In this latest instalment of "Our Stories" our Founding Director Oliver Fenghour talks with Tim Ringo SAP SuccessFactors, Vice President, Europe Middle East & Africa about the business benefits of employing Autistic talent into organisations and what other industries can learn from the tech sector.

OF Why is it important for organizations to have a clear Diversity & Inclusion Strategy?

TR: From my perspective it goes beyond corporate social responsibility and being seen as an inclusive employer. It actually comes down to productivity and engagement. I mean when you have a diverse workforce both in terms of gender, ethnicity or neurodiversity there's a whole pool of talent in there that you can draw on. That can create more productivity, more engagement in the organisation. It has been shown that a mix of these types of skills from a diverse workforce creates better quality decision-making, better outcomes and that's where the productivity comes from. So, it goes beyond being just a corporate social responsibility employer and actually shows that this is a good business decision.

OF What can organisations learn from SAP's Autism workplace strategy?

TR: I think it has been really good to start to raise awareness certainly across the software industry but I think it is starting to go across industries. I think the thing that really helps us is we are starting to tap into a pool of talent that that we wouldn't have had otherwise if we didn't have the programme and I think that is the main benefit of our programme. I think other organisations are starting to look at what we do and are thinking we need to do this too. Again, following on from your earlier question it isn't just about corporate social responsibility. It's actually there is something in it for the business and there is something in it for the workforce and I think those are the two things that are really important.

OF In your opinion how can other organisations follow the example of the tech sector in identifying and employing autistic talent into their businesses'?

TR: I wouldn't necessarily describe the tech sector as a beacon of being a great example. I think at this moment in time it seems that tech organisations are more open to different models of

human capital. So, at the moment they are looking at different way to flatten the organisation and create processes that reduce organisational drag. So, I think to a certain extent the software industry is leading the way in looking at how organisations manage people and how they manage talent differently. I think that is something when you look at the best companies such as Verizon, Google, Netflix and SAP they are all successful in how they manage talent in their organisations. So, it seems to be a natural fit for our businesses' because we need innovation and we need to think about new ways of doing things to compete.

OF What do you see as the business benefits of employing autistic people into organisations?

TR: I think that it is about adding new talent. Personally, the one specific thing I have seen by bringing people with different brains in is it gives you opportunities to tap into things that nobody else would have thought of. Such as new products and services that you wouldn't have had if you didn't have people like that who were looking at things differently. You would kind of be going down similar tracks you have always gone down and if you have somebody in there who says, "well hang on a minute what about this?" or "what about that?". Neurodiverse conditions bring different ways of thinking into organisations as those with the condition(s) they see things that neuro-typical people don't and that is hugely beneficial.

OF In your view why is it essential that colleagues of autistic employees have autism awareness training?

TR: Well I think it is critical because generally when you have a team you all as a team should understand each other's quirks, each other's motivations, where your coming from. I spend a lot of time with my teams regardless of what personal experiences and conditions they have. So, we all need to know where we are coming from. So, that when we get into conflict or we get into situations where we have different opinions on how to do a job. Stepping back as a team and saying lets all understand our differences. So, when you take that to people who are neuro-diverse its another level. I think when you take a team and you have one person who is neuro-diverse in that team and they say look I have this particular condition. If the manager doesn't tell the other colleagues then the other colleagues aren't going to know where they are coming from in certain instances and then they are not going to know how to react to that. So, I think everybody being upfront about their personal experiences, their background and if they have neuro-diverse conditions being upfront about that makes a huge difference. People will know ok I know where you are coming from, when they might see something different to what they are used to but I think that applies generally to a team, specifically if somebody is neuro-diverse its important to be honest and open with the team. Then as a leader it is my job to make sure that people understand that we need to be open and accepting to this because fact is that's what makes good teams. Diversity whether it is neuro-diversity or any other kind of diversity is good and it should be seen in that context and not as something special. We all have our diverse traits and characteristics but it is really important for colleagues to know that they have a neuro-diverse colleague and I would encourage the neuro-diverse colleague to be upfront about their condition.