

# Dandelion Principle: Redesigning Work

*Organizations can utilize human limitations by redesigning work to handle the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

People with 'autism' spectrum are generally unemployable because of certain human limitations and neurologically different behavior. 'Autism' is defined as a developmental disorder with "impairment of the ability to communicate with others" and "preoccupation with repetitive activities of restricted focus". But SAP AG, multinational software giant has set a target to hire 1% of their workforce with 'autism' by 2020. The reason behind the decision was a belief that people who think differently will be ready to take up big challenges. This emerging management principle was called by them as "the dandelion principle".

*The inspiration for this change was a Danish consulting company Specialisterne where 75% of its skilled employees were recruited with autism spectrum disorder as their abilities matched with software requirements. Their claim was based on the following observations:*

- *Employees with autism were tolerant, able to focus and capable of taking up repetitive and detailed work*
- *They do not interact much and generally work in solitary tasks*
- *They have abilities to perform certain information technology tasks*

*Specialisterne assigned special jobs to them that aligned with their individual abilities and tendencies to add significant value to organization and to achieve better results. Inspired by Specialisterne, Passwerk in Belgium, Auticon in Germany and Aspiritech in the United States implemented similar strategies.*

## **Why name dandelion?**

They named the principle as dandelion because though dandelion is considered a weed, it has got many positive characteristics such as:

- Roots can be used to make coffee substitute
- Leaves can be used in making soups
- They are sources of calcium, potassium, iron and manganese
- They are full of vitamins A,C,E,K, riboflavin and beta-carotene
- Moreover, research is being carried out to see whether roots can be used to check cancer potential

Organizations that employed people with human limitations were able to achieve value by generating opportunities for the untapped talent that people with different abilities possess. It helped them to harness their peculiarities for innovations and to attain competitive advantage to survive in an innovative economy.

Human beings have certain physical and psychological limits beyond which they cannot change themselves. It also leaves the person in a state of confusion and he/she might commit several mistakes while processing the data. As a result, the person's work might be ineffective. Though people make efforts to achieve perfection in their work, it is not easy to completely overcome these limitations. Organizations can design tasks in such a way that they can transform human limitations in productive ways.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What do you understand by Dandelion principle?  
(**Hints:** people who think differently take up challenges- Dandelion, a weed has many strong points- people with limitations use their untapped talent and are innovative)
2. How can organizations transform human limitations in productive ways, by giving examples?  
(**Hints:** Specialisterne employed people with autism-used them in software which requires repetitive actions- assigned special jobs)

*Source: Robert D. Austin and Thorkil Sonne, The Dandelion Principle: Redesigning Work for the Innovation Economy, MIT Sloan Management Review, May 19, 2014*