

**Research Proposal for 6th Annual
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TITLE

“Adopting black dogs: the lived experiences of corporate neurodiversity program leaders and the business case for neurodiversity at work”

ABSTRACT

Black Dog Syndrome is a term used to describe the observed phenomenon wherein black dogs in animal shelters tend to be adopted at a significantly lower rate compared to dogs of other colors. This phenomenon has been attributed to various factors, including cultural superstitions, negative portrayals in media, and the belief that black dogs are more aggressive. This research proposal outlines a study that draws a parallel between Black Dog Syndrome and the employment challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals, highlighting potential systemic barriers and biases that contribute to their underrepresentation in the workforce.

BACKGROUND

The lack of employment opportunities for neurodivergent individuals can be attributed to several factors, such as societal misconceptions, stigmatization, and a lack of accommodations in the workplace. Neurodivergent individuals, including those with autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, often face significant barriers in finding and maintaining employment due to discrimination and a lack of understanding regarding their unique abilities and needs. Similar to the biases that contribute to Black Dog Syndrome, these systemic obstacles can be traced back to unfounded stereotypes, negative portrayals in media, and societal expectations that place undue emphasis on conformity and adherence to neurotypical norms.

The disparities in employment opportunities for neurodivergent individuals can be further exacerbated by a general lack of resources and support structures. This is analogous to the limited adoption rates of black dogs, which may be hindered by insufficient visibility and promotion in adoption campaigns. Similarly, inadequate representation of neurodivergent individuals in the

workforce can perpetuate stereotypes and hinder the implementation of inclusive practices that would facilitate their integration.

To address the systemic barriers faced by neurodivergent individuals in the employment sector, concerted efforts have been made to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and promote inclusive practices. In recent years, firms have dedicated significant resources to developing neurodiversity programs. The objectives of such neurodiversity programs often include:

- Creating education and training programs for employers to better understand the unique strengths and needs of neurodivergent employees, fostering a more inclusive work environment.
- Increasing representation of neurodivergent employees in the workforce to challenge stereotypes and promote positive portrayals.
- Implementing targeted recruitment strategies and support networks to facilitate the hiring and retention of neurodivergent employees.
- Developing tailored accommodations and adjustments to workplace policies and practices to account for the diverse needs of neurodivergent employees.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

To better understand neurodiversity programs, this study will examine the lived experiences of neurodiversity program leaders at publicly traded companies in the United States. By doing so, it attempts to answer the following research question: what are the lived experiences of corporate neurodiversity program leaders and how do they make sense of those experiences? To conduct the study and answer this research question, I will interview 10 neurodiversity program leaders virtually (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet) using a semi-structured format with open-ended questions. Interview questions will include:

1. Could you please give me a brief history of the neurodiversity program from when it started to where it is now?
2. In what ways is the neurodiversity program similar or different to other neurodiversity programs?
3. How has the neurodiversity program impacted organizational performance?
4. What are your best practices for leading the neurodiversity program?
5. What are some of the successes you've had with the neurodiversity program?
6. What are some of the challenges you've had with the neurodiversity program?
7. Can you describe a typical day at work?
8. What does leading the neurodiversity program mean to you?
9. How does leading the neurodiversity program make you feel?
10. In what ways has leading the neurodiversity program impacted you?
11. In general, what types of considerations should companies think about when it comes to neurodiversity programs?
12. What advice would you give to a company that wants to create a neurodiversity program?
13. What is your hope for the future of the neurodiversity program?
14. If you could paint a picture of the neurodiversity program, what would it look like?

- Please be specific. Describe in detail the adjectives, nouns, subjects, shapes, colors, textures, patterns, artistic styles, moods, emotions, images that come to mind.
- An illustration of [subject] (person, place, thing) with [details] (colors, shapes, sizes, textures, patterns) in [artistic style] (abstract, minimalist, surrealist, cubism) with [composition] (resolution, lighting style, aspect ratio, camera view).
- If you could choose any famous artist (living or deceased) to paint this picture, who would it be?

The neurodiversity program leaders will be asked to share their thoughts, perceptions, feelings, decision-making, and activities related to managing their neurodiversity programs. After all the interviews are completed, I will analyze the interviews to identify similarities, differences, themes, and key takeaways. A synthesized write-up of the interviews and analysis will be published as a book. The findings will also be published in an academic journal, presented at academic conferences, and shared on social media.

CONCLUSION

Black Dog Syndrome serves as a valuable lens through which both practitioners and scholars alike can better understand the systemic barriers that impede the employment opportunities and success of neurodivergent individuals. By addressing the root causes of these disparities and implementing targeted interventions, firms can work towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable workforce that recognizes and values the unique contributions of all individuals, irrespective of their genetic makeup.

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