Development and Retention of Autistic Staff in Hospitality

Module 4

Provision of Support to Autistic Staff in Hospitality

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Module Title	Module 4: Provision of Support to Autistic Staff in Hospitality
LEARNING OBJECTIVES	Module 4 is about help learners develop the necessary skills to support the Career Development, Well-being and Retention of Autistic Staff in their Hospitality Organisations. Module 4 aims to: 1. Educate learners on the Available Resources they can use to Support Staff with Autism 2. Educate learners on how to Utilise Available Resources to Support and Retain Staff with Autism 3. Educate learners on the concepts of Coaching and Mentoring in the Context of Supporting Staff with Autism
LEARNING OUTCOMES	Through Module 4, learners will learn about: 1. Establishing Performance Appraisal Sessions 2. Supporting Staff with Autism in Establishing SMART Goals 3. Supporting Staff with Autism by identifying Skills Gaps 4. Supporting Staff with Autism with Constructive Feedback 5. Monitoring the Career Progress of Staff with Autism 6. Supported Employment Principles

1. Introduction

In recent years, Autism-focused NGOs, researchers, therapists, and socially responsible enterprises in the EU hospitality sector have advocated for the expansion of early-life interventions supporting individuals with Autism. These interventions should evolve into long-term initiatives that support individuals throughout their employment cycle and life. Within the hospitality industry, the percentage of Autistic individuals employed full-time remains exceptionally low with little to no research to provide the data necessary to offer detailed insights into challenges and issues they face on a larger scale. General market research across the EU indicates that those who are employed and are on the autism spectrum, often hold minimum-wage positions with little opportunity for career progression. Barriers to sustained employment in the hospitality sector for Autistic individuals include:

- Limited access to vocational education and training specific to hospitality roles.
- Communication challenges.
- Prejudices about Autism within the industry and the society in general.
- Limited understanding of Autism among employers and peers.
- Lack of Autism-friendly job descriptions and tailored roles in hospitality settings.
- Work environments not conducive to Autism-specific needs.
- Insufficient organisational resources dedicated to long-term support.

These barriers can be mitigated by equipping hospitality employers with vocational training that provides the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to support Autistic employees effectively throughout a structured and comprehensive employment cycle.

2. Supported Employment in European Hospitality

Supported Employment refers to assistance provided to individuals with physical or mental disabilities to secure and maintain competitive employment. Within the hospitality sector, this includes job searches, accommodations, career advancement opportunities, and fostering inclusion while ensuring employees' well-being.

'What are the Benefits of Supported Employment in Hospitality?'

Securing long-term, supportive employment in the hospitality industry provides significant benefits for Autistic employees, including:

- Access to high-quality accommodations and resources, promoting self-sufficiency.
- Enhanced social integration through team-oriented roles, reducing isolation.
- Leveraging individual strengths, positioning Autism as a competitive advantage in roles suited to Autistic individuals' unique skills.
- Combating misconceptions about Autism and promoting neurodiversity as a value in the workplace.
- Development of social skills critical to hospitality, such as communication with colleagues and guests, as well as teamwork.
- Improved career progression opportunities via customised training in hospitality-specific skills.
- Advancing inclusive hiring practices that benefit both Autistic employees and the broader community.

2. a. Principles of Supported Employment in the Hospitality Sector

To create inclusive and supportive workplaces, hospitality employers and managers can follow these seven principles:

Zero Exclusion

Managers should ensure all employees, regardless of their Autism spectrum condition or prior experience, have access to employment and necessary support.

Integrated Employment and Treatment

Managers should acknowledge and accommodate employees' ongoing therapies (if applicable), ensuring understanding and flexibility in work arrangements.

Competitive Employment

Managers should offer fair opportunities in diverse hospitality roles, promoting equity and combating stigmas.

Rapid Job Search and Systematic Development

Hospitality Organisations should collaborate with organizations specializing in Autism-friendly recruitment and retention strategies.

Consistent, Long-term Support

Managers should provide sustained mentorship, Autism-friendly environments, team-building activities, and individualised accommodations.

Embracing Individualism

Managers should match Autistic employees to roles that align with their strengths and interests to enhance satisfaction, retention, and performance.

Fair Compensation

Employment contracts should clearly outline fair wages, benefits, and opportunities for career advancement to empower Autistic employees to thrive professionally.

3. Resources for an Autism-friendly Workplace

Coaching

Coaching in the hospitality sector involves experienced professionals supporting employees in achieving personal and professional goals. For Autistic employees, coaching can:

- Improve job satisfaction and performance.
- Foster stronger interpersonal relationships with colleagues.
- Enhance self-confidence and self-awareness.
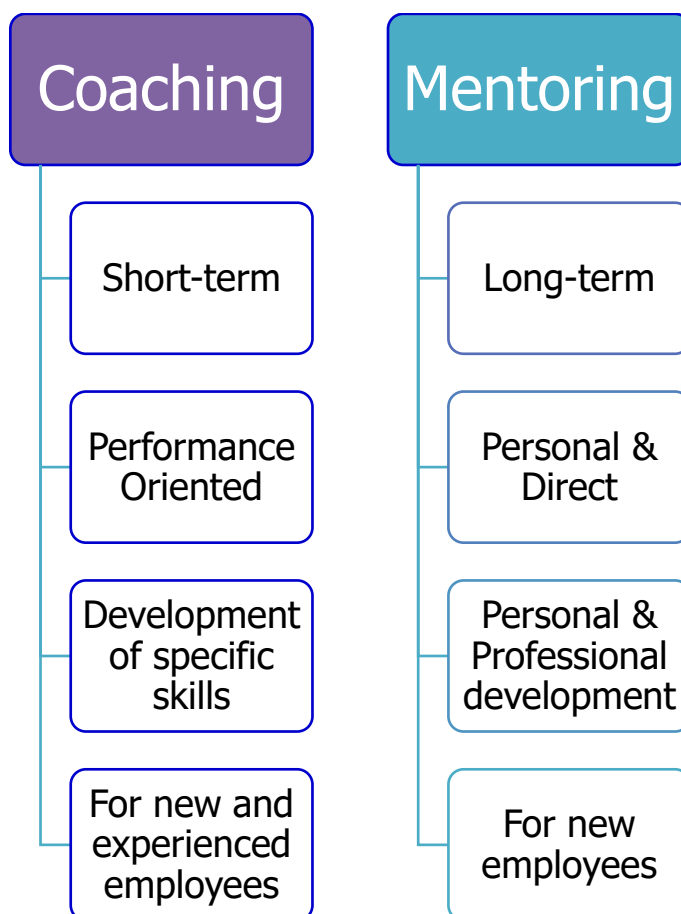- Provide a clear pathway for career growth through specialized hospitality knowledge and motivation.

Mentoring

Mentoring provides a structured relationship where seasoned hospitality professionals guide Autistic employees, helping them navigate personal and professional challenges. This is particularly valuable in a sector known for high-stress environments. Benefits of mentoring for Autistic employees include:

- Building confidence and competence in workplace-specific scenarios.
- Long-term emotional support, fostering resilience and motivation.
- Strengthening skills, knowledge, and career potential tailored to hospitality roles.

By integrating coaching and mentoring into HR practices, EU hospitality managers can create inclusive environments where Autistic employees thrive, transforming potential challenges into opportunities for mutual growth and success.

Mentoring and Coaching have many similarities, however there are some key differences between them:

Coaching	Mentoring
Short-term	Long-term
Performance Oriented	Personal & Direct
Development of specific skills	Personal & Professional development
For new and experienced employees	For new employees

3. a. The Skills of Coaches and Mentors

- Active Listening

Active listening involves fully focusing on and engaging with the person you are interacting with, without distractions (Mindtools, 2018). It also emphasizes the importance of body language—both our own and that of others. Aligning body language with spoken words signals attentiveness and reinforces trust in conversations. By mastering active listening, coaches can create a supportive and engaging environment for meaningful communication.

- Communication Skills

Effective communication is essential for coaches, who must clearly convey their thoughts and ideas to learners. As learners rely on their coaches for guidance and expertise, clear

communication minimizes misunderstandings and confusion, ensuring that the coaching process progresses smoothly and supports the learner's development.

- ### Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, as well as the impact of one's actions, choices, and behavior on others. Emotional intelligence includes five key components:

1. **Self-Awareness:** Reflecting on personal behavior, ethics, and values.
2. **Self-Regulation:** Managing emotions and controlling impulses.
3. **Motivation:** Demonstrating commitment to achieving long-term goals.
4. **Empathy:** Understanding and appreciating others' perspectives.
5. **Social Skills:** Building and maintaining effective relationships.

4. SMART Career Goals and Skills Mapping

4. a. SMART Goals

Autistic employees may benefit from support in setting career goals, and supervisors can assist them in creating **SMART career goals**. These goals are defined by the following criteria:

- **Specific**: Career goals should be clearly defined and narrowly focused, making it easier to track progress and set achievable milestones.
- **Measurable**: Goals should include measurable outcomes, allowing progress to be monitored effectively.
- **Achievable**: Goals must be realistic and attainable, ensuring employees feel motivated and empowered to work towards them.
- **Realistic**: Goals should align with the employee's available resources, such as their knowledge, skills, experience, and support systems.
- **Timely**: Clear deadlines and timelines should accompany goals to provide structure and focus.

These SMART goals can be integrated into support programs for Autistic employees and periodically reviewed as part of performance evaluations and job satisfaction assessments.

4. b. Skills Mapping

The Skills Mapping activity can be introduced during the initial stages of employment and revisited periodically. This exercise helps identify and assess skill gaps, attributes, and competencies of Autistic employees. Supervisors can use this process to collaboratively prioritise actions for skill development. By visually mapping and articulating their strengths and areas for improvement, employees gain a clearer understanding of how to focus on both personal and professional growth.

Steps to Conduct a Skills Mapping Exercise

1. **Create a Skills Map Chart:** Begin by preparing a Skills Map Chart to structure the activity, as shown in the example below.
2. **Document Skills and Competencies:** Encourage employees to list their skills and competencies in a hierarchical format, starting with their strongest skills followed by areas where they feel they lack proficiency. Employees should analyse both hard and soft skills, explaining their relevance and how these skills contribute to their role. Supervisors should actively assist in identifying and documenting as many skills as possible.
3. **Develop an Action Plan:** Guide employees through creating an actionable plan to enhance existing skills or acquire new ones based on the Skills Map. Encourage them to explore available opportunities, such as training programs, workshops, or improving workplace relationships with peers and colleagues, to support their development.

Lacking   **Competence**
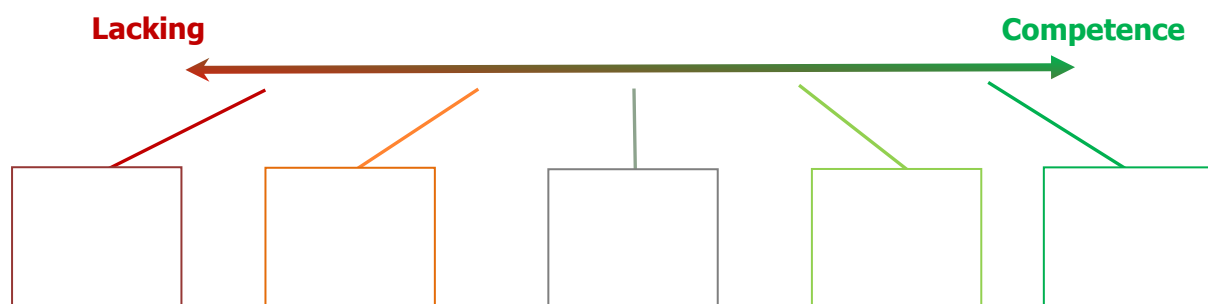
5. Performance Appraisal Practices

To maximise the performance and success of Autistic employees, employers can implement the following best practices:

Best Practice 1: Optimise the Probationary Period

A well-structured probationary period is crucial for ensuring that candidates with Autism are suited to their roles, paving the way for long-term support and employment retention. Employers should clearly explain the purpose of the probationary period and the accompanying performance appraisal process to candidates. Suitability assessments begin during the initial interview and continue through the probationary period, typically lasting three to six months.

During this time, managers should:

- Evaluate the employee's skills, knowledge, and training needs.
- Use tools like the PERFORM HR Platform (described in Module 6) to support assessments.
- Provide regular, constructive feedback to monitor progress.
- Address identified training needs through coaching or mentoring programs.

Best Practice 2: Establish Long-term Performance Management Processes

Performance management should be a continuous process throughout the employment cycle, regardless of an employee's abilities. Managers can ensure consistent support by scheduling regular performance review sessions, either one-on-one or in groups. The frequency of these sessions can be tailored to organizational policies or agreed upon by managers and employees.

Key components of performance review sessions include:

- Discussions of daily challenges, achievements, conflicts, and inspirations.
- Providing constructive feedback to acknowledge successes or address areas for improvement.
- Exploring workplace relationships and social dynamics.

- Gathering employee feedback about job satisfaction and concerns.

By maintaining a structured approach to performance management, managers can foster ongoing development and job satisfaction.

Best Practice 3: Address Poor Performance Thoughtfully

Poor performance can arise at any stage of employment and may be particularly likely for Autistic employees due to:

- Workplace environments that are not Autism-friendly.
- Misunderstandings about job responsibilities.
- Communication barriers.
- Lack of motivation.

To address these challenges, managers should take a mindful and proactive approach:

1. **Assessment and Adjustment of the Work Environment:** Managers should evaluate the workplace and implement reasonable accommodations to better support the employee without disrupting others' work.
2. **Maintenance of Open Communication:** Managers should provide consistent, constructive feedback and engage in meaningful dialogue.
3. **Investigation of Causes:** Before providing feedback, managers should gather all relevant information to understand the root cause of performance issues and develop appropriate solutions.
4. **Provision of Specific Feedback:** Managers should clearly address particular concerns, clarify expectations, and outline targets or standards for improvement.
5. **Avoidance of Personalisation:** Managers should focus on behavior or outcomes, not on the employee's disability or personality traits.
6. **Encouragement and Detailed Explanations:** Managers should avoid asking simple "yes" or "no" questions. They should allow employees to fully explain their perspective and rationale.
7. **Provision of Support:** Managers should regularly ask employees if they need assistance and discuss ways to enhance support.
8. **Explore Motivation:** Managers should investigate any lack of motivation and collaborate to identify strategies to inspire better engagement and performance.

6. Summary

Module 4 explores the concept of **Supported Employment**, which involves providing assistance to individuals with mental or physical disabilities to help them secure and maintain competitive employment while receiving necessary treatments. Supported Employment offers comprehensive support throughout the employment cycle, including assistance with accommodations, benefits, social integration, and career advancement opportunities.

The module highlights the principles and impact of Supported Employment, particularly in employing and retaining Autistic staff within the European Hospitality Sector. To effectively support Autistic employees, managers can leverage a range of tools developed through the **PERFORM Project (described in detail in module 6)**. These tools are designed to provide targeted support throughout the employment cycle, with a focus on Coaching and Mentoring, as well as performance and well-being appraisals.

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