation headset to help with the audial stimulation are common accommodation measures for autistic workers. Just as important is to provide an opportunity for them to cope with sensory stimulation (this includes self-regulation breaks, listening to music, walking, running, jumping, meditation etc).

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Autism Strengths & Weaknesses Chart

This section offers a comprehensive review of research conducted across six countries—Portugal, Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Spain. It explores the unique strengths and challenges autistic individuals encounter in the job market. Autistic employees are often highly valued for their abilities in tasks requiring precision, attention to detail, and reliability, but they may also face barriers that need to be addressed to create an inclusive work environment.

The Autism Strengths & Weaknesses Chart emphasizes the need for proper support, including sensory accommodations and structured tasks, to help autistic individuals thrive professionally.

Their cognitive abilities, particularly in areas requiring precision and focus, make them well-suited for roles that demand attention to detail, methodical work, and reliability. With proper support and structure, they can thrive in roles that play to these strengths.

However, to unlock their full potential, it is critical that workplaces provide the necessary accommodations and support. This includes addressing sensory sensitivities, providing clear and structured tasks, and offering flexibility in work routines to mitigate anxiety and stress. Creating an inclusive environment that respects the unique needs of autistic individuals is essential for fostering both their professional growth and the success of the organizations they contribute to.

Overall, this research highlights the importance of understanding and valuing the unique contributions autistic individuals can make in the job market. By addressing their challenges with empathy and accommodation, employers in Portugal, Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Spain and beyond can benefit from the reliability, expertise, and dedication that autistic employees offer.

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STRENGTHS								
AREAS								
Cognitive skills	Soft skills	Interpersonal skills	Work ethic	Technical skills	Motivational skills	Attention to detail	Organizational skills	Resilience
SPECIFIC STRENGHTS								
Attention to detail	Dedication to tasks	Honest communication style	Being a person that colleagues/ employers can rely on to deliver what is expected of them	Exceptional knowledge in specific fields	Desire to learn new skills	Following established routines with a high level of perfection	Methodology and structuring	Persistence and determination
Creative thinking	Persistence and determination	Altruism	Punctuality	Strong knowledge retention on mastered tasks	Patience and persistence in resolving technical issues	Ability to identify and address minor inconsistencies	Preference for structured environments and routines	
Effective learning	Hard working		High dedication and loyalty to their job responsibilities	Exceptional technical skills in IT, math, and science		Observance	Ability to thrive on predictability and consistency	
Logical thinking	Ability to learn new skills quickly with clear instructions		Commitment to completing tasks to a high standard	Strong analytical and problem-solving skills		Meticulous focus and accuracy		
Ability to focus for	Ability to		Excellent	Attention to		Excellent proofreading and data entry skills		
extended periods of time	follow instructions meticulously		adherence to instructions and schedules	detail in code writing and debugging		proofreading and data entry skills		
Excellent memory for facts								
Fast learning								
What area of work skill is								

WEAKNESSES						
AREAS						
Time management	**Interpersonal skills**	**Communication**	**Flexibility**	**Sensory Processing**	**Abstract thinking**	**Task Management**
SPECIFIC STRENGHTS						
Tiredness/fatigue.	Difficulty with social interaction and dynamics	Challenges with fast-paced conversations, interpreting sarcasm or humor, and adapting communication styles.	Difficulty adapting to unexpected changes in routine.	Sensitivity to noise, light, smells, or other stimuli in the workplace can be overwhelming and distracting	Less preference for tasks requiring creative problem-solving, open-ended solutions, or brainstorming ideas.	Not clarifying what tasks need to be carried out.
Challenges with traditional time management methods and estimating task duration.	Difficulty managing disagreements, mediating conflict, or navigating office politics.	Difficulty understanding unspoken social norms	Difficulty in Multitasking			Sensory sensitivities
		Difficulty understanding and responding to nonverbal cues like facial expressions or body language.	Difficulty in Working under pressure			Less preference for tasks requiring creative problem-solving
			Intense interests in specific topics or activities			Open-ended solutions

Job Profiling Cards

The **Job Profiling Cards** section is designed to bridge the gap between the unique strengths and areas for growth of autistic adults and the specific job roles that align with these attributes. Each job card provides a detailed profile of roles best suited to individuals with autism, ensuring their cognitive, social, and sensory preferences are taken into account. Based on insights from the ASD Strengths & Weaknesses Chart, these roles are selected to capitalise on strong attention to detail, analytical thinking, creativity, and a structured approach to tasks—qualities often exhibited by autistic adults.

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Job Profiling Card 1 - Administrator/ computer operatortypist

Job title	Administrator/ computer operator/ typist
Industry	Finance, Healthcare, Government, Research
Job description	The Administrator/Computer Operator/Typist will manage office administrative tasks, operate computer systems efficiently, and perform accurate typing duties, including document preparation and data entry.
Responsibilities	– Perform accurate typing duties, including – document preparation, data entry, and – transcription – Operate and maintain computer systems, – ensuring all hardware and software are – functioning correctly – Manage office administrative tasks such as – scheduling meetings, handling – correspondence, and maintaining records – Maintain and update databases, ensuring data integrity and security
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail – Dedication to tasks – Strong analytical and problem-solving skills – Ability to focus for extended periods of – time – Excellent proofreading and data entry – skills
Potential challenges	– Sensory Overload – Task Switching – Communication

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Job Profiling Card 2 - Graphic Designer and Drawer

Job title	Graphic Designer and Drawer
Industry	Advertising and Marketing, Web and App Development, Corporate, Education
Job description	A Graphic Designer and Drawer creates visual concepts, using computer software or by hand, to communicate ideas that inspire, inform, and captivate consumers
Responsibilities	– Developing graphics for product illustrations, logos,websites,and marketing materials – Communicating with the team to exchange ideas and concepts
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail – Observance – Hard working – Creative thinking
Potential challenges	– Deadline Pressure – Ambiguity in Instructions – Task Switching

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Job Profiling Card 3 -Translator

Job title	Translator
Industry	Tourism and Hospitality, NGOs, Medical, Media and Entertainment
Job description	A Graphic Designer and Drawer creates visual concepts, using computer software or by hand, to communicate ideas that inspire, inform, and captivate consumers
Responsibilities	– Translating documents – Proofreading translations – Collaborating with clients to meet their specific linguistic needs.
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail – Being a person that colleagues/employers can rely on to deliver what is expected of them – Commitment to completing tasks to a high standard – Meticulous focus and accuracy
Potential challenges	– Attention to nuance – Social interactions – Deadline pressure

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Job Profiling Card 4 - Writer and proofreader

Job title	Writer and proofreader
Industry	Publishing, Education, Freelance and Content Creation, Advertising and marketing
Job description	A Writer and Proofreader creates and refines written content to ensure clarity, coherence, and accuracy.
Responsibilities	– Drafting original texts – Revising existing content, and meticulously checking for grammatical, typographical, and stylistic errors
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail – Ability to follow instructions meticulously – Being a person that colleagues/employers can rely on to deliver what is expected of them – Commitment to completing tasks to a high standard – Observance – Excellent proofreading skills
Potential challenges	– Sensory Sensitivities – Deadline Pressure

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Job Profiling Card 5 - Accounting clerk

Job title	Accounting clerk
Industry	Public Accounting Firms, Banking and Financial Services, Healthcare
Job description	An Accounting Clerk is responsible for maintaining financial records, processing transactions, and ensuring accuracy in financial documentation.
Responsibilities	– Managing accounts payable and receivable, reconciling bank statements, – Assisting with financial reporting and audits.
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail – Logical thinking – Hard working – Ability to follow instructions meticulously – Being a person that colleagues/employers can rely on to deliver what is expected of them – Exceptional technical skills in IT, math, and science – Strong analytical and problem-solving skills
Potential challenges	– Attention to Detail can be exhausted – Deadline pressure

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Job Profiling Card 6 - Researcher

Job title	Researcher
Industry	Higher Education, Healthcare, Technology and innovation
Job description	A Researcher conducts systematic investigations to establish facts, develop new theories, or solve problems within their field of expertise.
Responsibilities	– Design studies – Collect and analyze data – Publish findings in reports, academic journals, or presentations
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail – Effective learning – Ability to focus for extended periods of time – Commitment to completing tasks to a high standard – Strong knowledge retention on mastered tasks – Exceptional knowledge in specific fields – Methodology and structuring
Potential challenges	– Deadlines and Time Management – Interpreting Abstract Concepts – Communicating complex findings

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Job Profiling Card 7 - Programmer

Job title	Programmer
Industry	Telecommunications, Gaming and Entertainment, Software development, Education
Job description	A Programmer designs, writes, tests, and maintains code for software applications and systems.
Responsibilities	– Understanding user requirements – Developing efficient algorithms, debugging code – Collaborating with other team members to deliver high-quality software solutions
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail in code writing and debugging – Attention to detail – Exceptional technical skills in IT, math, and science
Potential challenges	– Ambiguity in Requirements – Communicate complex technical concepts – Deadline pressure

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Job Profiling Card 8 - Financial analyst

Job title	Financial analyst
Industry	Banking, Insurance, Energy, Consulting
Job description	A Financial Analyst evaluates financial data to help organisations make informed business decisions.
Responsibilities	– Analyzing financial statements – Forecasting future revenues and expenses – Providing recommendations based on financial trends and market conditions
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail – Logical thinking – Commitment to completing tasks to a high standard – Exceptional technical skills in IT, math, and science – Meticulous focus and accuracy
Potential challenges	– Explaining intricate financial concepts – Handling tight deadlines – Sensory Sensitivities (in an office environment)

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Job Profiling Card 9 - Market research analyst

Job title	Market research analyst
Industry	Advertising and Marketing, Retail, Media and Entertainment, Technology
Job description	A Market Research Analyst collects and analyses data on consumer preferences, market trends, and competitors to help organisations make informed business decisions.
Responsibilities	– Designing surveys – Conducting market research – Interpreting data, and presenting findings to guide marketing strategies and business development.
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail – Commitment to completing tasks to a high standard – Meticulous focus and accuracy – Exceptional technical skills in IT, math, and science
Potential challenges	– Complex data interpretation – Presentation pressure – Ambiguity in instructions

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Job Profiling Card 10 - Data analyst

Job title	Data analyst
Industry	Government and Public Sector, Logistics and Transportation
Job description	A Market Research Analyst collects and analyses data on consumer preferences, market trends, and competitors to help organisations make informed business decisions.
Responsibilities	– Designing surveys – Conducting market research – Interpreting data, and presenting findings to guide marketing strategies and business development.
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail – Commitment to completing tasks to a high standard – Meticulous focus and accuracy – Exceptional technical skills in IT, math, and science
Potential challenges	– Complex data interpretation – Presentation pressure – Ambiguity in instructions

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Job Profiling Card 11 - Statiscian

Job title	Statiscian
Industry	Data Science, Finance, Healthcare, Government, Research
Job description	Statisticians use mathematical theories and methodologies to collect, analyze, interpret, and present numerical data. Their work helps in making decisions in various fields such as economics, medicine, and engineering.
Responsibilities	– Designing surveys, experiments, or opinion polls – Analyzing and interpreting data using statistical techniques – Presenting data insights and recommendations through reports and presentations – Collaborating with other professionals to understand data needs and provide solutions
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to detail and accuracy – Analytical and logical thinking – Comfort with routine and repetitive tasks – Proficiency with statistical software and tools
Potential challenges	– Handling ambiguous or poorly defined data problems – Communicating complex data insights to non-experts – Managing tight deadlines and high-pressure situations

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Job Profiling Card 12 - Decorator

Job title	Decorator
Industry	Interior Design, Event Planning, Retail
Job description	Decorators enhance the aesthetics of spaces, including homes, offices, and event venues, by selecting and arranging elements such as furniture, color schemes, lighting, and accessories.
Responsibilities	– Meeting with clients to understand their needs and preferences – Creating design concepts and mood boards – Selecting and sourcing materials and products – Overseeing the implementation of designs
Strengths matched to job	– Strong visual and spatial awareness – Creativity and artistic talent – Ability to focus on detailed work – Organizational skills for managing projects and timelines
Potential challenges	– Interpreting and responding to client feedback – Handling unexpected changes or last-minute requests – Working in diverse environments with varying sensory inputs

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Job Profiling Card 13 - Archiving / Library

Job title	Archiving / Library
Industry	Education, Museums, Corporate
Job description	Professionals in archiving and libraries manage collections of information, such as books, documents, and digital media. They ensure these resources are organized, preserved, and accessible to users.
Responsibilities	– Cataloging and classifying materials – Maintaining and updating databases – Assisting users in locating resources – Preserving and conserving physical and digital collections
Strengths matched to job	– Strong organizational skills – Attention to detail – Ability to follow established systems and procedures – Comfort with repetitive tasks and routines
Potential challenges	– Interacting with a diverse user base – Adapting to new technologies and systems – Managing large volumes of information

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Job Profiling Card 14 - Animal Care/Dog Walker

Job title	Animal Care/Dog Walker
Industry	Pet Services, Veterinary, Animal Shelters
Job description	Animal care workers and dog walkers provide essential care and exercise for pets. This can include feeding, grooming, walking, and monitoring animals' health.
Responsibilities	– Walking dogs and ensuring they get enough exercise – Feeding and providing water to pets – Cleaning and maintaining living spaces – Monitoring animals for signs of illness or distress
Strengths matched to job	– Compassion and empathy for animals – Ability to follow routines and schedules – Physical stamina for walking and handling pets – Attention to detail in monitoring animal health
Potential challenges	– Handling unexpected behavior from animals – Dealing with demanding pet owners – Working in varying weather conditions

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Job Profiling Card 15 - Photographer/Editor

Job title	Photographer/Editor
Industry	Media, Advertising, Art
Job description	Photographers and editors capture, edit, and produce images for various purposes, such as advertising, events, and personal projects.
Responsibilities	– Planning and executing photo shoots – Editing and retouching images using software – Collaborating with clients to meet their needs – Managing and organizing digital image files
Strengths matched to job	– Strong visual and creative skills – Technical proficiency with photography equipment and software – Attention to detail in editing and composition – Ability to work independently
Potential challenges	– Interacting with clients during shoots – Adapting to different shooting environments – Managing tight deadlines for editing and delivery

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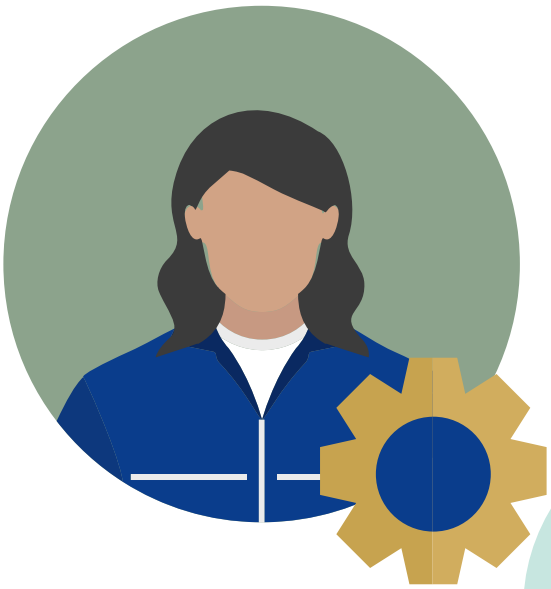
Job Profiling Card 16 - Car mechanic

Job title	Car Mechanic
Industry	Automotive, Manufacturing, Repair Services
Job description	Car mechanics diagnose, repair, and maintain vehicles. They work on various components, including engines, brakes, and electrical systems.
Responsibilities	– Diagnosing mechanical and electrical issues – Performing routine maintenance tasks – Repairing or replacing faulty parts – Testing vehicles to ensure repairs are successful
Strengths matched to job	– Strong problem-solving skills – Mechanical aptitude and interest – Attention to detail and precision – Ability to work with tools and machinery
Potential challenges	– Communicating with customers about repairs – Handling unexpected issues or delays – Working in a noisy and busy environment



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Job Profiling Card 17 - Plumber

Job title	Plumber
Industry	Construction, Maintenance, Repair Services
Job description	Plumbers install, repair, and maintain plumbing systems, including pipes, fixtures, and fittings used for water distribution and waste disposal.
Responsibilities	– Installing and repairing plumbing systems – Inspecting plumbing systems to identify issues – Reading blueprints and technical drawings – Ensuring compliance with safety and building regulations
Strengths matched to job	– Strong practical and problem-solving skills – Attention to detail and precision – Ability to work independently or in small teams – Comfort with physical and hands-on work
Potential challenges	– Interacting with clients or contractors – Managing unexpected on-site challenges – Working in confined or varied environments

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Job Profiling Card 18 - Electrician

Job title	Electrician
Industry	Construction, Maintenance, Manufacturing
Job description	Electricians install, maintain, and repair electrical systems in buildings, machinery, and equipment, ensuring safety and functionality.
Responsibilities	– Installing wiring, outlets, and fixtures – Troubleshooting electrical issues – Reading blueprints and technical diagrams – Ensuring compliance with electrical codes and safety standards
Strengths matched to job	– Strong technical and problem-solving skills – Attention to detail and safety – Ability to follow precise instructions and diagrams – Comfort with hands-on and physical work
Potential challenges	– Communicating with clients or team members – Handling unexpected electrical issues – Working in varied and sometimes hazardous environments

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Job Profiling Card 19 - Blue Collar

Job title	Blue Collar
Industry	Construction, Manufacturing, Maintenance
Job description	Blue-collar workers perform physical or manual tasks in a variety of sectors, such as construction, manufacturing and maintenance. These roles often involve the use of specialised tools, machinery and equipment.
Responsibilities	– Machinery Operation: Operate and maintain equipment and tools. – Installation and Repair: Assemble, install, or repair structures, machines, or systems. – Maintenance and Cleaning: Keep the work area safe and orderly. – Safety Compliance: Follow safety protocols to prevent accidents.
Strengths matched to job	– Strong craftsmanship and attention to detail – Creativity and design skills – Ability to work independently – Comfort with tools and machiner
Potential challenges	– Meeting client specifications and expectations – Handling custom orders and adjustments – Working in workshops with varying noise levels

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Job Profiling Card 20 - Jewellery Maker

Job title	Jewellery Maker
Industry	Artisanal, Retail, Manufacturing
Job description	Jewellery makers design and create jewelry pieces using materials like metals, gemstones, and beads. They may also repair and customize existing jewelry
Responsibilities	– Designing and sketching jewelry concepts – Selecting and sourcing materials – Crafting and assembling pieces – Repairing and resizing jewelry
Strengths matched to job	– Strong artistic and design skills – Attention to detail and precision – Patience and focus for intricate work – Ability to work independently
Potential challenges	– Understanding and meeting client preferences – Managing custom orders and deadlines – Working with delicate and valuable materials

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Job Profiling Card 21 - Videogame Tester

Job title	Videogame Tester
Industry	Video Game Development
Job description	A Videogame Tester is responsible for testing video games to identify and document bugs, usability issues and other aspects that may affect the user experience. Their job is to ensure that the game runs smoothly and meets quality standards before release.
Responsibilities	– Bug Detection: Identify and report bugs in the game. – Documentation: Record details of bugs and how to reproduce them. – Usability Testing: Evaluate the user experience. – Fix Verification: Confirm bug resolution.
Strengths matched to job	– Attention to Detail: Detecting minor errors. – Logical Thinking: Follow test procedures. – Concentration: Maintain focus on repetitive tasks. – Written Communication: Document findings clearly.
Potential challenges	– Repetitiveness: Repetitive tasks can be tedious. – Deadlines: Meeting deadlines can be stressful. – Social Interaction: Need to communicate with the team. – Sensory Environment: Possible sensitivity to noise or light.

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Autism Fitting Job Map

This section presents the **Autism Fitting Job Map**, a tool designed to identify the job sectors and roles that are most suitable for autistic individuals. To develop this map, the project partners conducted 19 interviews with professionals from eight EU countries—Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal, and Spain—who are experts in the employability of autistic people. These interviewees included psychologists, social workers, recruitment specialists, and sociologists. Their insights helped pinpoint the sectors and job roles that align best with the unique strengths of autistic individuals, offering the greatest potential for them to thrive in the workforce.

The collected insights were then incorporated in **one common tool**: a Job Fitting Map. It was developed as an instrument, which career consultants and other specialists providing career support to autistic individuals can use in their practice with autistic clients.

The most frequently mentioned sectors were **Information Technology, Research and Administration** as well as **Quality control in Manufacturing & Production**. **The service sector, creative industries, work in Government & Public Services as well as Finance & Banking**, were other fields frequently identified as suitable for autistic individuals, **given their most common strengths.**

Freelance work was mentioned as another option, as this type of work allows self-organisation, relatively independence and flexible working hours. The focus is therefore not only on the industry and job activity, but also on the framework conditions of the working arrangements themselves and the extent to which these can be flexibly adapted.

Suitable job roles and examples within the above-mentioned job categories can be found in the Job Fitting Map but here are some main considerations.

Roles Requiring Precision and Attention to Detail

The interviews highlighted that autistic people often have a **remarkable ability to focus on details and perform tasks precisely**. Industries that benefit from these skills include quality control in manufacturing, where detecting errors is critical, and administrative roles in data management. The ability to **identify and correct minor errors** is highly valued in these industries, making them ideal for autistic people.

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Preference for structured and routine-based roles

A recurring theme in the interviews is the suitability of roles that offer s**tructure, routine and repetition**. Autistic people often excel in environments where tasks are predictable and consistent. Industries that were identified as particularly accommodating include logistics, warehouse management and administrative roles. In these, tasks such as inventory control, product placement and data entry are common. Not only are these tasks repetitive, but they also require attention to detail, which fits well with the strengths of many autistic people.

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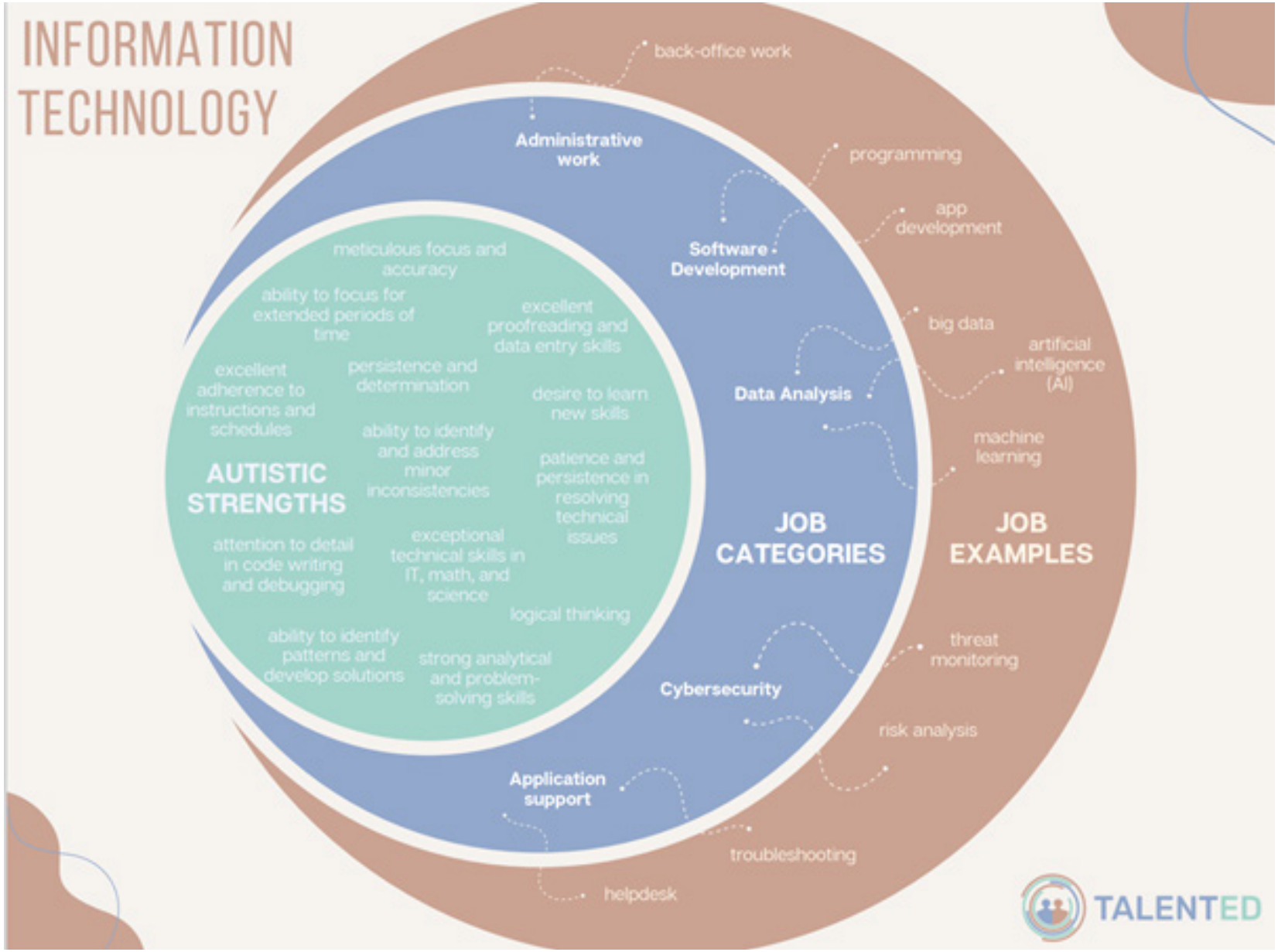
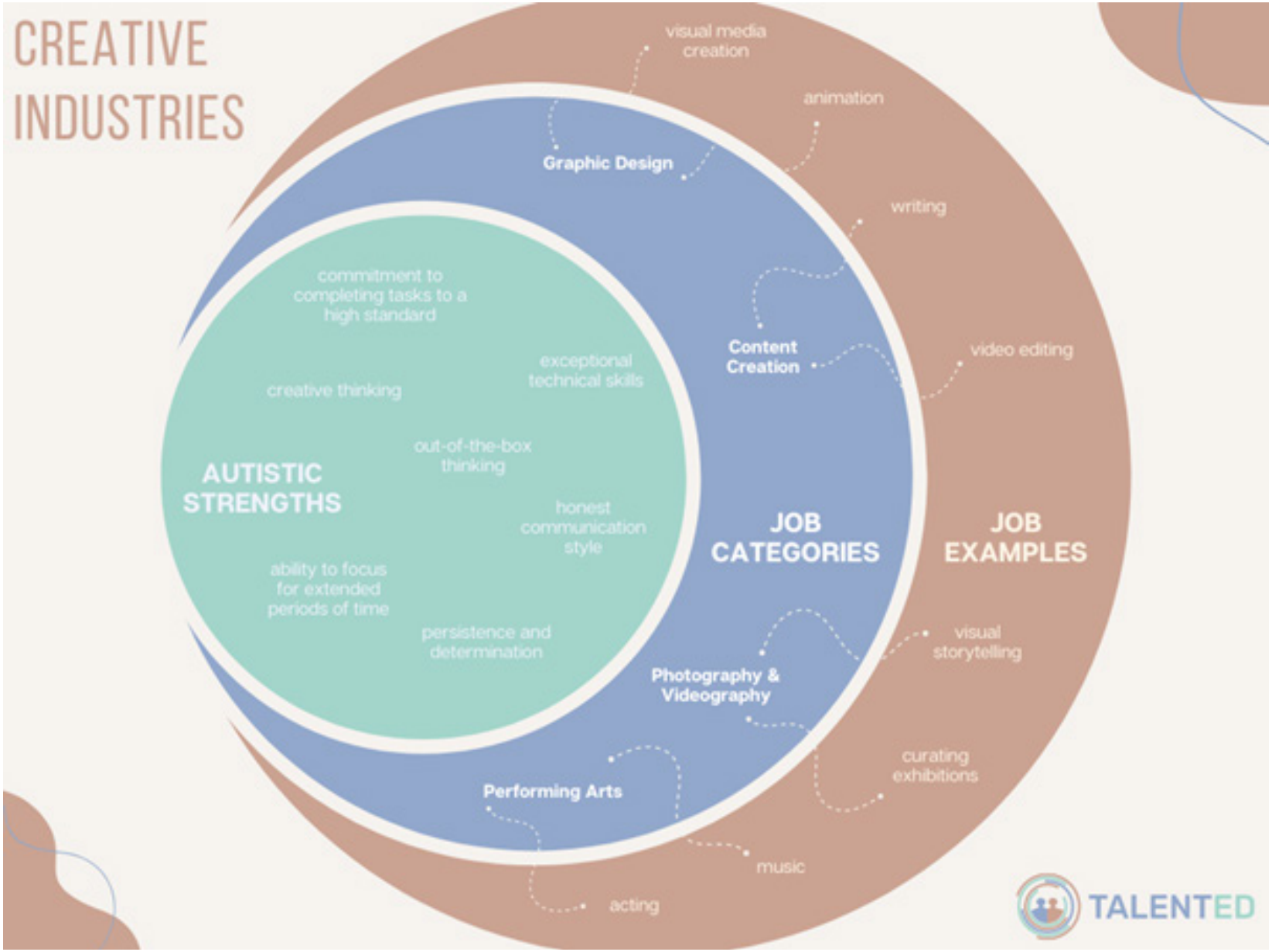
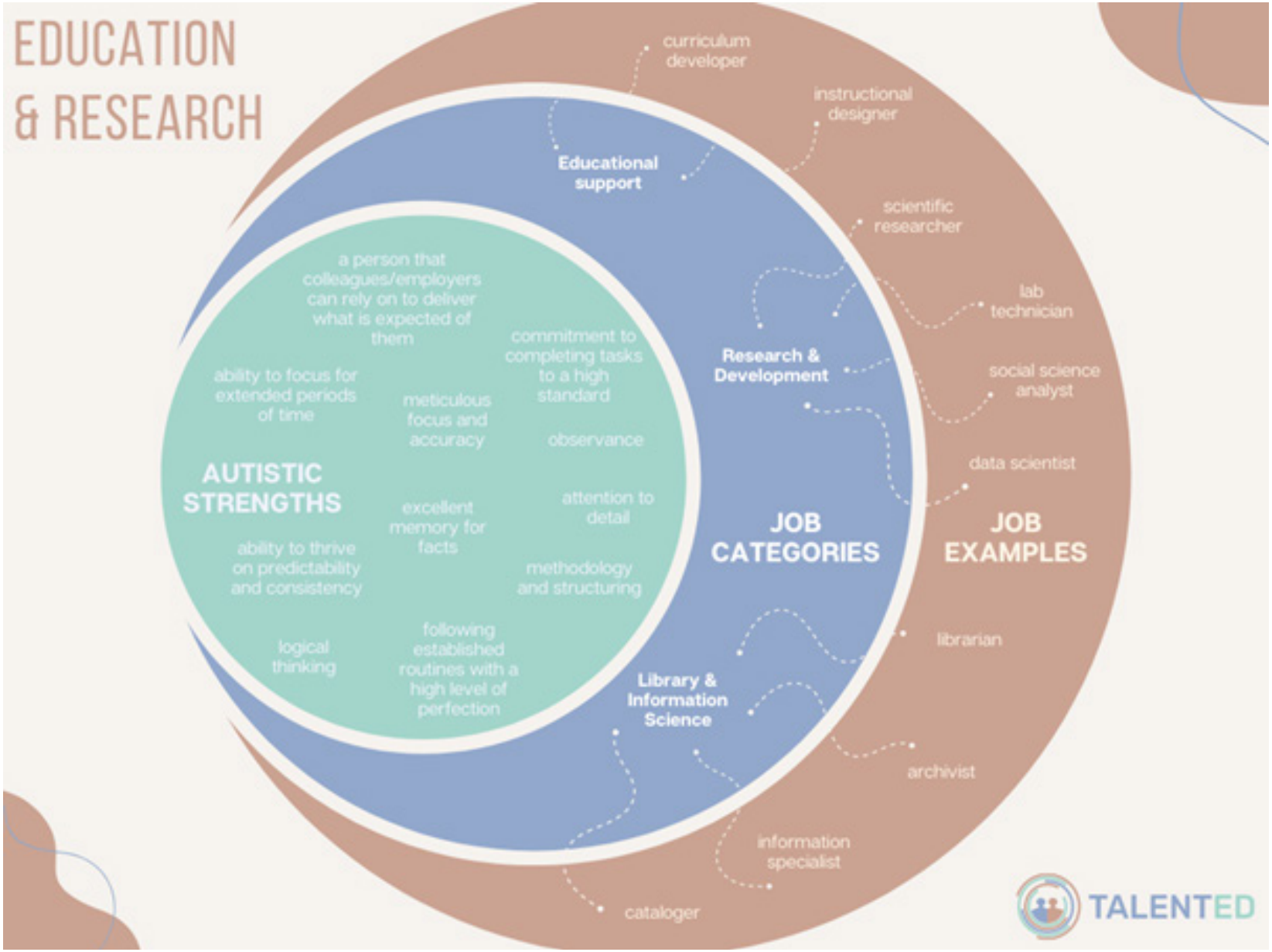
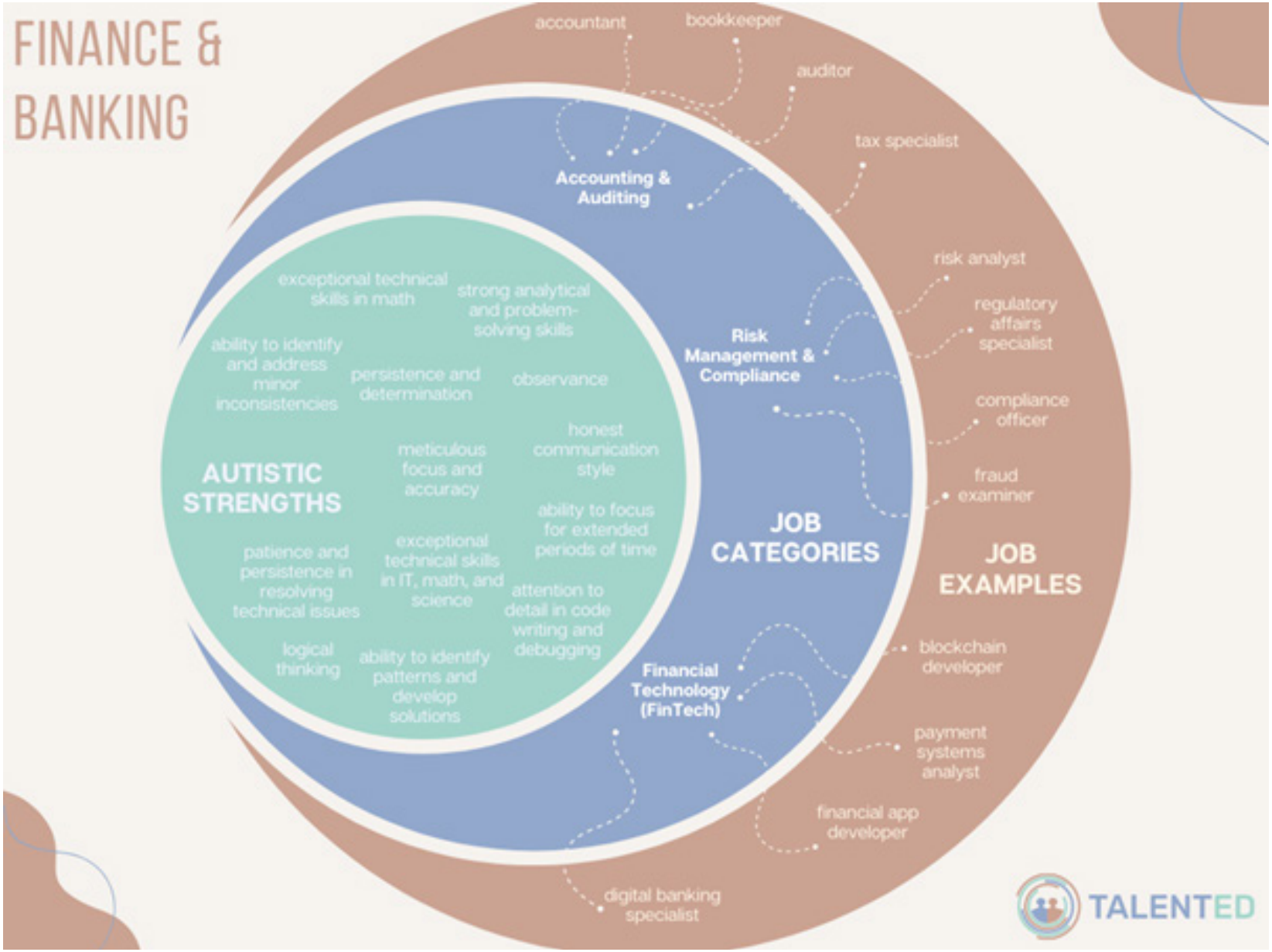
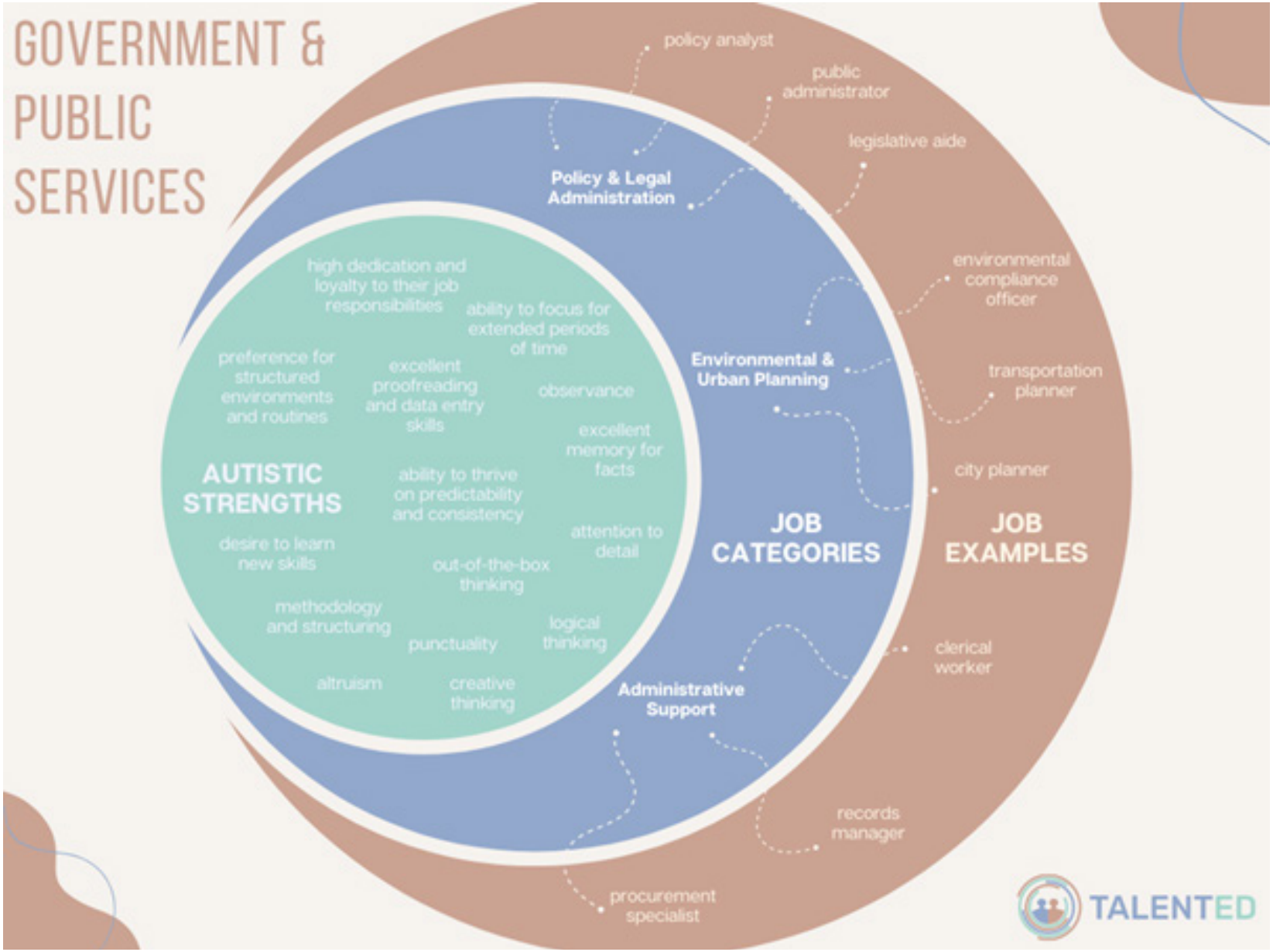
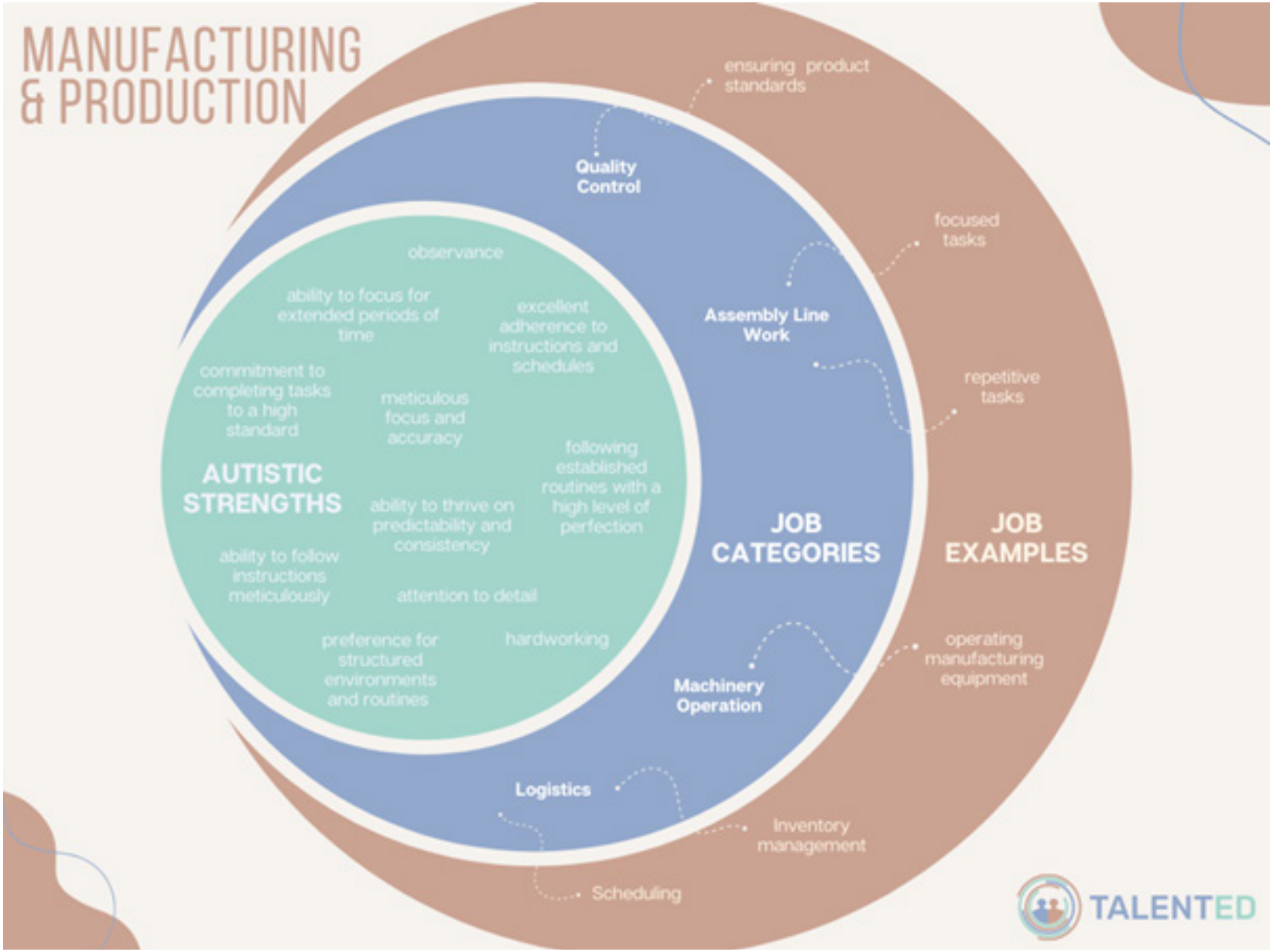

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
AUTISTIC STRENGTHS
meticulous focus and accuracy
ability to focus for extended periods of time
excellent proofreading and data entry skills
excellent adherence to instructions and schedules
persistence and determination
desire to learn new skills
ability to identify and address minor inconsistencies
patience and persistence in resolving technical issues
attention to detail in code writing and debugging
exceptional technical skills in IT, math, and science
logical thinking
ability to identify patterns and develop solutions
strong analytical and problem-solving skills
JOB CATEGORIES
Administrative work
Software Development
Data Analysis
Cybersecurity
Application support
JOB EXAMPLES
back-office work
programming
app development
big data
artificial intelligence (AI)
machine learning
threat monitoring
risk analysis
troubleshooting
helpdesk
TALENTED

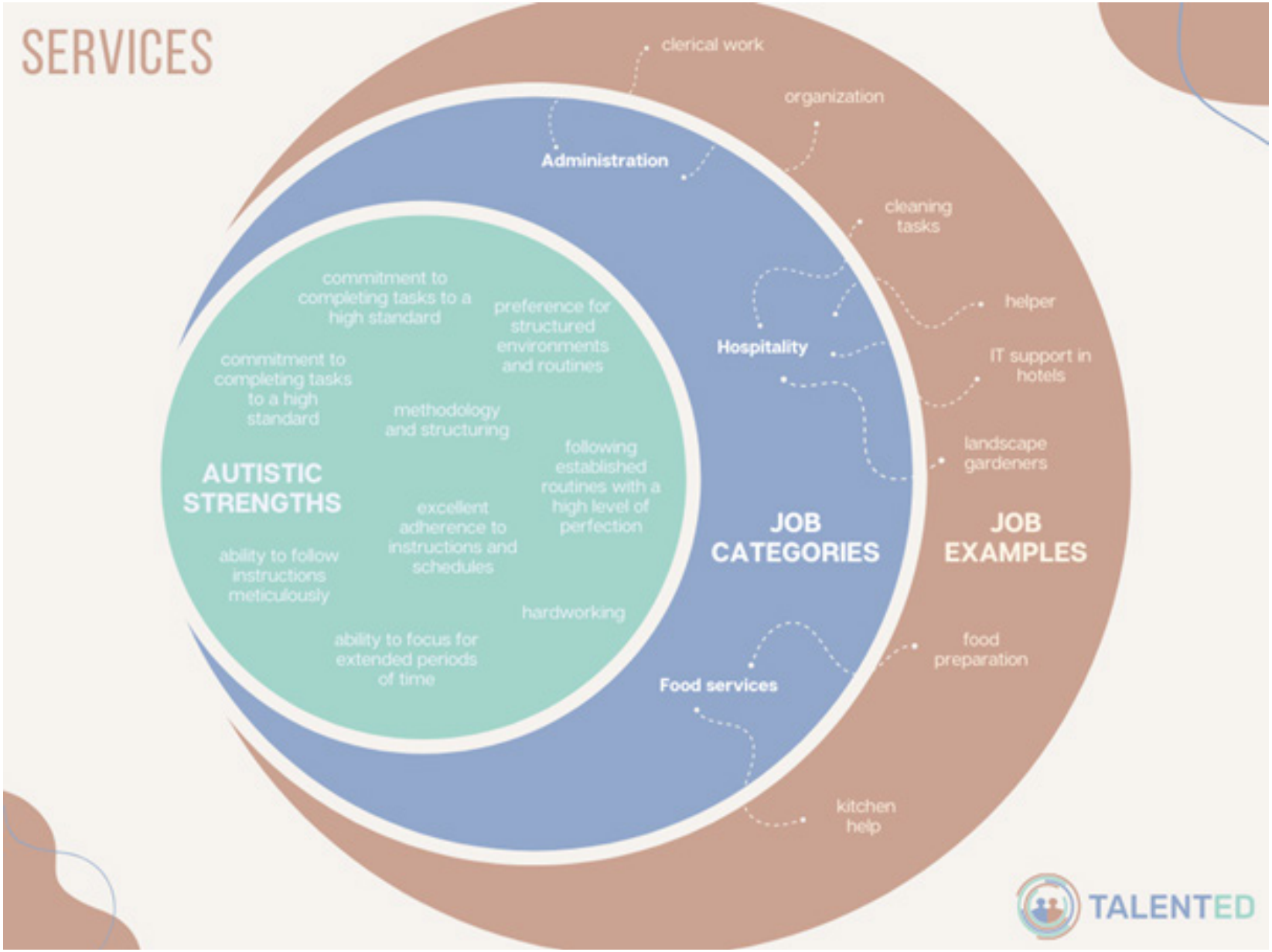

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
visual media creation
animation
Graphic Design
writing
commitment to completing tasks to a high standard
Content Creation
video editing
exceptional technical skills
creative thinking
out-of-the-box thinking
AUTISTIC STRENGTHS
honest communication style
JOB CATEGORIES
JOB EXAMPLES
ability to focus for extended periods of time
persistence and determination
visual storytelling
Photography & Videography
curating exhibitions
Performing Arts
music
acting
TALENTED


EDUCATION
& RESEARCH
curriculum developer
instructional designer
Educational support
scientific researcher
lab technician
Research & Development
social science analyst
data scientist
JOB CATEGORIES
JOB EXAMPLES
librarian
Library & Information Science
archivist
information specialist
cataloger
AUTISTIC STRENGTHS
a person that colleagues/employers can rely on to deliver what is expected of them
commitment to completing tasks to a high standard
ability to focus for extended periods of time
meticulous focus and accuracy
observance
excellent memory for facts
attention to detail
ability to thrive on predictability and consistency
methodology and structuring
logical thinking
following established routines with a high level of perfection
TALENTED


FINANCE & BANKING
accountant
bookkeeper
auditor
tax specialist
Accounting & Auditing
risk analyst
regulatory affairs specialist
Risk Management & Compliance
compliance officer
fraud examiner
exceptional technical skills in math
strong analytical and problem-solving skills
ability to identify and address minor inconsistencies
persistence and determination
observance
honest communication style
meticulous focus and accuracy
AUTISTIC STRENGTHS
ability to focus for extended periods of time
JOB CATEGORIES
JOB EXAMPLES
patience and persistence in resolving technical issues
exceptional technical skills in IT, math, and science
attention to detail in code writing and debugging
logical thinking
ability to identify patterns and develop solutions
Financial Technology (FinTech)
blockchain developer
payment systems analyst
financial app developer
digital banking specialist
TALENTED


GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC SERVICES
AUTISTIC STRENGTHS
high dedication and loyalty to their job responsibilities
ability to focus for extended periods of time
preference for structured environments and routines
excellent proofreading and data entry skills
observance
excellent memory for facts
ability to thrive on predictability and consistency
attention to detail
desire to learn new skills
out-of-the-box thinking
methodology and structuring
logical thinking
punctuality
altruism
creative thinking
JOB CATEGORIES
Policy & Legal Administration
Environmental & Urban Planning
Administrative Support
JOB EXAMPLES
policy analyst
public administrator
legislative aide
environmental compliance officer
transportation planner
city planner
clerical worker
records manager
procurement specialist
TALENTED


MANUFACTURING & PRODUCTION
AUTISTIC STRENGTHS
observance
ability to focus for extended periods of time
excellent adherence to instructions and schedules
commitment to completing tasks to a high standard
meticulous focus and accuracy
following established routines with a high level of perfection
ability to thrive on predictability and consistency
ability to follow instructions meticulously
attention to detail
preference for structured environments and routines
hardworking
JOB CATEGORIES
Quality Control
Assembly Line Work
Machinery Operation
Logistics
JOB EXAMPLES
ensuring product standards
focused tasks
repetitive tasks
operating manufacturing equipment
Inventory management
Scheduling
TALENTED


SERVICES
clerical work
organization
Administration
cleaning tasks
helper
IT support in hotels
landscape gardeners
Hospitality
food preparation
Food services
kitchen help
commitment to completing tasks to a high standard
preference for structured environments and routines
commitment to completing tasks to a high standard
methodology and structuring
following established routines with a high level of perfection
AUTISTIC STRENGTHS
excellent adherence to instructions and schedules
ability to follow instructions meticulously
hardworking
ability to focus for extended periods of time
JOB CATEGORIES
JOB EXAMPLES
TALENTED

Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from this resource emphasize key areas of focus and address the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals on the autism spectrum.

We can highlight key insights and practical solutions to **improve employment opportunities** for autistic individuals. While people with autism may face challenges with social communication, workplace integration, and adapting to change, they also possess **valuable strengths**. These include attention to detail, a methodical approach to tasks, and strong technical and analytical skills. These abilities make them particularly well-suited for jobs in fields like technology, data management, and quality control, where precision and routine are key.

However, many autistic individuals encounter significant **barriers to employment**, including social stigma, discrimination, and a lack of supportive services. Employers often lack awareness and understanding of the needs of autistic employees, which only makes it harder for them to find and maintain work. The job application process itself can also be difficult, with traditional methods often not designed to accommodate their unique needs. The suggestions agree on simplifying these processes and **offering adjustments** such as clear communication and alternative interview formats.

Support in the workplace is crucial. The TalentED Handbook emphasizes the importance of personalized support, including mentoring programs, individualized work plans, and clear communication. Adjustments to the physical work environment can also make a big difference. Offering quiet spaces, flexible schedules, and remote working options helps reduce stress and allows autistic employees to perform at their best. These accommodations not only benefit the employee but also create a more inclusive and productive workplace.

Training on neurodiversity for managers and colleagues is another key recommendation. This training can help everyone better understand the specific needs and behaviours of autistic individuals, encouraging greater acceptance and collaboration. It helps break down misconceptions and fosters a work environment where neurodiverse employees feel supported and valued.

One of the practical tools in the handbook is the **Job Profiling Cards**, which align the strengths of autistic individuals with specific job roles. Careers in technology, administration, finance, and research are highlighted as particularly fitting, as these fields often value the precision, routine, and analytical thinking that many autistic people excel at.

Additionally, the TalentED project, points out that **certain sectors** provide great

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opportunities for autistic individuals. These include Information Technology (IT), research, administration, and quality control in manufacturing. Creative fields and freelance work are also mentioned as good options, as they allow for flexible working conditions that can accommodate the specific needs of autistic individuals.

When it comes to **learning**, autistic adults often prefer structured environments with clear instructions and direct feedback. The handbook stresses the importance of training methods that are practical and goal-oriented, giving individuals the chance to apply what they've learned in real-world settings. Collaborative learning environments also help autistic individuals develop soft skills, which can further enhance their professional growth.

The **employment situation** for autistic individuals varies across Europe, influenced by national policies and support systems. While countries like Germany and Spain have well-established frameworks to support autistic individuals in the workplace, other countries are still in the process of developing inclusive practices. The TalentED project plays a vital role in bridging these gaps by advocating for stronger policies and offering practical resources for educators, employers, and policymakers.

Employers are central to creating more **inclusive workplaces**. The handbook provides clear recommendations on how they can help, such as offering job coaching, creating sensory-friendly workspaces, and fostering a culture that values neurodiversity. By embracing the strengths of autistic employees, employers can tap into a pool of dedicated, TalentED individuals who bring fresh perspectives and valuable skills to their organizations.

The current reality clearly calls for a **collective effort** to improve employment outcomes for autistic individuals. Achieving this will require strong collaboration between policymakers, employers, educators, and vocational trainers to create environments where autistic adults can thrive. By removing the barriers they face and providing tailored support, society can progress toward a future where autistic individuals are fully integrated into the workforce, contributing their unique talents and strengths to the economy.

For further information and resources, visit TalentED Project website.

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Annexes

The **TALENT ED Handbook** serves as a foundational resource, offering adult educators, professionals, and others a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strengths of autistic adults.

Designed to enhance the employability and educational outcomes of autistic adults, this handbook includes valuable insights on the labour market, policy landscapes, and societal integration. It also provides practical tools such as job profiling cards, an Autism Strengths and Weaknesses Chart, and an Autism-Fit Job Map—each designed to match individuals' abilities to jobs in high-demand sectors, such as green, digital, and social industries.

To **further support** the mission outlined, two additional tools were developed as part of the TALENT ED project and are included in the annexes of the handbook: an activation tool, and a career and educational counselling tool. These two resources build upon the framework provided by the Handbook and are designed to activate, guide, and support both autistic adults and the professionals working with them.

Activation Tool

The **Activation Tool** is aimed at fostering motivation and engagement for adults with The Activation Tool is aimed at fostering motivation and engagement for adults in the spectrum, as well as their families and caregivers. Developed through a thorough review of existing toolkits, case studies, and success stories, this tool emphasizes the importance of **role models, inspirational quotes**, and **benefit cards**. These elements offer tangible **examples of success**, demonstrating to autistic individuals with the potential paths they can pursue in the labour market. The activation tool encourages self-belief and action by providing relatable role models and simple, accessible question-answer cards that address common concerns and offer solutions. The ultimate goal of this resource is to stimulate a sense of empowerment among autistic individuals by helping them visualize their potential in the workforce.

Career and Educational Counselling Tool

The Career and Educational Counselling Tool, built around the Autism-Fit Job Map introduced in the Talent ED Handbook, is an essential resource for both autistic individuals and the professionals guiding them through career and educational planning. This tool provides detailed pathways to employment, outlining the key qualifications required for various jobs. Through personalized advice, the tool supports individuals in identifying educational and career paths aligned with their strengths, enabling them to access the right opportunities in the labour market.

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Both tool packs were developed using innovative, user-centered design methods. Virtual Codesign Labs played a critical role in shaping these tools, with seven sessions conducted across Europe involving 72 participants. These sessions used participatory techniques, including brainwriting and roundtable discussions, to gather input from experts, educators, employers, and autistic individuals. The collaborative nature of these labs ensured that the tools were not only theoretically sound but also practical and tailored to the real-world needs of autistic adults.

The final tools are accessible through the TalentED website, providing a wide-reaching resource for improving employment opportunities and integration into the labour market for people in the spectrum.

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