

The Neurodivergency Super Power

How Diverse Teams Function Better

Drupalcamp Asheville 2025

Saturday July 13th 2025

J Matthew Saunders



Image by ChatGPT



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Advisory Council NEXT for Autism

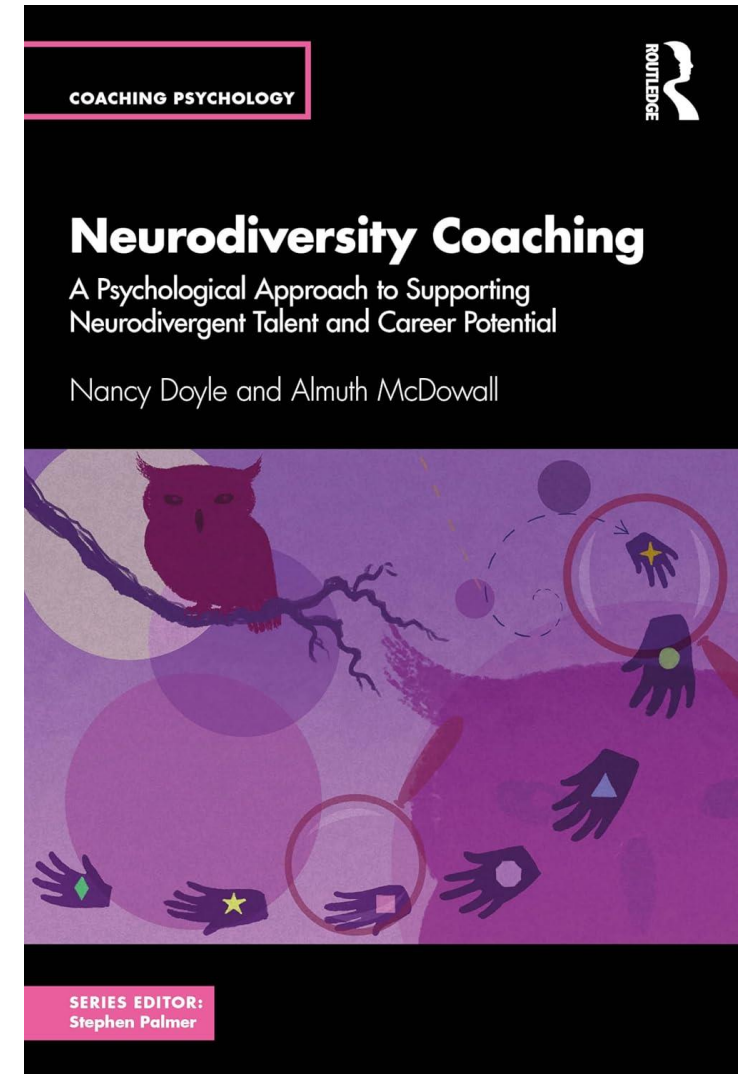
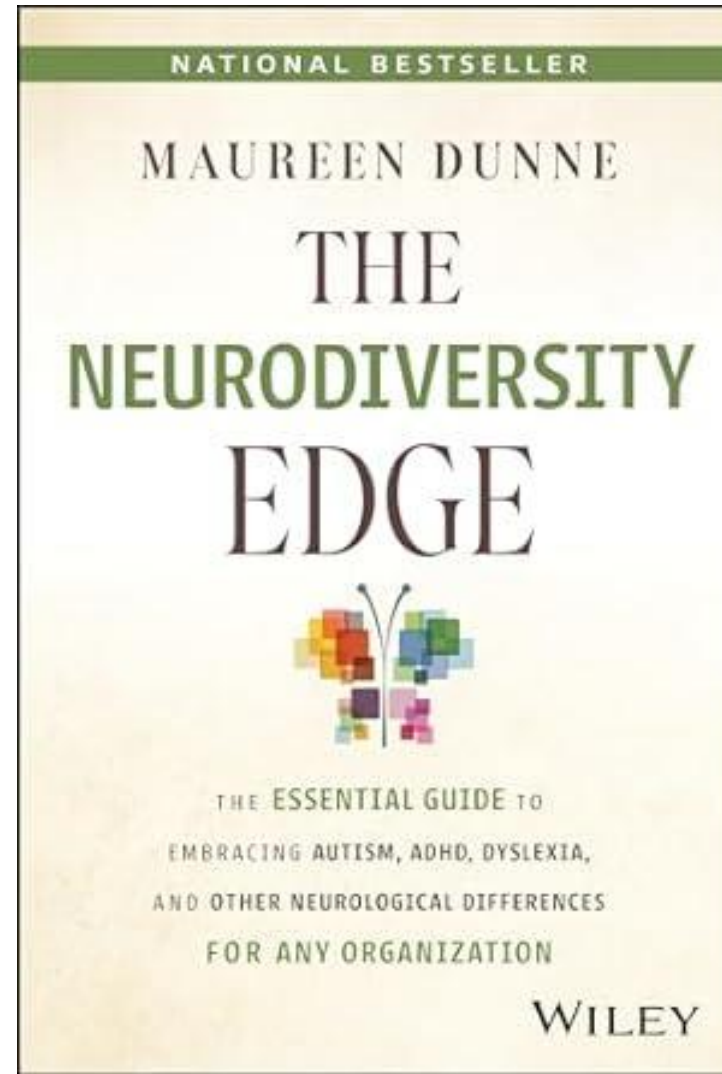
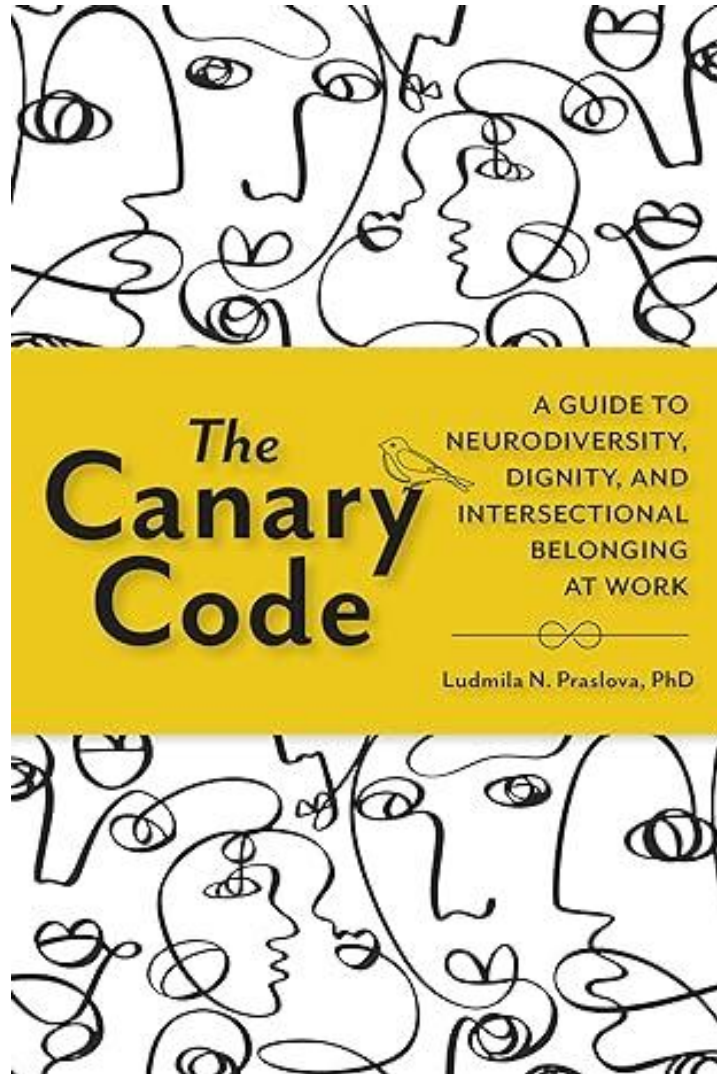
Mentor for Neurodiverse Youth

Curriculum Author/Editor for NEXT

Advocate & Activist in Neurodiversity

Technologist – mostly in Open

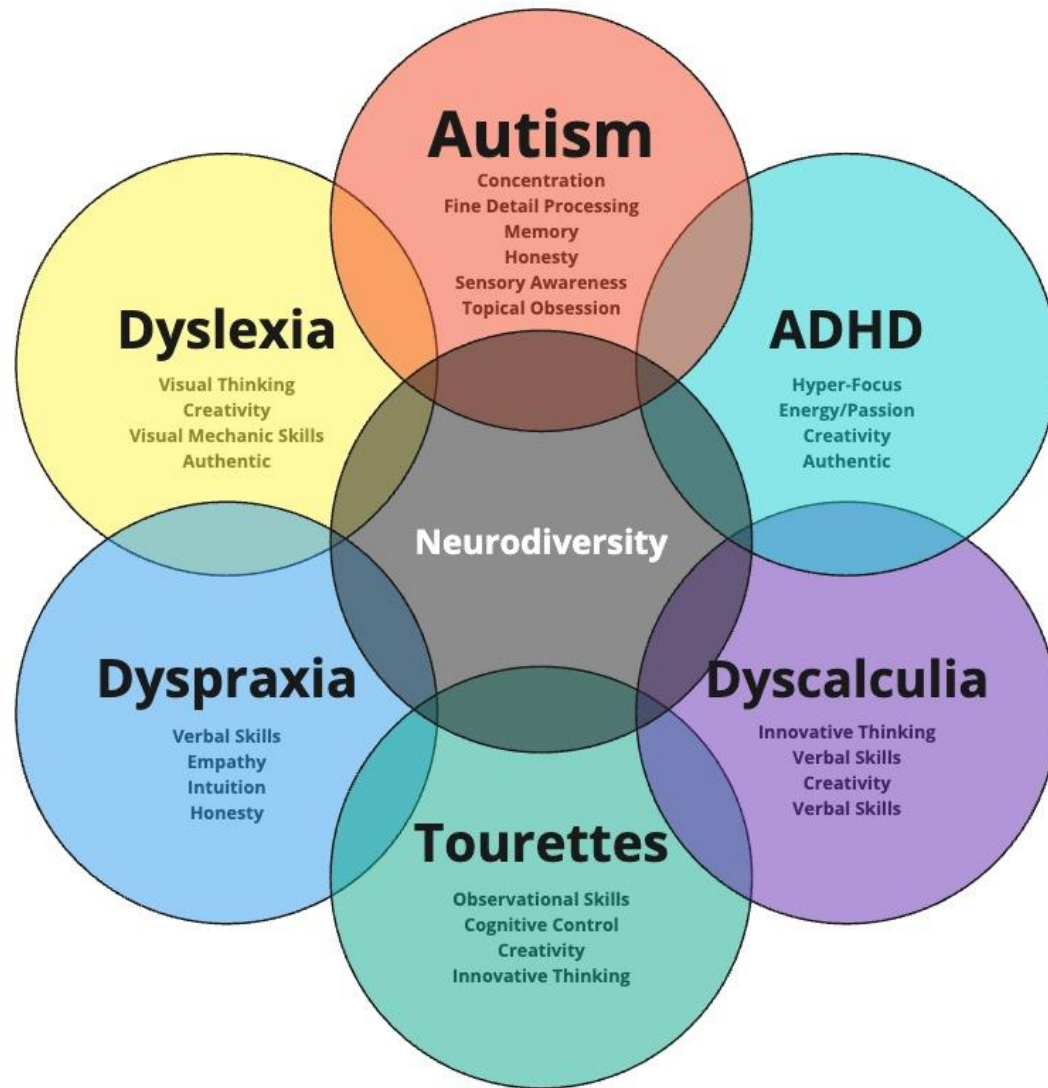
Source



What IS Neurodiversity?

“Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.”

– Harvard Health Publishing





<https://ahaslides.com/NEURO2025>

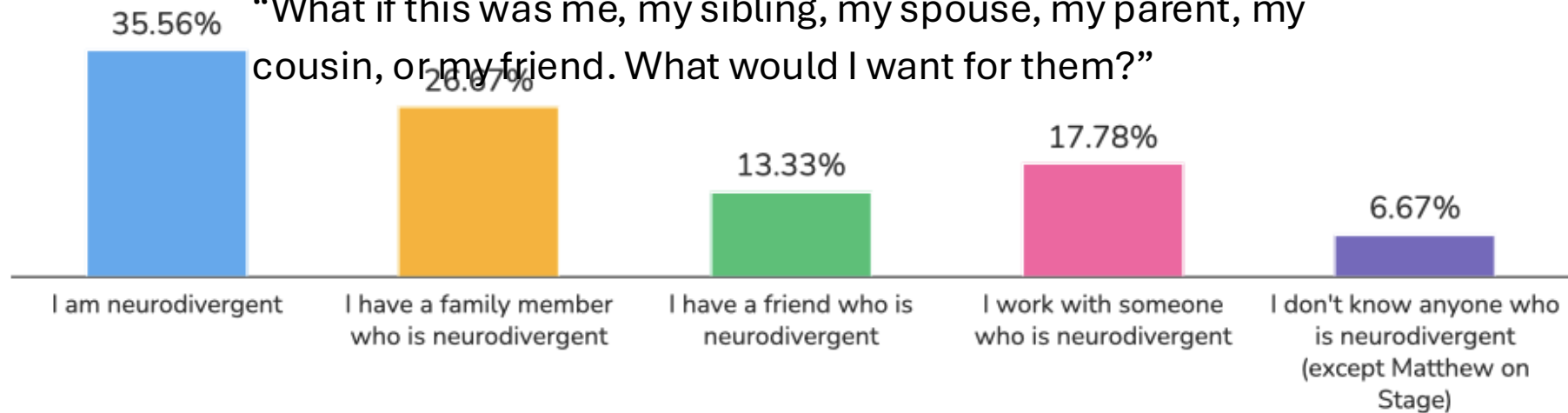
To join, go to: ahaslides.com/NEURO2025



Who Amongst Us

This illustrates how you are either a part of, or connected to this community already.

What I want you to think about throughout my session is,
“What if this was me, my sibling, my spouse, my parent, my cousin, or my friend. What would I want for them?”



Get Feedback



15-20%

**of the population
is neurodiverse in
some way**

Source:
<https://www.thehrdirector.com/business-news/employee-engagement/thirty-eight-percent-16-24-year-olds-identify-neurodivergent/>

4.2%

overall unemployment in
the US

7.2%

unemployment rate of
those with the general
class of being disabled

30-40%

Unemployment rates
amongst neurodivergent
adults

85%

of people on the
autism spectrum are
unemployed



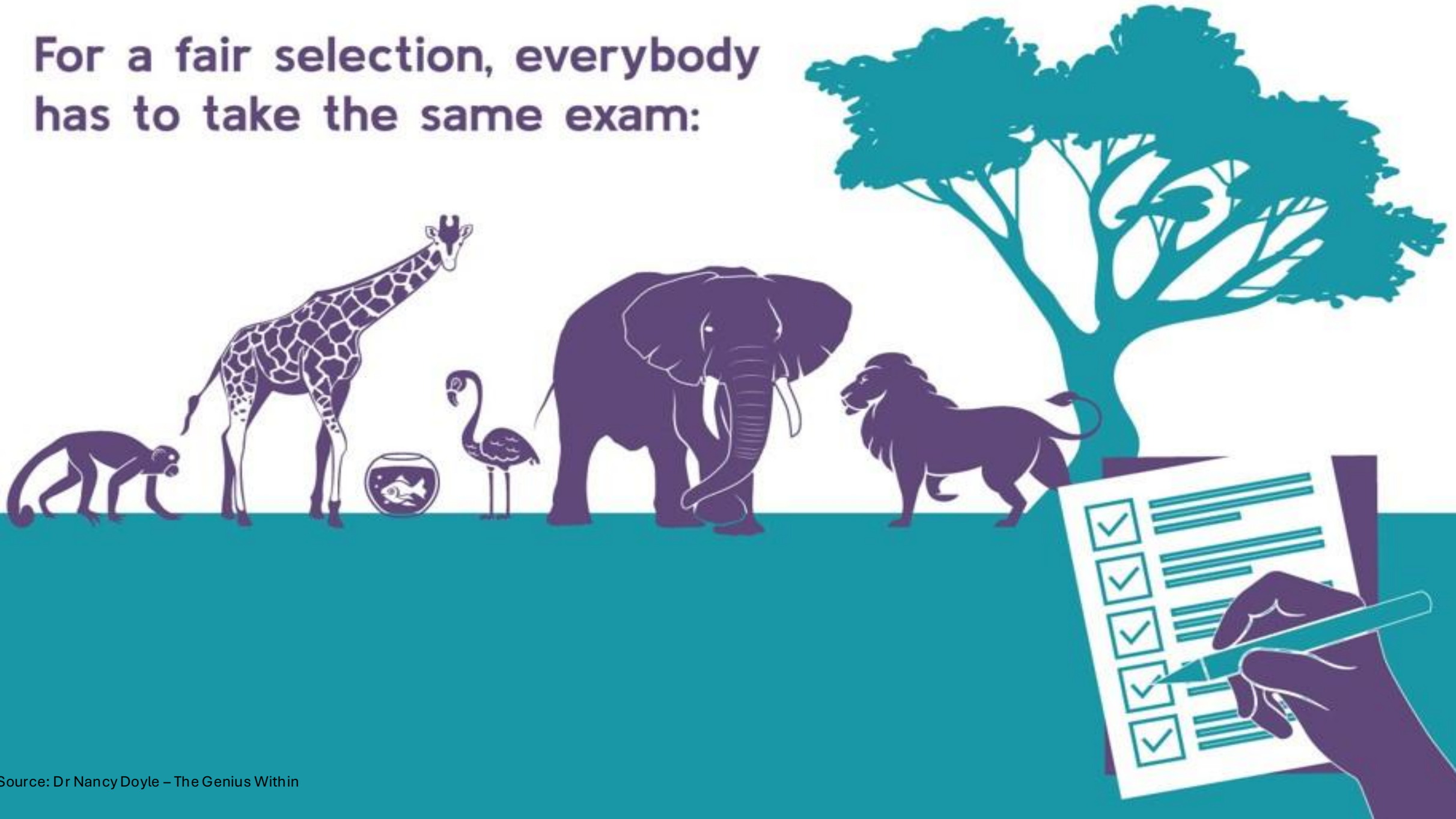
Why Is It Hard To Find A Job?

- **Traditional Hiring Practices Are Biased**
 - Rigid Application Processes
 - Favor Charisma and Quick Thinking
 - Applicant Tracking Systems

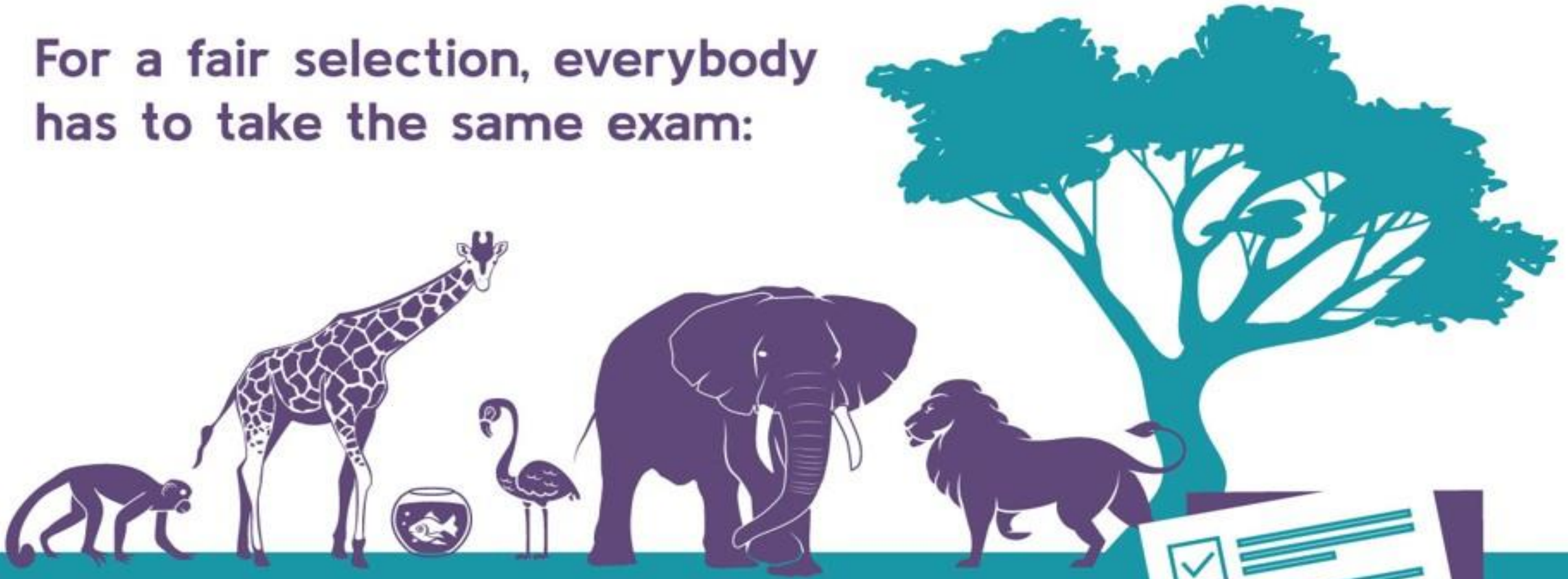
“Current hiring practices often rely on style over substance. Style based hiring presents barriers for many neurodivergent job seekers and leads to shockingly high levels of unemployment.”

Dr. Ludmila Praslova
The Canary Code

For a fair selection, everybody
has to take the same exam:



For a fair selection, everybody
has to take the same exam:



Please climb that tree!





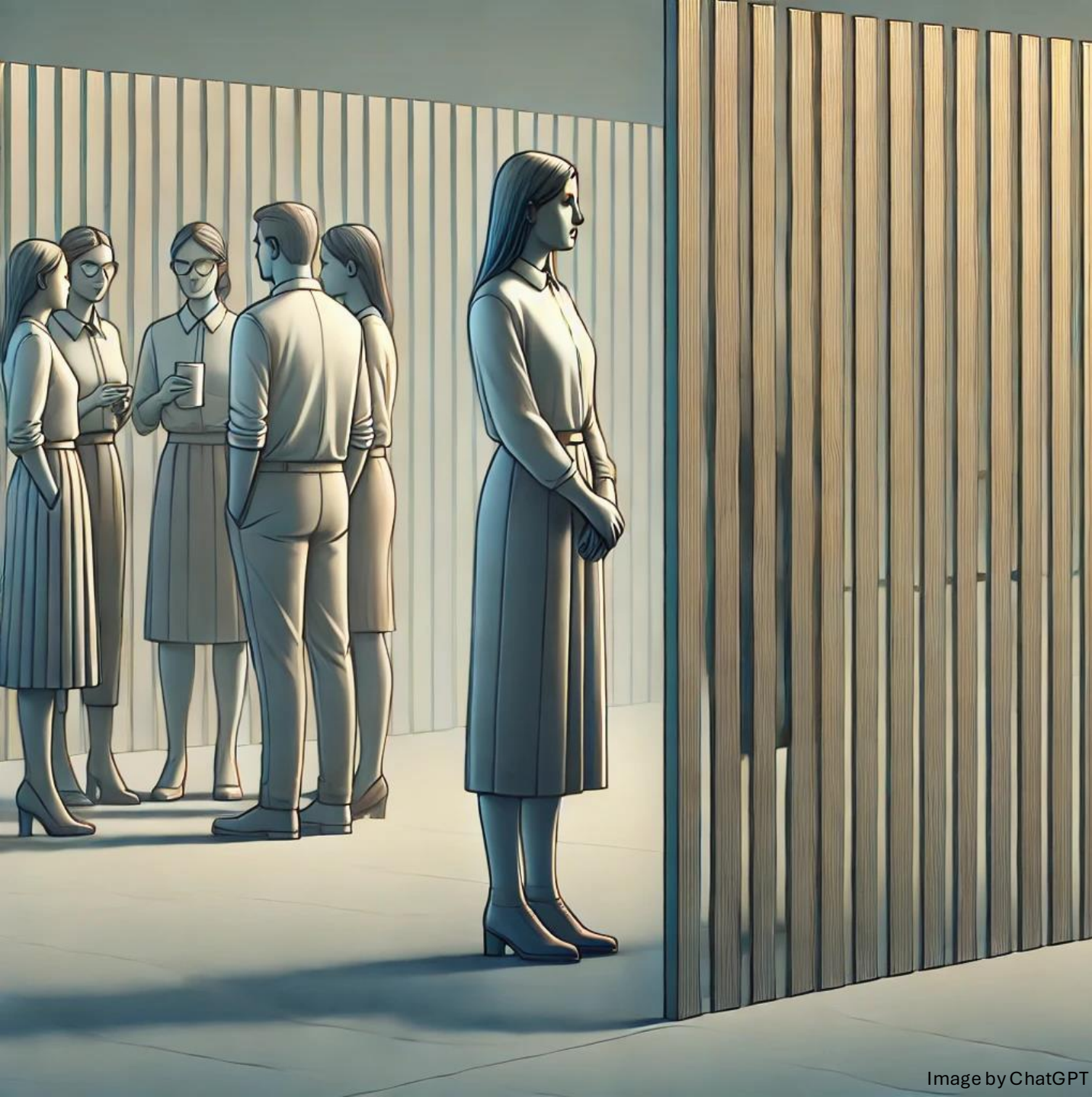
Why Is It Hard To Find A Job?

- **Social and Communication Barriers**
 - Self-Promotion and Networking
 - Literal thinking and difficulty with abstracts

“Many autistic individuals have high levels of educational attainment and skills and are more than capable of performing the work. However, few excel at making small talk with strangers...

However, being hired for most of these jobs requires an interview. Neuronormative small talk expectations in the interview subject autistic applicants to “style over substance” negative judgements by evaluators quickly and largely outside their awareness that are then justified by the “poor fit” statement.”

Dr. Ludmila Praslova
The Canary Code



Why Is It Hard To Find A Job?

- **Hiring Bias and Employer Misconceptions**
 - Assumption that we lack soft skills, leadership ability, or adaptability
 - Fear of the cost of accommodations
 - Stereotypes about neurodivergence

“In general, the stereotype that neurodivergent people are only a “fit” for entry-level jobs denies the tremendous range of their abilities and talents...”

“A few [managers] wanted to know how to be better peers and allies.”

“Nobody ever wondered how to best support a neurodivergent leader.”

Dr. Ludmila Praslova
The Canary Code

Why Is It Hard To Keep A Job?

- **Sensory and Environmental Barriers**
 - Noise, Lighting, Open Office Layouts
 - 9-5 Schedules without accounting for different energy levels, focus patterns, work styles

“Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn’t require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are.”

Dr. Brené Brown
The Gifts of Imperfection

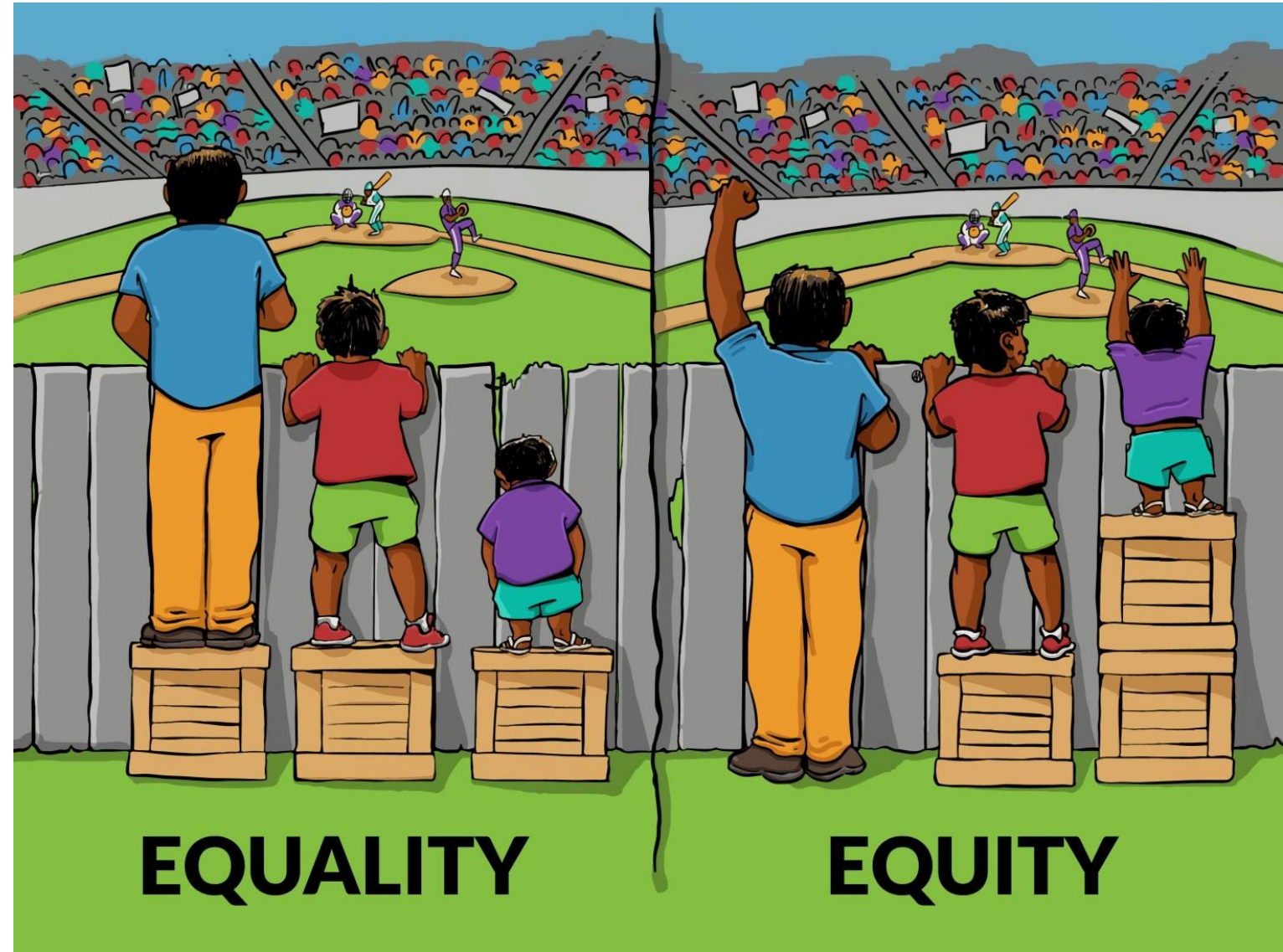


Why Is It Hard To Keep A Job?

- **Lack of Support and Accommodations**
 - We don't disclose and we mask
 - Clear expectations aren't provided
 - Accommodations are overlooked and/or denied.

“Autistic individuals often face significant barriers in accessing appropriate support and accommodations, leading to feelings of isolation and misunderstanding.”

Wikipedia



Why Is It Hard To Keep A Job?


- **Workplace Culture & Social Expectations**
 - Unspoken rules. Office Politics. Networking pressure.
 - Executive Dysfunction
 - Masking

“...Neurodivergent people often engage in an arduous process of fitting in, also known as “masking”, where enormous energy is expended through superficial impression management and deeply felt stress to hide neurodivergent traits.”

Dr. Maureen Dunne
The Neurodiversity Edge



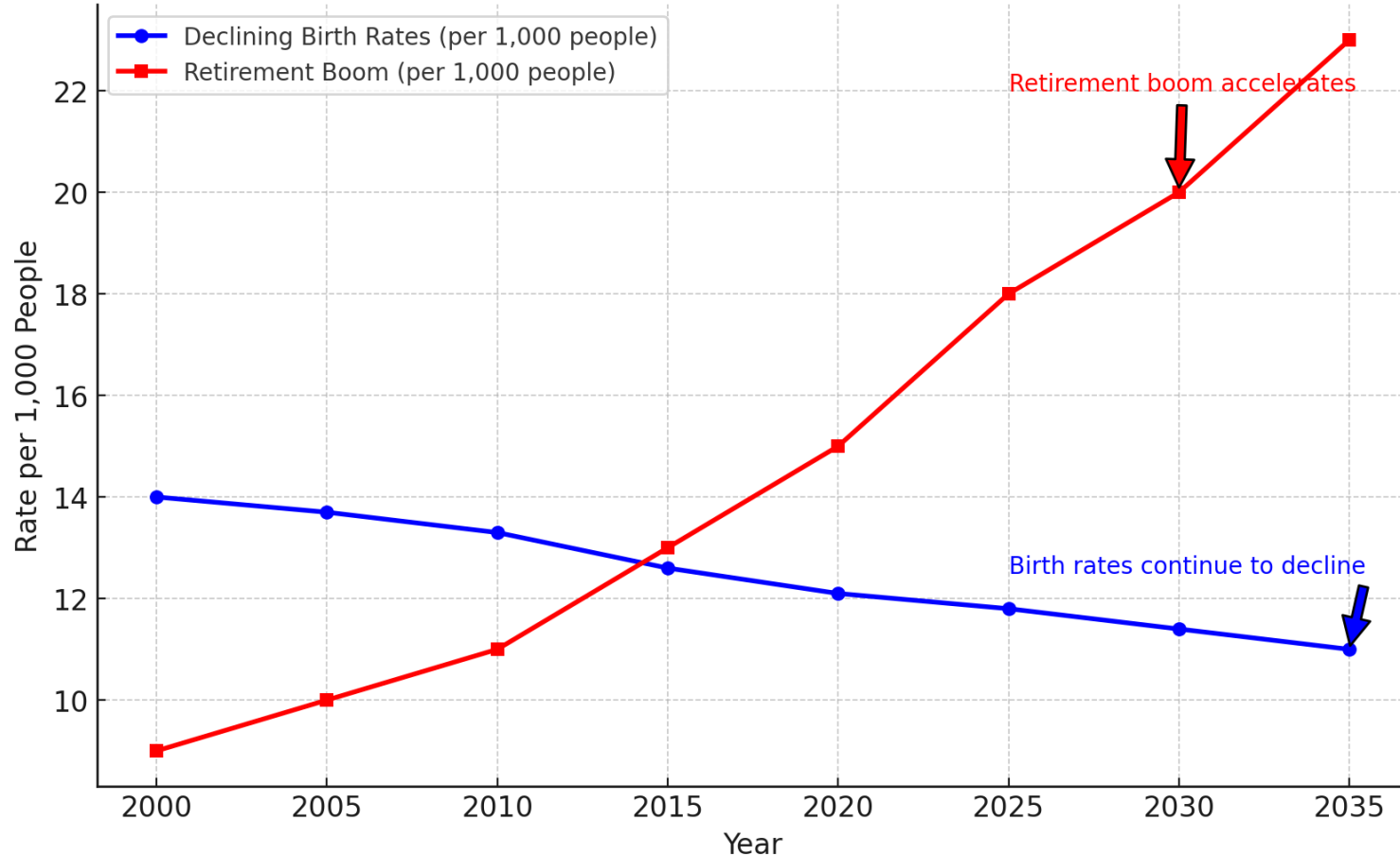




**This all seems
like a lot of
trouble. How can
ANY of this be a
superpower?**



Demographic Shift in Western Countries: Birth Decline vs Retirement Boom



Our population demographics have become our enemy. We are having fewer babies than people retiring creating a workforce gap.

Data Sources:

- **Fertility Rates:** Data on fertility rates were sourced from the **OECD's 2024 report**, which provides comprehensive statistics on birth rates across member countries.
- **Retirement Trends:** Information on the aging population and its economic implications was obtained from the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, which discusses the challenges posed by an aging demographic.

WE ARE NEARING A CRISIS!

We Could...

- Increase Immigration
- Delay Retirements
- Invest in Automation and AI
- Make More Babies

Make better use of
the neurodiverse
population



"...in a recent study by JPMorgan, autistic employees were found to be 48% faster and up to 140% more productive at a range of tasks when compared to their neurotypical peers employed in the same position."

-- Dr Maureen Dunne

The Neurodiversity Edge

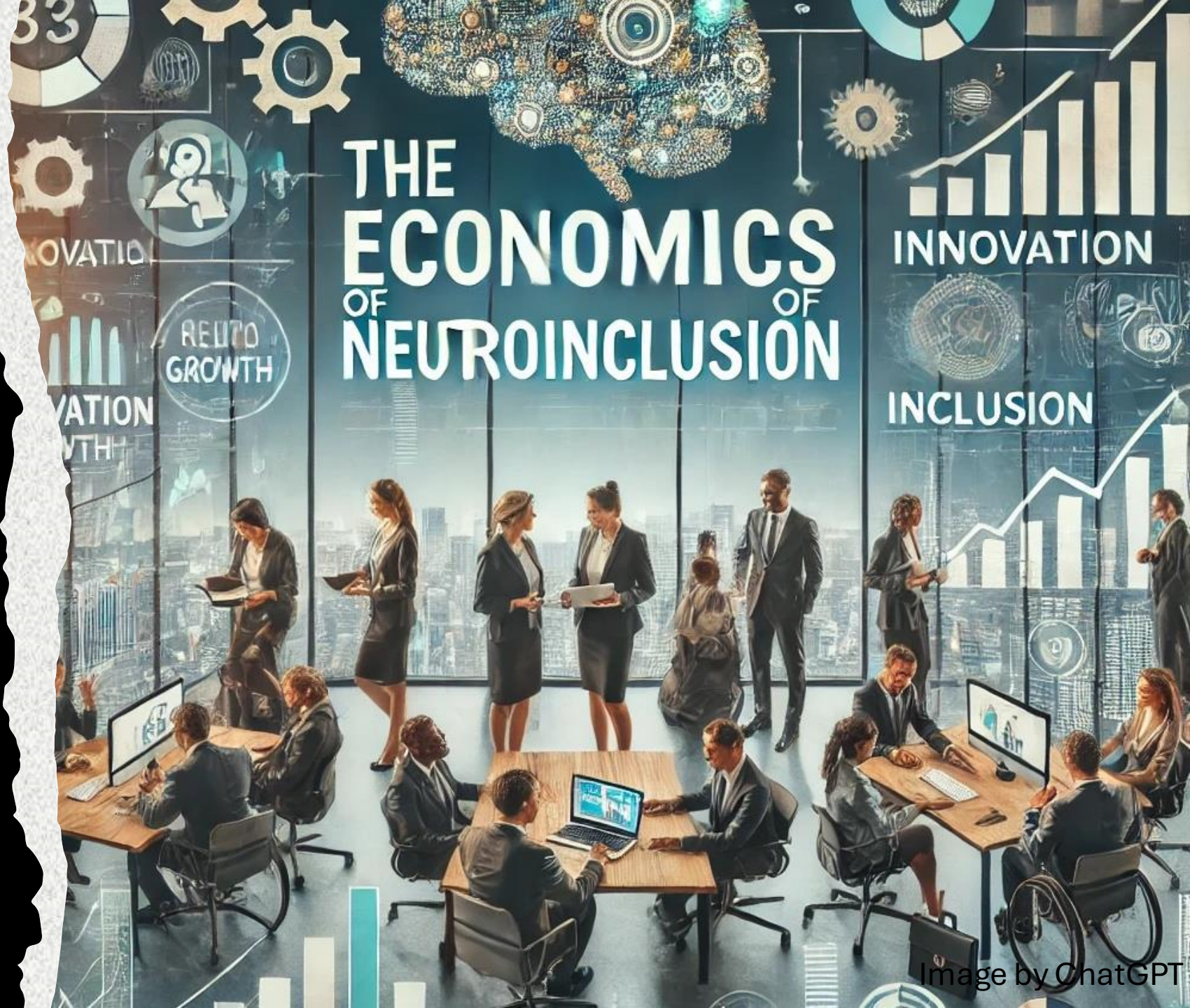
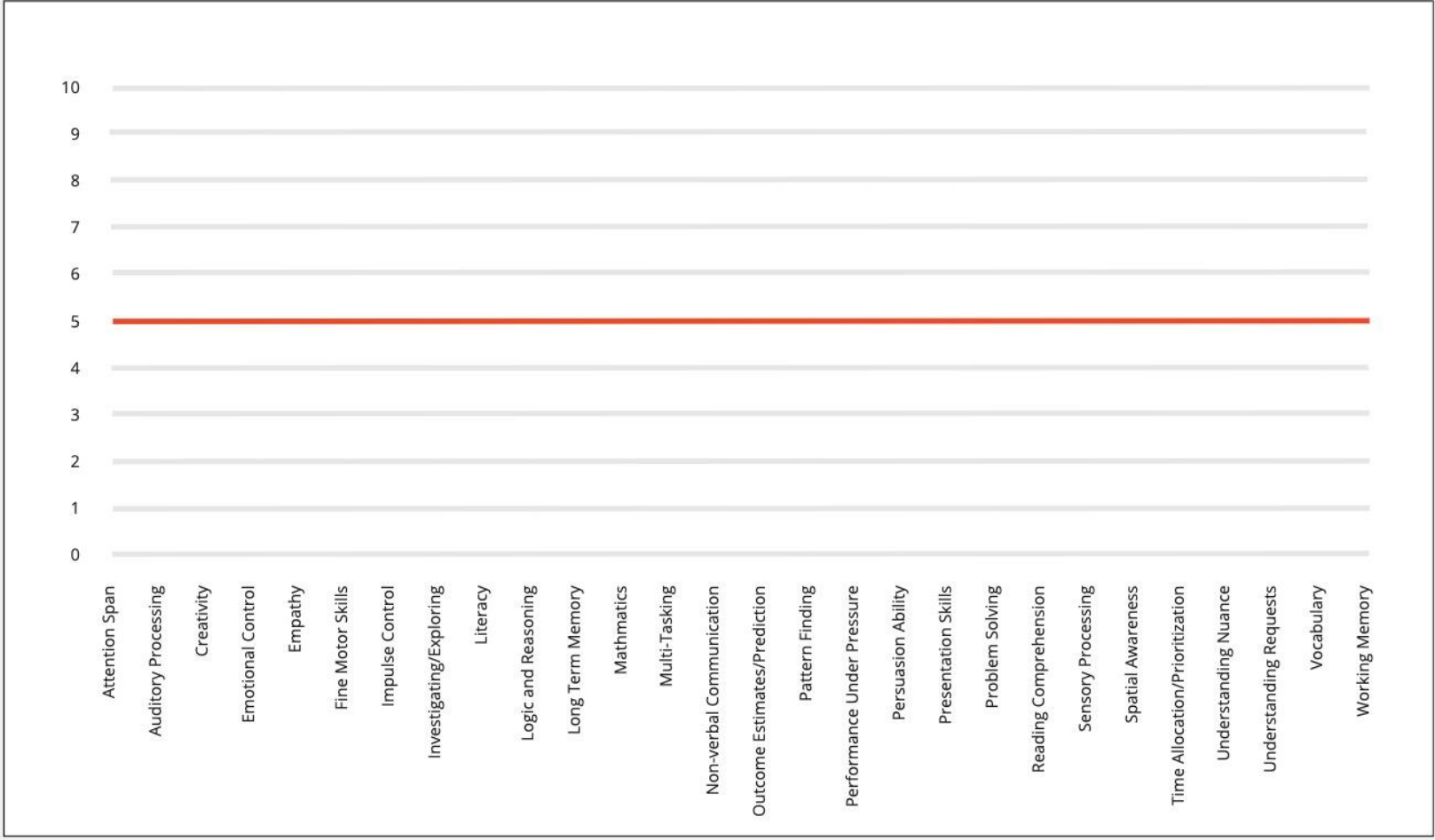


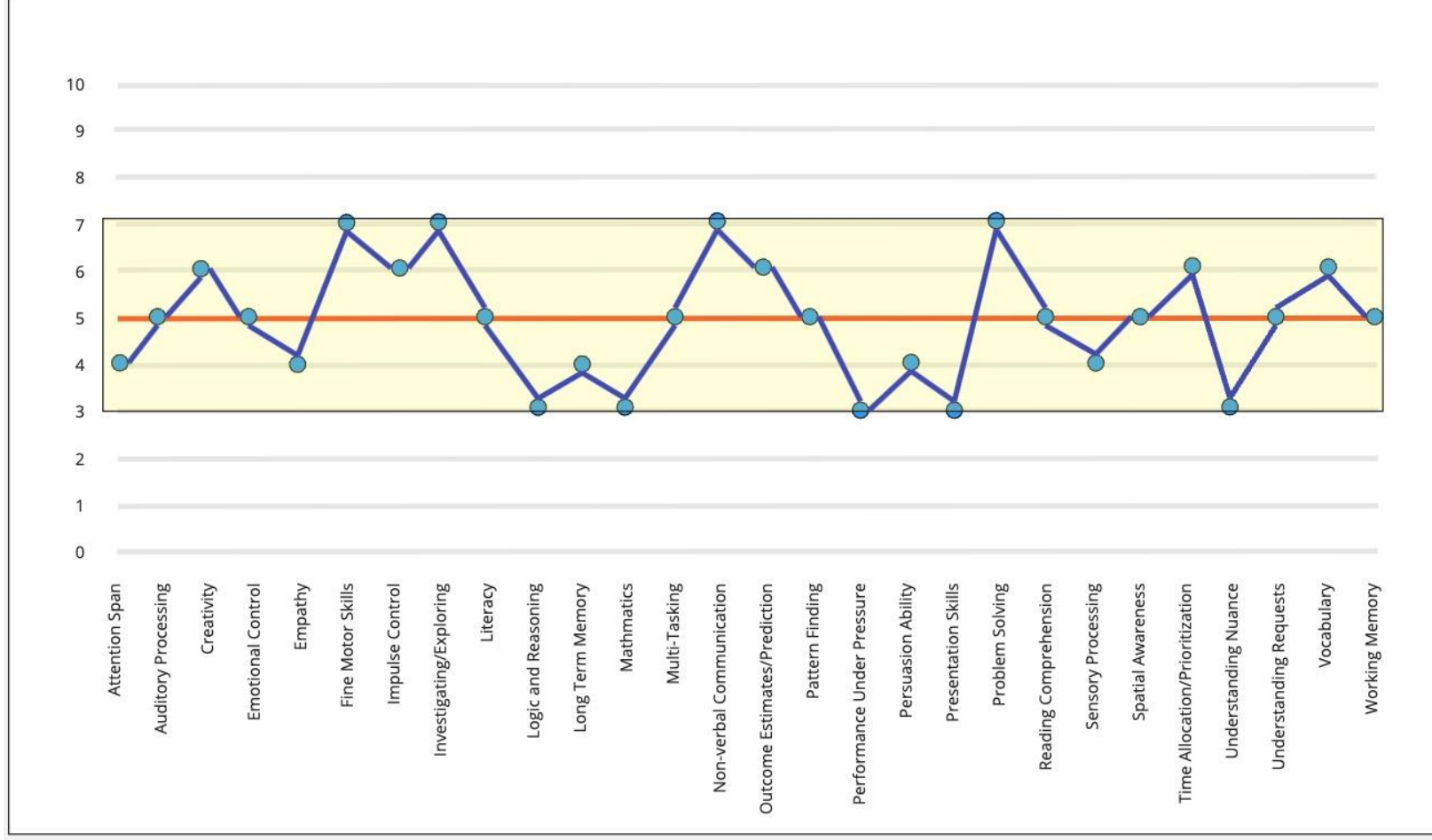
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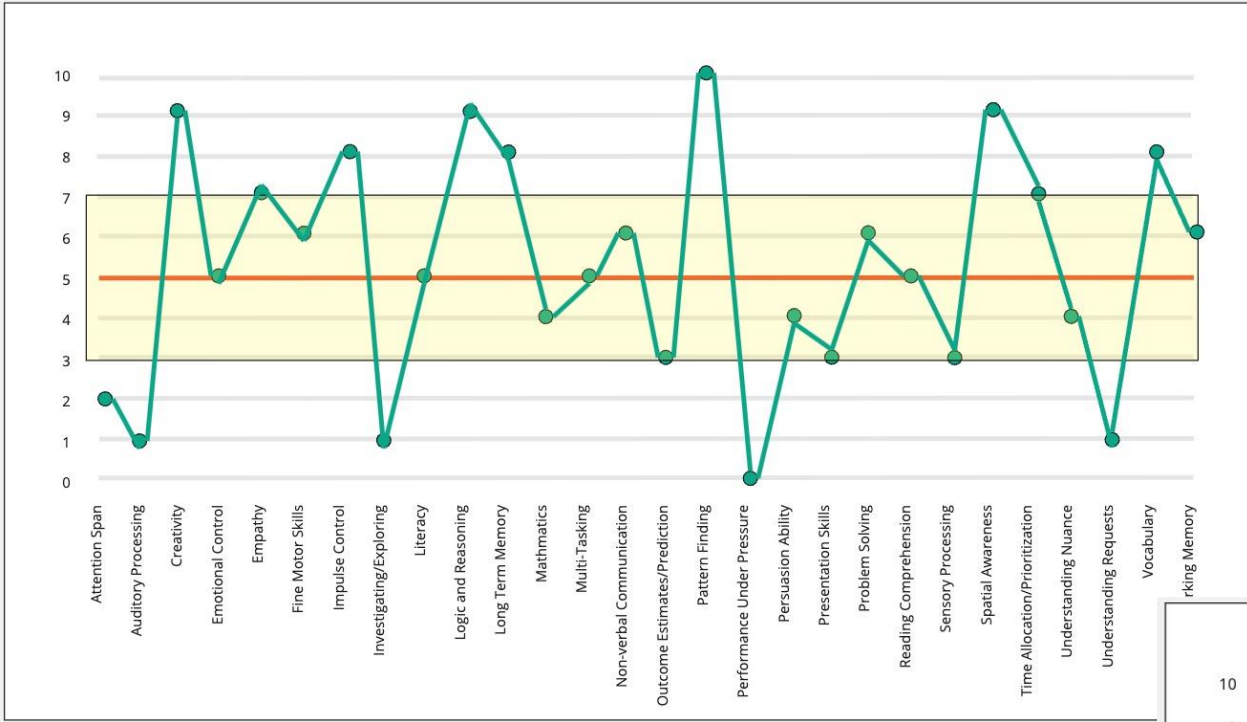
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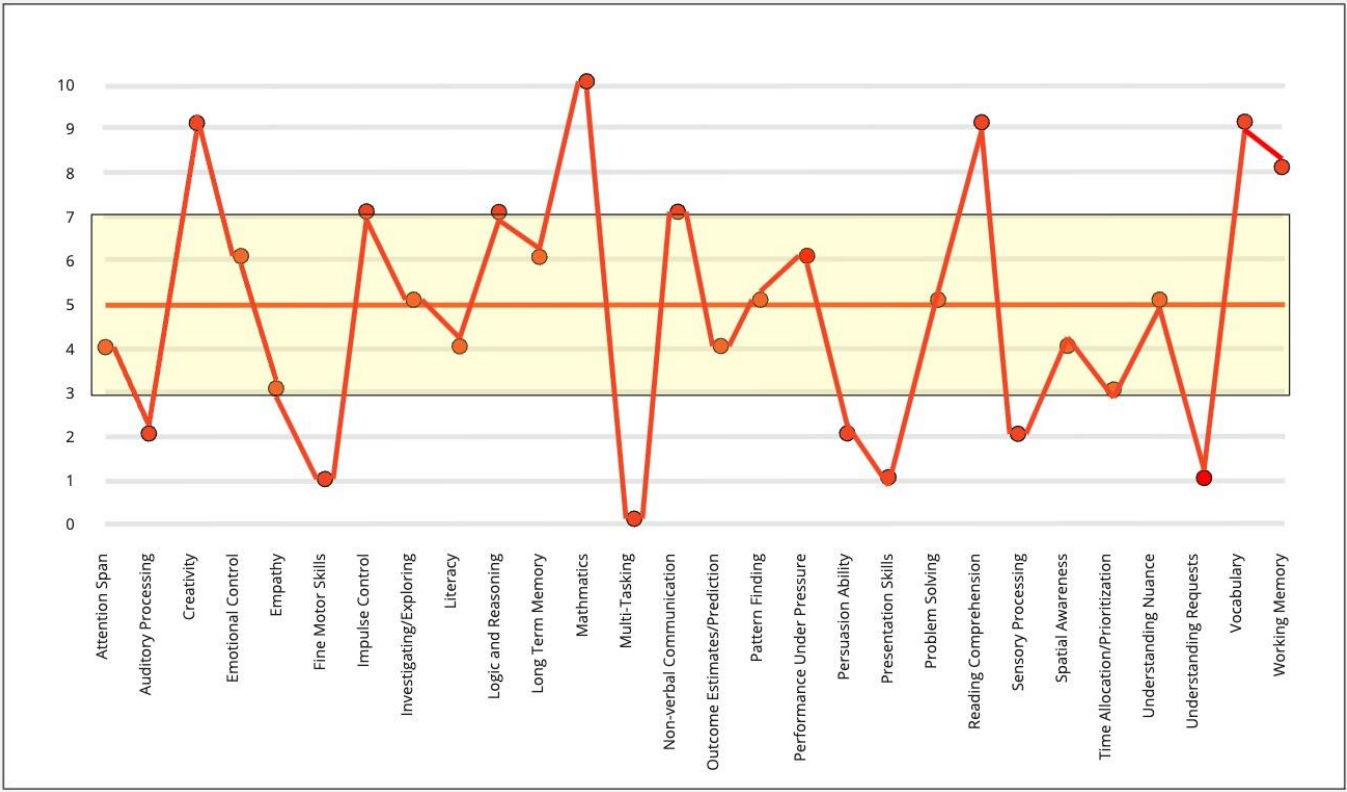
Jennifer

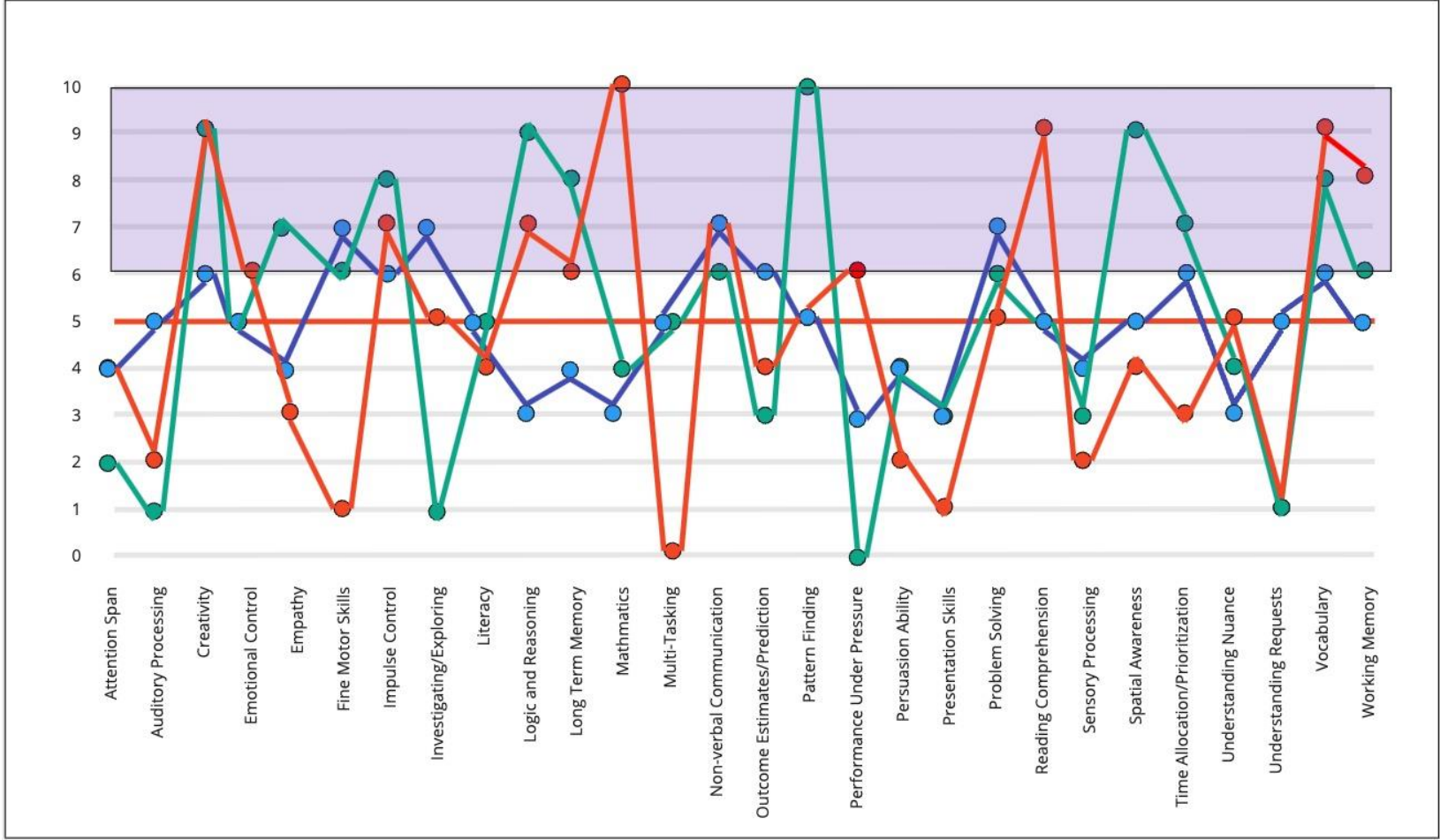


Robert



David







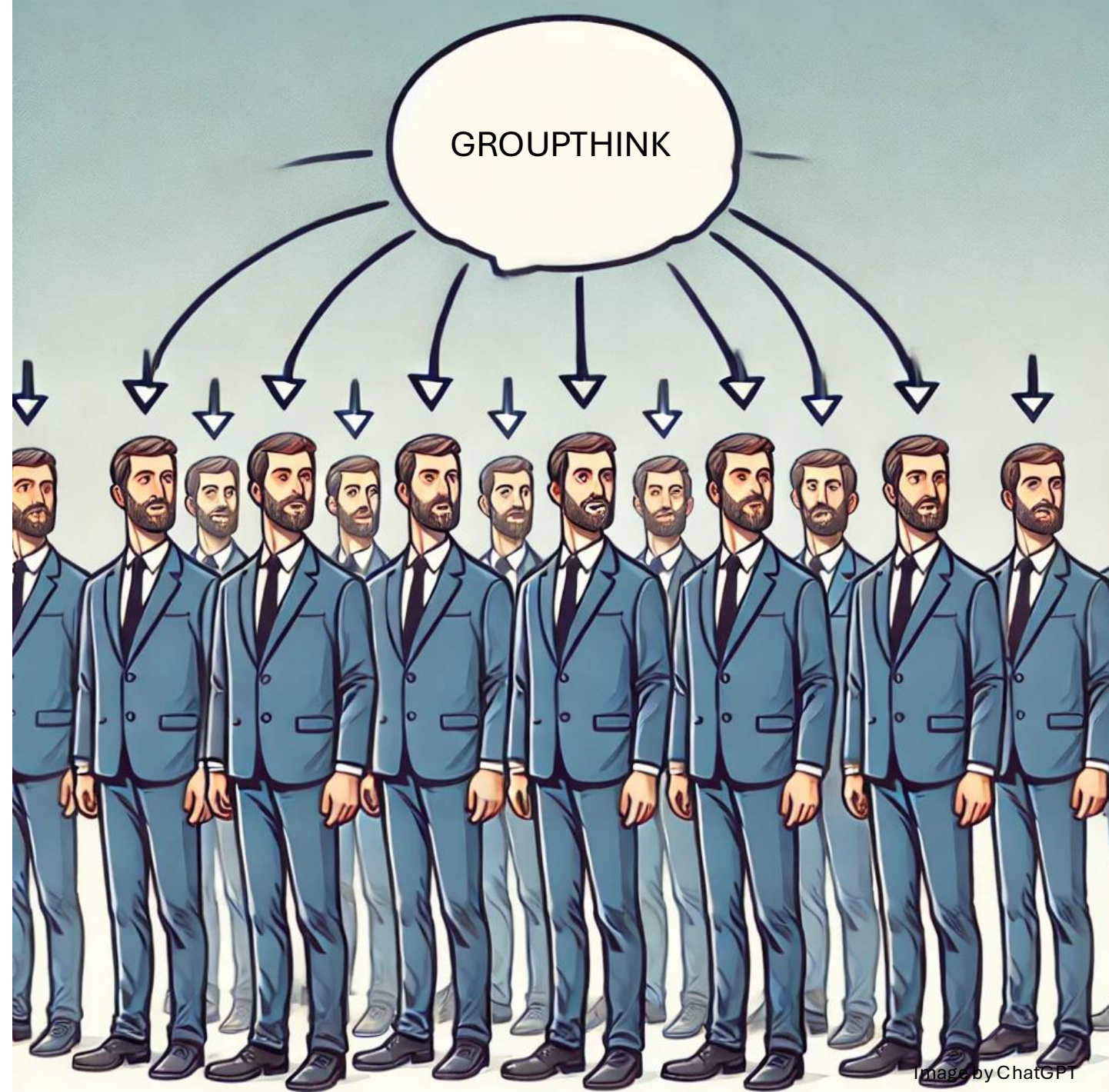
Diversity, not just neurodiversity, hedges against "GroupThink". It is an economic advantage.

“Companies with more diverse management teams demonstrate, on average, 19% higher revenues due to increased innovation and 9% higher margins.”

Dr Maureen Dunne
The Neurodiversity Edge

“A level of homogeneity of thought that crosses some theoretical threshold where individual reasoning becomes subordinate to some emerging consensus within a group, resulting in a decision-making outcome that is driven by factors, including social dynamics, unrelated to an objective and rational evaluation of information relevant to making the most effective decision.”

Dr Maureen Dunne
The Neurodiversity Edge



Groupthink **thrives in environments** where:

- **There is pressure to agree**
- **The group is highly cohesive**
- **A strong leader dominates**
 - **There is time pressure**
 - **There is fear of conflict**

This can cause:

- **Illusion of Invulnerability**
- **Collective Rationalization**
- **Stereotyping Outsiders**
 - **Self-Censorship**
 - **Pressure to Conform**
 - **Illusion of Unanimity**



The Challenger Disaster (1986)

NASA engineers ignored warnings about faulty O-rings because of pressure to launch on schedule—leading to the catastrophic explosion.

By Kennedy Space Center -
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nasa2explore/10697912315/in/album-72157630719371642/>, Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=530754>

The 2008 Financial Crisis

Banks and investment firms ignored warnings about high-risk mortgage practices because of peer pressure and industry norms, leading to a massive economic collapse.



CASTRO PROCLAIMS VICTORY FOR CUBA

News Summary

THE WORLD

SOVIET CHARGE DENOUNCED — Britain denounced before the U.N. Political Committee the Soviet and Cuban charges that the United States masterminded the invasion aimed at overthrowing Prime Minister Castro. (Complete story on Page 2, Part 1.)

U.S. NAVY INVASION CHARGE — The Soviet Tass news agency charged that the rebel invasion of Cuba was supported by U.S. destroyers, submarines and aircraft carriers, with an American general supervising the landings from a Costa Rica base. (Complete story on Page 2, Part 1.)

RECHIMANN RECORDING SEES DOOM — Adolf Eichmann portrayed himself in tape-recorded testimony as a doomed man who should have hanged himself for the mass slaughter of Jews in Hitler's Nazi reign. (Stories on Pages 5 and 11, Part 1.)

GENEVA CONFERENCE — The United States is considering whether to seek a suspension of the molasses trade with Cuba if the current deadlock in the molasses trade conference continues. (Complete story on Page 2, Part 1.)

MOBUTU CLAIMS CONGO BACKING — Gen. Mobutu claimed rebel soldiers of the Bakwile regime now recognize him as commander-in-chief of the entire Congo army. (Complete story on Page 9, Part 1.)

ALBANIAN EXECUTIONS REPORTED — Reports out of Albania said Communist strongman Enver Hoxha had had 60 political rivals executed in his bid to retain control. (Complete story on Page 14, Part 1.)

THE NATION

MORE AID FOR LADS — The Lashan government called for more foreign aid to fighting anti-Communist rebels and got an immediate promise that the United States will send uniformed military advisers into Cuba soon. (Complete story on Page 2, Part 1.)

BROWN CONFIDENT — Gov. Brown said in Washington that he doesn't know and doesn't care if Richard Nixon seeks the California governorship. He said a "Daisy" will win anyway. (Complete story on Page 2, Part 1.)

KENNEDY'S GUESS — President Kennedy ordered an all-out effort to give the Free World high prestige through aid after hearing talk by Premier Khrushchev. (Complete story on Page 2, Part 1.)

NEWS SUPPRESSION DENIED — Presidential Press Secretary Salinger denied the Kennedy Administration suppresses news. (Complete story on Page 4, Part 1.)

THE CITY AND THE STATE

DOPE MEASURE APPROVED — The Assembly Public Health Committee approved a stiff narcotics penalty bill after inserting two amendments supported by Los Angeles County supervisors to make it even tougher on dope peddlers. (Complete story on Page 4, Part 1.)

GARY COOPER GRAVELLY ILL — Gary Cooper, who has undergone surgery twice in the last year, is reported to be gravely ill and bedridden in his Bel-Air home. (Complete story on Page 1, Part 1.)

CITY PAY RAISES — City employee representatives met with members of the City Council to outline steps to take in asking higher wages. Randberg assumed the Fire and Police League of his ill on 11th hour. (Complete story on Page 1, Part 1.)

Navy Cruise Called Off by Kennedy

BY DON SHANNON

Times Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — President Kennedy canceled his scheduled cruise about a giant aircraft carrier off the coast of Florida this weekend as the Cuban crisis deepened.

At the same time, the White House announced a cabinet meeting today. This will be only the fourth time that the top officers of the administration have been called together.

Later, it was disclosed that President Kennedy's lunch address at 11 a.m. (PT) today before the American Society of Newspaper Editors will be on the Cuban crisis and that it will be carried on NBC-TV and the ABC, CBS, Mutual and KRCR radio networks.



FAMILY OF EXECUTED MAN—Members of family of American businessman Howard Anderson assemble in home at Miami shortly after hearing of his execution by Castro firing squad at Havana. They are, from left, sons, Marc, 11, and Gary, 15; Mrs. Anderson, and Anderson's mother, Mrs. Lufema Anderson.

Schedule Delayed

The President was to have boarded the superliner

Independence Saturday for an overnight cruise to witness

maneuvers by a task force of 14 ships. Following the

change in Mr. Kennedy's plans, the Navy called off the

Pres. secretary J. Edgar Hoover called the Cuban

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husband, Mrs. Howard Anderson said, "my husband

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McNair Jr., 22, was executed Tuesday night in Pinar

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Rebel Boats Sunk, Other Invaders Trapped, Radio Says

MIAMI (AP) — The Cuban government claimed early today to have crushed an anti-Castro invasion "in less than 72 hours."

The Cuban statement, heard in Miami, said that both government forces and rebels had suffered heavy casualties. It said some of the rebels tried to flee the island but were stopped by government aircraft which sank their boats.

The communique signed by Fidel Castro also said that the remainder of the invading force was trapped in a swamp and could not escape. The announcement said that the last rebel position, at Playa Giron, was overrun at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Nine hours elapsed before the official announcement was made at 2:30 a.m. today. It was first heard here at 5:25. No explanation was given for the delay.

Earlier Report Differs

The communique was in sharp contrast to one issued late Wednesday night in New York City by spokesmen for the insurgent Revolutionary Council. The council said the major part of rebel forces landing in Cuba

Other Cuba news, pictures, Page 2, 13, 21, 22, 24, P. 1.

Victim's Widow

Says Castro Ignored Plea

MIAMI — "I know

that my husband was innocent. I prayed

for his life, but the Chief Executive

of the United States ignored my plea."

Sparking quietly to news

press secretary J. Edgar Hoover called the Cuban

President's "dilemma" at the inquests had executed her

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U.S. Protests Killing of 2 Americans in Cuba

Executions Called Violation of Justice Practiced by Civilized Nations of World

WASHINGTON (UPI)—The United States Wednesday protested Cuba's execution of two Americans as a

violation of the elementary rules of justice practiced by the civilized nations of the world.

The State Department said it was doing its best to

obtain information about the

executions of other Americans

including newsmen Hunt were charged with "spionage

for the United States." McNair, international and Robert

along with five Cubans who

heretics of the American

press

Appeal to Berlin

The department said it

was asking the Berlin go-

vernment, which represents

U.S. interests in Cuba, to

protest the executions early

Wednesday of Howard P.

Anderson, 22, and Robert

McNair Jr., 22, who were

executed Tuesday night in

Pinar del Rio in charges of

arming the Cuban radio and

Howard P. Anderson, Jr., son

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had reached a goal in the Escambray Mountains, and

credited this to a successful fight by other units against

Castro tanks, artillery and aircraft.

The Havana broadcast today claimed the capture of

"a large quantity of arms of North American make, in-

cluding a number of heavy Sherman tanks."

The communique was the first statement over Fidel

Castro's signature to be made public in three days. His

last previous statement was broadcast shortly after

midnight Tuesday.

Statement Says U.S.

Castro's statement said that the government troops

"destroyed in less than 72 hours the army which was

organized during many months by the imperialist gov-

ernment of the United States."

The broadcasts said that the revolutionary (Castro)

army and militia had pressed the invaders "without

showing any mercy" and had suffered heavy casualties. No figures

were given.

The official announcement promised additional details

"within the next few hours." It said that no complete

report would be given until the situation was completely

clarified.

At this point, no matter

what the official statement said, it was clear that the

invaders had been defeated.

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At this point, no matter

The Bay of Pigs Invasion (1961)

President John F. Kennedy's advisors failed to question a poorly planned invasion of Cuba, leading to a humiliating military defeat.





+87%

Decision Making



+60%

Boosted
Results



+20%

Increased
Innovation



+30%

Reduced
Risk

Sources:

Slide by Nancy Doyle – The Genius Within

(1) Bain & Company, HBR: The Decision Driven Organisation

(2) Harvard Business Review: Why Diverse Teams are Smarter

(3) McKinsey & Company “Diversity Wins”

(4) Accenture: Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage

(5) Deloitte: The Diversity & Inclusion Revolution: eight powerful truths

“Different kinds of minds working together create much stronger teams than cognitively homogenous groups.

When all kinds of minds are valued and there is a strong foundation of trust and psychological safety, the potential for innovation is ripe.”







PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Psychological Safety

1. **Foster a Culture of Respect & Understanding**
2. **Encourage Open Communication & Flexible Participation**
3. **Create a Low-Sensory, Flexible Work Environment**
4. **Embrace Strengths-Based Collaboration**
5. **Model Psychological Safety as a Leader**
6. **Implement Clear, Inclusive Policies**

Thank You!

YouTube:
bit.ly/myneurodivergentbrain

