Capstone Project:

Quality Improvement for the Autism2Work Initiative at Computer Aid, Inc.

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Acknowledgments

I received immense support throughout this process. I want to say to those not named directly; I appreciate everyone who saw me through the last three years.

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This project is for you.

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Capstone Proposal:

Quality Improvement in Autism2Work Initiative at CAI

Executive Summary

To increase the number of fully employed neurodivergent people in the US, many Fortune 500 companies have started in-house autism initiatives or contracted specialized teams from other companies. Computer Aid Inc. (CAI) is one of the leaders within these contracting companies in the information technology sphere. This capstone project explores the goals and practices of CAI's job readiness training (JRT) function within their Austims2Work (A2W) initiative. The primary purpose of this capstone project is to examine the goals of the JRT, with the secondary goal of investigating the affordances within the JRT portion of the A2W program.

CAI places ASN employees with a neurotypical team lead who holds an Autism Certification from the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES, 2021). The term neurodivergent or neurodivergence focuses on the idea that some brains function differently from what is considered neurotypical or the normed function of the human brain. Within these societal expectations, a neurodivergent person may behave in ways deemed out of the norm due to the different ways they process and respond to information and external stimuli (Uljarevic and Hamilton, 2013). This project focuses solely on the JRT portion of the various ongoing supports CAI offers its employees. The JRT is one of several affordances granted to ASN trainees and employees at CAI and occurs within the first half of a potential employee's interactions with CAI staff. CAI defines the JRT as a weeklong (eight-day) interview event containing meet and greets, onboarding, and various training activities. This training occurs after recruitment, application, and admission but before decisions about retention and placement.

Research Questions

1. What are the primary and secondary goals of CAI's job readiness training (JRT)?
2. What practices organize participation in CAI's job readiness training (JRT)?
3. To what extent are there affordances made available during the JRT for the neurodivergent training participants that align with the observed primary and secondary goals?

Findings

Finding One. Based on my observations of the eight-day JRT, the primary goal of the training is to assess potential employees for job readiness through a series of tasks and interactions. The secondary goal of the training is to modify behaviors toward working within a professional, agile team-based system using the scrum framework and agile approach for information technology teams.

Finding Two. Over eight days, the participants engaged in a variety of activities to assess their job readiness and modify behaviors toward a professional, team-based setting using the agile approach and scrum framework for information technology teams. Such participation requires trainees to show up each day at the specified time, interact in a professional setting and manner, and engage with potential coworkers in an agile team-based system using the scrum framework. The facilitators assessed participants throughout the eight-day training period for their professional skills and level of preparedness for the job.

Finding Three. The trainer and staff used a series of measurably proficient pedagogical practices to engage the trainees in activities focused on development outcomes using a variety of affordances, such as video-based training modules, peer modeling, group interactions, share out sessions, and cascading affordance building where necessary.

Recommendations

Recommendation One. The JRT is an excellent approach for this type of training; All methods align with the prevailing literature's recommendations and findings. If CAI were to continue on this course, they would serve their trainees well in doing so.

Recommendation Two. As CAI considers moving back to in-person JRT sessions, I recommend keeping some of the sessions in the online space so the participants can learn how to engage successfully in that remote work environment.

Recommendation Three. My third recommendation focuses on expanding lessons in professional development and emotional intelligence. I recommend doing so by cutting back on or removing the DO-IT profiler. The work of this profiler could be done in part through ABI observations during the training.

Recommendation Four. Lastly, and somewhat out of the project's scope, I recommend adding an abridged version of the JRT for all potential new CAI employees. It appears worth the time to run a cost-benefit analysis on a shortened version of the JRT in place of a more traditional interviewing and onboarding process.

Introduction

The partner organization is Computer Aid Inc. (CAI), specifically employees who manage the organization's Autism2Work (A2W) initiative. The observations for this project were conducted via synchronous Zoom sessions over eight days in June 2021. The documents reviewed were retrieved from www.cai.io between June and September 2021. These public relations documents include CAI's Autism2Work program, published participant interviews, and published articles about the program. I retrieved three publicly viewable webinar sessions during September and October 2021. The transcripts from these webinars triangulate and affirm information from the interview articles among the PR materials.

This project focuses on CAI's job readiness training (JRT) at the beginning of the hiring process for autism spectrum neurodivergent (ASN) applicants. This capstone project explores if the JRT is meeting the predetermined goals of the training and if these goals meet the needs of the ASN participants. The A2W program focuses on "helping people reach their true potential" (CAI, 2021a). The firm's literature states that "By managing the lifecycle of talent acquisition, training, cultural integration, supervision, skill development, and ongoing performance of the A2W teams, CAI can help you reap the many benefits of diversity" (2021a). CAI defines the JRT as a weeklong (eight-day) interview event containing meet and greets, onboarding, and various training activities. The JRT is part of their talent acquisition, training, and cultural integration modules within the initiative. This training occurs after recruitment and application but before decisions about retention and placement.

The JRT is one piece of a much larger set of accommodations afforded to ASN trainees and employees working at or placed by CAI. The organization belongs to the White House's Autism Roundtable, which "aims to maximize the quality of life of those with ASD" (IHS,

2021). Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is defined as “a lifelong state of being that influences an individual’s social interaction and communication styles” and “marked impairments in the use of facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction” (Kapp & Sarrett, 2019, p. 588; Uljarevic and Hamilton, 2012, p. 1517). While the US government continues to use the term ASD, or autism spectrum disorder, the autism community is moving away from this term due to the negative connotation of the term disorder. Additionally, this term excludes those without a diagnosis, who are in many cases the most underserved and underrepresented members of this community. Until recently, many self-diagnosed people used “Asperger syndrome” (Jordan and Caldwell-Harris, 2012, p. 399). In recent years, the use of Asperger syndrome fell out of fashion due to its connection to the Nazi colluder, Hans Asperger (Czech, 2018). I use the designation of ASN throughout this project unless quoting a source that relies on other terminology as a way to honor the ever-changing nature of scientific discovery, the continuing movement away from designating neurodivergence as a disability or disorder, and the wishes of those who identify as ASN. I also wish to include those who fall into the categories of either self- or misdiagnosed.

In the United States, ASN persons “experience high rates of unemployment and underemployment in relation to adults with other disabilities and the general population” (Ohl et al., 2017, p. 345). Additionally, of those ASN persons, those who “disclosed their ASD diagnosis to their employer were more than three times as likely to be employed than those who did not disclose” (Ohl et al., 2017, p. 345). While gainful employment is not the only way to measure the quality of life, it is one element that allows us to pursue other areas of fulfillment. Autism behavior indexing (ABI) and applied behavior analysis (ABA) training are used from early childhood education through employment training as a means of integrating ASN persons into

the larger body of normative culture (Bangerter et al., 2017; Ohl et al., 2017). For some ASN persons, on-the-job or pre-employment training sessions may be their first experiences with behavioral modification training if they were not diagnosed with ASD in childhood or early adulthood. CAI's A2W initiative relies on various behavioral modification approaches within their training.

For this capstone project, I explored the meaning and use of affordances within CAI's JRT. The purpose of this capstone project is to examine the goals of the JRT, with secondary goals of potentially improving the overall A2W program processes and outcomes.

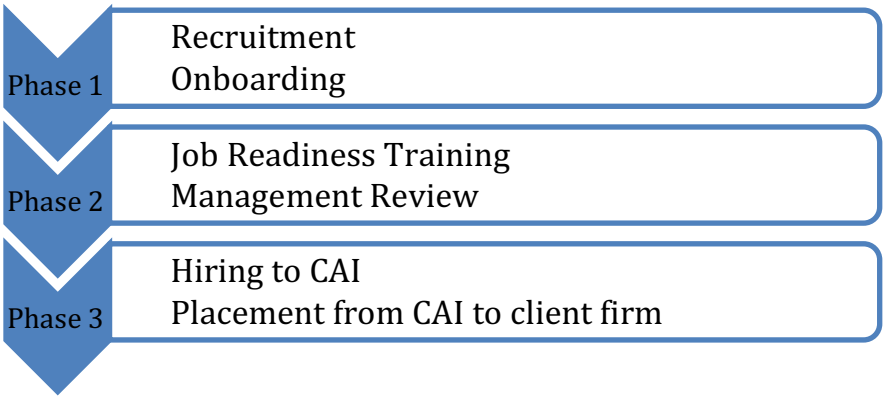
Organization Context

CAI is a business-to-business (B2B) solutions company. According to their website page, *Who We Are,* "CAI is committed to being purpose-driven, prioritizing client success, employee well-being and serving the community" (2021a, p.1). This broad statement does not directly mention the firm focus, which is to provide technological solutions, including experts in information technology and strategic consulting. This capstone project explores the A2W initiative at the firm, which provides an affordance-driven onboarding and training process for prospective ASN employees. The main project stakeholders are the A2W management team. This team includes managers, educators, technology experts, and salespersons. This team specializes in workforce augmentation and support by building teams of ASN employees with an IBCCES certified neurotypical team lead. Various firms leverage these teams, including government agencies, Fortune 50 companies, and educational institutions. In some cases, the firms launch in-house autism initiatives and, in turn, create training plans and affordance structures to accommodate the needs of new, internal hires.

Employees at CAI speak passionately about the A2W initiative. Many of the employees who aided my work have someone in their lives for whom they champion this work, whether it be a family member or a friend. Although I do not want to speak in broad generalisms, I often find that when I meet others doing this type of work, they are either involved as someone directly impacted or doing the work in memory of or on behalf of someone they love. (I am no exception to this statement.) In a recent CAI webinar on "Get Started Building a Neurodiverse and Inclusive Workforce," the moderator stated that "leading companies are finding that individuals on the autism spectrum can spur innovation and provide the talent that they're looking for" (qtd. in Michael, 2021, 3:11).

Although this project focuses on the in-house training portion of the initiative, there are many moving parts. These other parts include but are not limited to talent recruitment and acquisition, onboarding and training for ASN employees, educating outside firms on how to integrate an A2W team successfully, managing expectations at all levels of interactions, training and certifying neurotypical team leads and managers, human resource management, B2B sales, and educating firms on driving cultural change. Additionally, CAI touts a high level of placement success, mainly when speaking about their A2W teams.

Computer Aid Inc's Autism2Work Phases as a System Flowchart:



For my part, I am a professor at a university with one of the top-rated student autism initiatives in the United States. Companies such as CAI recruit applicants from our pool of graduates. These students often move from our program to job-readiness or corporate training. In the case of CAI, our university works closely with this and other firms that are serviced by or have in-house programs based on A2W. Our university also has representation at the White House Roundtable on Autism. I teach each summer in a college readiness program for our autism initiative (CREATE), often working with and advising students who may attend programs such as CAI's JRT after graduation. As the department chair, I work closely with the university's autism initiative to improve outcomes for our students during and after their time in our program.

Computer Aid Inc. (CAI) is home to the Autism2Work (A2W) initiative. According to my team at the partner firm, the employees within the program self-identify as living with autism spectrum disorder, autism spectrum condition, or autism spectrum neurodivergence. This project used the acronym ASN for autism spectrum neurodivergence/neurodivergent to simplify the approach. Potential CAI ASN employees participate in specialized activities beginning with the recruitment phase lasting throughout their employment. CAI provides ASN employees with an IBCCES certified neurotypical (NT) support system within their working cohort. Neurotypical is a designation for persons who are considered normative within fundamental ideals surrounding behavioral and cognitive functions. Most people who do not identify in any neurological or cognitive way are considered neurotypical. CAI's ASN employees have a higher success rate than their peers not employed within such a support system (Hendricks and Wehman, 2009). Aside from the provided aid through the A2W program, ASN employees are better supported and better understood at workplaces with such initiatives because the managers and support staff are better educated and better supported to aid these employees (Hendricks and Wehman, 2009).

For example, staff members are aware of behaviors and speak with ASN employees about work etiquette or timeliness. Other workers watch for warning signs and reach out to A2W staff if an employee is displaying high-risk behavior (eating alone, shouting at others, or various other forms of reacting to overstimulation or stressors). Affordances such as quiet or temperate workstations may reduce behavioral issues related to ASN. I discuss the numerous ways such aids benefit ASN employees within the findings.

Problem (Focus) of Practice

As one of the leaders in autism initiatives, Computer Aid Inc. (CAI) continually improves its Autism2Work (A2W) program goals and outcomes. CAI's job readiness training (JRT) falls near the beginning of the hiring process for ASN applicants. Recruitment, initial interactions, and LMS onboarding occur before the JRT. This capstone project explores whether the JRT is meeting its predetermined goals and if these goals and accompanying affordances meet the needs of the ASN participants. I am passionate about how communication impacts underserved communities, particularly those with what we often call invisible differences. This capstone project focuses on improving the existing training rather than seeking out a specific problem within the training model. Not all companies offer the affordances of an autism initiative for job readiness within the normative corporate hiring structure. Evidence in the literature and the data collected herein suggests that these initiatives, when offered, improve job readiness and successful integration into the workforce for ASN employees.

CAI participates in the White House Roundtable on Autism and continually improves its autism initiative. This particular focus is vital because it impacts a growing number of people categorized as ASN worldwide. Most ASN persons are either unemployed or underemployed, which directly affects the quality of life, autonomy, fulfillment. We risk excluding a growing

proportion of our population to everyone's detriment if we do not address the problem of under- and unemployment at a national scale. While CAI's program directly integrates self-identified ASN persons, not all companies participate in or understand the affordances necessary to do this work. A greater understanding of the ASN population is essential to promote and increase such training throughout the United States and beyond.

Positionality

I am a strategic communication specialist and a faculty member who works closely with ASN students. My interests in this work are personal and professional. I wish to advance this work for friends who were left behind and are still underserved by the normative structures within our capitalist system. On a professional level, I see neurodivergence as a gateway to human evolution, mainly through the lens of interpersonal communication. Within this body of work, the agreement with CAI limited my access, particularly around the LMS and group project content they consider proprietary. During my research, I observed the JRT but not the LMS or group project presentations. During the creation of this capstone, the COVID-19 pandemic limited my access to the trainees, which limited the data collection and analysis scope. In turn, I am relying on PR materials and webinars to supplement the voices I could not capture in this process. I completed this capstone with an eye on the future, and I consider this work a slice of a much larger body of work that will continue after completing my doctoral work.

Literature Review

This literature review focuses on peer-reviewed studies and meta-analyses regarding ASN-focused educational and behavioral interventions. I will unpack approaches directly tied to those used within the JRT. From a theoretical standpoint, the affordances built into CAI's JRT are sound and supported by evidence-based practices within the field. The review focuses on

how and why these practices work and establishing benchmarks for norming the work. Additionally, the conceptual framework leans on care ethics, ecology systems, and management theories and frames. The literature touches on these theories and frames as they appear within and pertain to the literature.

A close review of meta-analyses and peer-reviewed studies brought to light concerns over evidence-based practice for ASN interventions, both social and intellectual (Wang & Spillane, 2009; Hong et al., 2017). Once No Child Left Behind (2004) required classroom interventions to be evidence-based practices, the increase in similarly conducted studies began in earnest. Within this literature review, such studies surrounding ASN persons appear more prevalent in the past decade than any time prior. Due to this shift, the meta-analyses published in 2009 and later demonstrate greater credibility for improved effectiveness in practice. There are limitations to the research focused on employees and professional life. For this reason, the literature herein includes both works focused on postsecondary students through adults. When necessary, some work includes younger students, but I made every attempt to find studies focusing on persons at least 18 years or older since they are the target population.

When considering credibility and justification for inclusion, a consensus emerged across the reviewed literature: Publications of insignificant or limited findings are necessary to balance the analysis to remove publication bias. Uljarevic and Hamilton (2013) best describe the issue:

> Publication of null effects tends to be harder than publication of positive results, and it is plausible that studies with small groups and null findings (or better performance in the autism group) remain hidden in university filing cabinets around the world (p. 1522).

One must consider the absence of such findings as a hindrance to progress overall. For example, Van Heist and Geurts (2015) conducted “Study 2” within their meta-analysis to cover the

underrepresented elderly ASN population for a complete meta-analysis. While this study does not focus on my target population, it exemplifies the need for balanced and holistic approaches to research, including age ranges, intellectual co-morbidities/levels, sexual orientations, and nominal/null study results to see the complete picture. I intend to pursue and qualify various studies within this project that address diverse ASN populations.

Across this literature review, the following themes emerged: Self-identification as a positive approach to improved interventions, video modeling and neurotypical peers as social motivation and behavioral change agents, various peer types as necessary allies, and groups as essential solution drivers and change agents. Each of these themes exists within CAI's JRT program to varying degrees. This review focuses on these elements. The order focuses on the primary positive behavior before moving onto the best represented and correlated remediation elements/change agents. Some findings and recommendations focus on the implementation or level of usage of one or more elements within this review.

Self-Identification

Self-identification is the primary way people with ASN can seek guidance and help during their college and professional careers (Hong et al., 2017). In this way, many ASN employees who do not self-identify engage with normative human resource supports rather than autism initiative supports. In the case of the CAI JRT, the potential employee must self-identify to enter the A2W program. Self-identification acts as the gatekeeper to the affordances of the JRT. According to Kapp & Sarrett (2019):

> There are vast efforts to develop and disseminate methods to identify autism at earlier and earlier ages; currently, children can be reliably and stably diagnosed as early as their toddler years. Meanwhile, there is little effort put into developing reliable and accessible

> methods to diagnose adults. This situation has led to efforts by some in the adult autistic community to self-diagnose (p. 588).

This phenomenon of self-diagnosis in the adult community led to the use of the term ASN rather than ASD. Despite the different terminology people use to identify within the community, the need for self-identification remains the same. Further, "an adult diagnosis can result in workplace, social, and educational discrimination" (Kapp & Sarrett, 2019, p. 588). Autism initiatives aim to reduce the stigma and make affordances for those who may have either been misdiagnosed or went undiagnosed as children. The reasons for this lack of diagnosis vary. Still, they are often dependent on location, socio-economics, education, medical resource availability, gender, age, and in some cases, religious or political views. While "the benefits of disability disclosure are many (e.g., disclosure opens a line of communication between employers and their employees, allows for reasonable workplace accommodations, involves human resources)," self-identification is beneficial within the confines of a job with ASN supports in place (Ohl et al., 2017, p. 354; Kapp & Sarrett, 2019). As with many protections falling with the disability spectrum, employees may find themselves in heightened states of discrimination if their employer misunderstands their differences.

Video Modeling

Once employees self-identify as ASN, we can employ well-researched methodologies for implementing social and learning improvements. Several meta-analyses and journal articles surfaced video modeling as a highly successful solution to repairing or changing negative behaviors (Hong et al., 2017; Pecora, Mesibov, and Stokes, 2016; Post et al., 2012; Post et al., 2014; Wang, Cui, and Parrila, 2011). Professionals use video modeling to demonstrate negative and corrective behaviors based on normative social influence. As a tool, video modeling is best

utilized in conjunction with NT peer support, including but not limited to NT employees demonstrating behaviors with ASN employees in the videos. Such solutions allow employees with "ASD to imitate or to analyze inappropriate behaviors" (Post et al., 2012). In the case of the JRT, various NT employees interact with the ASN trainees synchronously and in conjunction with video modeling modules provided via a learning management system (LMS).

Such modeling is already at play across various corporate and university autism initiatives in multiple ways. Wang, Cui, and Parrila (2011) posit such interventions are "natural," particularly for younger children and adolescents. In a very telling fashion, Post et al. include video modeling interventions in their article regarding stalking behaviors in employees but not in the article focused on employees (2012; 2014). Such an omission feels intentional, particularly with all original authors involved in the secondary research. The literature offers video modeling as part of the solution, mainly when the aim is to improve emotional recognition and empathy (Kuder and Accardo, 2018; Koegel et al., 2018; Wang, Parrila, and Cui, 2013). Post et al.'s focus on human resource actions and law enforcement involvement suggests an escalation in approach at the very least, if not an unspoken tone of the resolution, which stands in contrast to the majority rule (2012; 2014). The goals focus on improving behavioral and learning outcomes before employees reach professional settings. Early intervention may solve such issues before they arise in the workplace. In the case of CAI, the video modeling builds normative systems of understanding workplace requirements before ASN trainees work on regulated group projects. This approach allows the JRT facilitators to modulate behaviors in real-time and for the trainees to return to the LMS modules for refreshers during the training period.

Peer Mentoring

Many sources consider NT peer-support paramount to successful social skill building for ASN persons. They suggest higher success outcomes for all approaches, including NT peers and group settings (Hong et al., 2017; Pecora, Mesibov and Stokes, 2016; Post et al., 2012; Wang and Spillane 2009; Wang, Cui and Parrila, 2011; Watkins et al., 2017). These considerations include in-person social interactions as well as video modeling interventions. During early meetings with CAI staff in 2020, the use of peers, specifically within their model, came up on multiple occasions and in various contexts. An NT person who is IBCCES certified leads an ASN and mediates relations between ASN employees and the employer sites and management. ASN-ASN peer mentoring occurs within the training on multiple levels, including verbal encouragement and teamwork throughout the training period.

Group Supports

The meta-analyses and peer-reviewed studies surface applied behavioral analysis techniques, particularly group SSI: GSSI (Kuder and Accardo, 2018; Ospina et al., 2008; Wang, Parrila, and Cui, 2013; Wolstencroft et al., 2018). Teaching ASN persons new skill sets is more successful in mixed NT-ASN group settings, although the learning can and does occur in ASN-dominated settings. The subject matter used in these training opportunities should focus on piquing the interest of the individuals in the NT-ASN target group. Jordan and Caldwell-Harris (2012) succinctly conclude, “Understanding special interests can lead to the development of educational and therapeutic programs that facilitate the acquisition of other important social and communication skills” for ASN employees. A need for such understanding pervades the literature.

Interestingly, all included literature concludes that age and gender are not practical factors when using GSSI built from peer groups. The success of knowledge transfer does not change with age and is affected by gender at a statistically insignificant rate. Such findings, particularly gender, were surprising since prevailing stereotypes list female ASN persons as more challenging to identify socially and males as challenging to teach non-verbal cuing. Sherlock et al. (2018) noted that reaching SRD happens at various intervals. It seems that other factors may contribute to efficacy and SRD. Kuder and Accardo (2018) frame another surprising finding: “while there is a growing research base on effective methods for meeting the challenges of college students with ASD, the results of the research thus far have been mixed and, in some cases, based on limited data.” It seems many programs’ claims of ASN-specific support are unsubstantiated or parallel to the support provided to employees with other cognitive and learning differences. Many programs may be missing the social motivation theory elements CAI incorporates.

Conceptual Framework

The epistemological framing is social constructivist and supports defining and identifying affordances within the training program that support participation in target practices. By affordances, I mean the things made available to the trainees to support their time in the training. These things can be additional support, software, and learning tools. The training is part of a more extensive development effort, which requires a shared social construct to function. The framing herein relies on Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model, which is a revision of his earlier Model of Ecological Systems Theory to situate the need for affordances such as those within Computer Aid, Inc’s (CAI) job readiness training (JRT) (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994). Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model situates the person at the center of a system of influence,

which allows me to conceptualize the type of relational interaction described above as an impact of the microsystem (training and trainer) upon the person at the center of the system (trainee) (see Appendix A). For the ASN trainee who is used to many impacts coming from the outer layers of the system, these more intimate interactions appear to create strong effects in removing limitations or barriers. If these interactions are positive and empowering in relation to the training goals, then the relational ethic model supports positive feedback within the bioecological model (Noddings, 2012; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994). Such positive feedback loops act as reciprocal care dialogues and reinforce within a positive human resource frame (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994, Noddings, 2012, Bolman and Deal, 2017). This conceptual framework also relies on care ethics as defined by Noddings (2012), the human resource frame as defined by Bolman and Deal (2017), and affordances within a relational ontology as defined by Evans et al. (2017) within the confines of communication technology and Greeno and Gresalfi (2008) within the confines of pedagogy.

Bolman and Deal's (2017) human resource frame will norm the work as the perception of how management theory functions when affordances such as the job readiness training are not available. According to this frame, the organization and employees need to be aligned to thrive; if either's needs are not met, one may exploit the other (Bolman and Deal, 2017). An observed goal within the training focuses on allowing the trainees to learn skills to align with their employee organization. In Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, this employee-employer relationship fits into the microsystem, influencing the employee's daily life. I pursued an examination of the training focused on both the training goals and the affordances and needs of the ASN trainees by aligning Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model with Bolman and Deal's human resource frame. Assumptions within this project rely on an understanding of norming

within the human resource frame (Bolman and Deal, 2017). Many assumptions about how companies should recruit, interview, train, and hire employees exist within the normative human resource models (Bolman and Deal, 2017). This project relies on the following assumptions within the human resource frame: 1.) organizations and people need each other, 2.) organizations exist to serve people and not the other way around, 3.) if the fit between organization and person is poor, then one or the other will engage in exploitation, and 4.) both suffer if the fit between organization and person is good, then both will excel through shared success.

As a "relational ethic," care ethics "are concerned with the caring relation" and "describe the roles of both carer and cared-for in establishing and maintaining that relation" (Noddings, 2012, p. 53). Noddings posits that without the response of the cared-for, "there is no caring relation, no matter how hard the carer worked at it" (2012, p. 53). I take up this framing as a relational rather than virtue ethic because the moral character of those involved is less important than the relationship between the carer and cared-for when it comes to relational affordances available to participants in the training under investigation. My goal is to make a value judgment regarding the affordances when they are part of a relational transaction between trainer and trainee (carer and cared-for, as it were) rather than the participants (managers, trainers, or trainees). Within this work, reciprocity is limited in definition to the one framed within Noddings' care ethics, which is "the mutual recognition and appreciation of response" (2012, p. 53). This definition allows for reciprocity to deepen the relational nature of the interactions and remove roles within the relationship. For example, if one of the trainees sees a trainer struggling with technology, they may share their knowledge to care for the trainer. If the trainer shows appreciation, the relational transaction ends, and the roles in that interaction reverse (trainee helping trainer), even if only for a brief time. This type of interaction allows both parties to learn

more about one another, grow in trust, and deepen their connection and understanding. In these terms, caring aids in the process of cascading affordances, where care is nested within a set of opportunities or potential next steps (Overhill, 2012). For example, let us consider the affordance of the LMS modules on professional development. If a trainee struggles to use the LMS (affordance), the trainer may help the trainee complete the module (carer; cascading affordance). If the trainee then responds by stating or showing they are grateful for the help, a reciprocal care relation has occurred.

To frame how and why the affordances given to ASN individuals in CAI's training exist, I am relying on Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994). This system of interaction with the person in question at the center argues:

> proximal processes as we have defined them are presumed to lead to particular kinds of developmental outcomes—those that represent the actualization of potentials for (a) differentiated perception and response; (b) directing and controlling one's own behavior; (c) coping successfully under stress; (d) acquiring knowledge and skill; (e) establishing and maintaining mutually rewarding relationships; and (f) modifying and constructing one's own physical, social, and symbolic environment (p. 568-569).

Proximal processes are the processes of systematic interaction between person and environment; therefore, the affordances enhance and support the person within the environment. Conceptually, these proximal processes, biologically defined as "mechanisms of organism-environment interaction," are the basis for normative behavioral development and are the areas wherein the skills of an ASN person may be lacking what is considered normative professional skills or appropriate behaviors (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994, p. 568; Bolman and Deal, 2017). Within these proximal processes lies the need for the affordances provided within job readiness training

and autism initiatives. For example, the affordance mentioned in the earlier example is the LMS modules wherein the trainee can acquire knowledge and skill in areas of professional development. Additionally, providing time during the training sessions for the trainees to complete the modules rather than assign them as work outside of the training is a cascading affordance.

I rely on care ethics to encapsulate relational affordances within the framing of the affordances available to participants. I wish to note that while some have viewed the work of care ethics, in particular, the writings of Gilligan and Noddings as essentialist, "Gilligan is very careful to note that this is just an association. The voice of care is not a female voice. It is simply a voice that is different [from] the voice of rational, impartial, decontextualized justice" (Heller, 2018, p. 262). Care ethics within the framing of this work does not include nor abide by the limitations of essentialism. Both Gilligan and Noddings have defended their binary exemplars within care ethics as non-essentialist. Yet, I would be remiss not to address the problematic nature of viewing any care framing as a binary (Heller, 2018). It is, however, important to include such work due to the relational nature of such training work. The relational nature of care ethics supports the cascading affordances within the training sessions.

Although I provided a cursory definition of affordances earlier, I wish to expand and constrain how I use affordances within this capstone project. In their "conceptual framework for understanding affordances in communication research," Evans et al. (2017) assert that:

> Because the attributes and abilities of users, the materiality of technologies, and the contexts of technology use are all potentially dynamic, the concept of affordances provides a framework to probe these relationships in different ways while retaining a relational ontology (and not privileging one aspect as deterministic of the others) (p. 36).

Since the training relies on teaching various communication technologies, I use the dialogic, discourse-driven definition of affordances to analyze these data. Affordances in computer-mediated communication (CMC) are relational, with a meaning beyond a generalized learning structure. For example, when Greeno and Gresalfi (2008) "say that an activity affords some aspect of participation for some individuals, we mean that it makes it relatively easy for those individuals to participate in that way" (p. 172). In communication and education, theorists agree that "Affordances…vary along a continuum" (Greeno and Gresalfi, 2008, p. 172) and provide a "continuous context for activity" (Evans et al., 2017, p. 42). The phrase *cascading affordance* captures this continuum when one affordance requires another affordance for the trainee to participate.

In their work regarding social affordances for ASN persons, Hellendoorn (2014) focuses on the concept of pick-up information and asserts:

> Since affordance perception is based on the pick-up of information, the explanation for the social-communicative impairments in ASD from an ecological perspective should be sought in differences in information pick-up between people with and without ASD and the cascading effects this will have for the interaction (p. 2).

Pick-up information is best defined as the perception and interpretation of what is presented, and the cascading effects can fall into two categories of either "One opportunity for action leads to another, with mounting effect" or "generating multiplying action possibilities" (Overhill, 2012, p. 2). In the case of cascading affordances necessary for the trainee to participate, the first definition is at work; In the case of other examples within the findings, particularly around the group work, the second definition is at work.

Research Questions

1. What are the primary and secondary goals of CAI's job readiness training (JRT)?
2. What practices organize participation in CAI's job readiness training (JRT)?
3. To what extent are there affordances made available during the JRT for the neurodivergent training participants that align with the observed primary and secondary goals the organization has for participants?

Project Design

Data Collection

This capstone project aims to improve ASN employees overall while improving holistic program success. The data within this project come from the job readiness training (JRT) observations, publicly available document review, and webinar sessions that were open to the public and included JRT participants and staff. Participants within the JRT were recruited by Computer Aid Inc. (CAI) for the training session and not explicitly for the study. As an improvement study, the goals do not include generalizability to the target population outside of the confines of CAI's initiative because the focus is to improve the training for CAI rather than generalize their initiative to other firms' initiatives.

CAI provided consent and restrictions regarding collecting information during the training, staff consented to be observed, and the trainees were informed of my presence but not asked individually for consent. While study participants knew the research focuses on autism initiatives, they were not privy to the study's full scope to reduce confirmation bias within the sample. Beneficence, or keeping the welfare of the participants as a goal, is paramount to this work because neurodivergent employees qualify as a vulnerable group. If I were to create additional stressors or problems for these employees, I would lose the research goals amidst what

might be gained by those stressors, notably if those stressors led to the need for additional cascading affordances.

I carefully reviewed the observation and coding instrumentation as necessary to improve reliability. In this way, peer mentorship and NT-ASN group support were included as separate variables to reduce the chance of one appearing to be the other. For clarification, peer mentorship can have ASN to ASN interactions, where the NT-ASN group support only focuses on an NT lead and two or more ASN trainees within a group setting. The data collection and coding were as unobtrusive as possible within the environment because I collected the observation and existing document data as part of the A2W program; therefore, I did not have to gather it through interviews or other forms from the subjects. I handled this collection carefully to reduce the alteration or influence of the study. While my presence may have created some minor modifications in behavior, those running the JRT noted no significant participant behavioral shifts from past JRT sessions held via the Zoom platform.

In my work with autism initiatives, one phrase is championed above all others: *Nothing about us without us* (ASAN, 2021). That phrase means that people who identify as part of the autism community demand a seat at any table where decisions about the community are made, including the White House Roundtable on Autism, where the CAI program originated. To this end, CAI initially agreed to include employees within the program to participate in the decision-making process for this investigation. Unfortunately, the agreement changed in spring 2021 when I requested to interview CAI participants. At that time, CAI's human resource department informed me the current workload did not allow time for the interviews and the challenge of making a paid representative or advocate present whenever interviewing an ASN employee. To include participants' voices in the project, I moved on to review the PR documents and webinar

transcripts. My future research in this area will consist of interviews with ASN employees. Still, for the sake of this project, the documents and webinars allowed some opportunities to triangulate and substantiate initial claims about this community initially drawn from my observations of the Job Readiness Training and conversations with program leadership.

Research of this nature is needed to codify best practices and constrain the definitions of housing an autism initiative with affordances rather than a disability accommodations tract. Such investigation requires an ethical approach to the interactions as the work could be intrusive at multiple phases. One of my goals was to collect data in the most discreet way possible, and the document and webinar reviews allowed me to review qualitative data directly engaging the subjects. I kept my camera off in the observations and did not engage the people I was observing. Still, future studies, including interviews or ethnographic research, must be cautious of this issue of obtrusion. Future studies should include implications and support for conducting intervention research for adult ASN populations at large.

I view the COVID-19 pandemic as a disruption and a limitation, which created the opportunity to test and explore new approaches. In the case of this project, the use of synchronous video conferencing created new opportunities. Participants did not experience the stressors of leaving their homes or being in an unfamiliar/new location. The study notes and accounts for other issues such as telecommunication connectivity, hardware reliability and quality, and in-home distractions.

Job Readiness Training

The JRT observations occurred over eight days in July 2021. The observational data collected over the eight-day job readiness training support the three research questions. I was in a video window with the camera and sound muted throughout the observation process. Participants

were aware of my presence, but I did not engage with the trainees or training sessions. My engagement was limited to the end-of-day checks with the managers to clarify points or find out what sections of the next day I could attend. I was placed in a breakout room in some cases while CAI shared proprietary information with trainees.

I collected the observational data via synchronous video sessions held over Zoom. I was off-camera during these sessions and did not intervene or engage with the participants. During the first morning session, I came on camera briefly, and one of the A2W managers introduced me, stating that I would be a present observer throughout the eight days. During breaks or at the end of the day, I was able to ask clarifying questions of the managers and trainers when the trainees were not present. This approach kept me as a background image to reduce the influence my presence might elicit. CAI employees joined the sessions with their cameras off to observe activities throughout the eight-day training. The trainees were made aware that these observations would occur and be ongoing throughout the JRT. At times, various managers would take trainees into breakout rooms for one-on-one discussions. As per my agreement with the firm, I was not in attendance for these one-on-one discussions. I was not present for any presentations containing proprietary information for outside clients. I was sent into a breakout room alone during such presentations until the proprietary information activity ended.

Documents

I collected public relations documents from the CAI website between May and September 2021 (see Appendix B). Initially, the goal was to interview the participants within the JRT along with current ASN employees, but COVID-19 restrictions and HR decisions restricted my access to interview anyone at the company. A qualitative review of the published documents from CAI's website supplied data to support questions one and three: 1.) What are the primary

and secondary goals of CAI's job readiness training? and 3.) To what extent are there affordances made available during the JRT for the neurodivergent training participants that align with the primary and secondary goals the organization has for participants? I had concerns about using these documents without other materials because they support its A2W initiative as PR materials. This concern led me to pursue other avenues of information gathering, which led me to attend and then gather other webinars related to the initiative.

Webinars

A qualitative review of the webinars focused on CAI's A2W initiative supplied data to support questions one and three. These data also triangulated and supported statements published within the reviewed documents. In many instances, ASN CAI employees substantiated these claims when they answered questions from webinar attendees regarding affordances, concerns, and myths around hiring, training, and employing ASN persons. The webinar sessions triangulate and support the validity of the experiential evidence within the documents and therefore support the same two questions in-depth and support findings from the JRT at a more topical level. The experiential evidence in the documents focuses on interviews of ASN employees at CAI. The triangulation within the webinar sessions is live responses by current ASN employees at CAI.

Data Analysis

Data Coding

When paired with care ethics and the bioecological model, this analytical grounding allowed me to focus on codes to explore how the participants engaged in affordances and the reciprocal nature of the training.

I used the Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence (2013) performance standards rubric as a coding structure for the JRT observations (see Appendix C). The performance standards focus on pedagogical delivery and learning outcomes for ASN students, and I used these standards to code the training observations, particularly for question 2.) What practices organize participation in CAI's job readiness training? I chose this particular rubric because it is a validated tool for evaluating autism-focused pedagogy within the education community. Throughout this process, I was looking for ways in which the affordances aligned with the codes established from the literature review in peer support, group support, video modeling, self-identification, and behavioral change agents. These areas became my primary thematic codes or the initial buckets I used to divide the observations. I view peer support, group support, and video modeling as affordances and self-identification for validating the need for affordances. I then used the VCU ACE to pull out trainer best practices within the areas of professional knowledge, instructional delivery, learning environment, and professionalism (see Appendix C). My last round of coding focused on whether the practices observed in the training sessions aligned with the primary or secondary goals of the training in alignment with the development outcomes as framed within Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994). In the final coding round, I looked for evidence of differentiated perception and

response, directing and controlling one's behavior, coping under stress, acquiring knowledge and skill, and modifying and constructing one's symbolic environment.

Neurotypical (NT) peer mentorship is tracked throughout the A2W program but is observable through the trainer and support staff in the sessions. Peer support data falls within the JRT observations and part of the document review data. CAI provides a video/training modeling system through training for A2W trainees within the LMS. These trainees must complete these training modules before the end of the JRT. Data tracking of usage is held within the company but was unavailable to me. I observed some outcomes of these modules during the debrief sessions, which I referenced as LMS share-outs in the findings. **Group support** is defined as a working group of ASN employees with an NT team lead to differentiate from NT peer mentorship. This data is tracked through the program and focuses on groups of NT-ASN employees working on specific contracts together. The data collection around this area focuses on the trainers and the ASN trainees. The confines of this project do not include the NT-ASN teams but do include the observations of interactions between the NT facilitators and the ASN trainees.

CAI did not provide the **video modeling** data as they consider this information part of their corporate intellectual property and therefore guards it as a trade secret. I was also not allowed access to the LMS, so my observations surrounding video modeling are limited to knowing the trainees completed the modules and discussions in the live training sessions I observed. These fall under the share-outs within the findings for question two. While I cannot measure success for employees who do not identify as ASN without potentially creating an ethical or regulatory breach, I can focus on the training outcomes. All trainees within the JRT observations identify as ASN. Each trainee exhibited a variety of comorbidities aligned with

typical autism, although the degree of neurodivergence and its impact on their performance varies from trainee to trainee. CAI does not require a formalized medical diagnosis for trainee inclusion in A2W, but they must **self-identify** to participate in the program.

After collecting public relations materials through the CAI website, I reviewed and coded the documents using the same coding strategy laid out above. I then observed an eight-day JRT via synchronous Zoom link. I went back and added more documents released between August and September 2021. The training observation data are the primary collection, with the document review second and the webinar transcript review third. The document and webinar transcript reviews support and enhance the training observation data. I added the webinar transcripts to validate and triangulate the findings within the documents since the documents are published PR materials. The webinars contain question and answer sessions wherein ASN employees answered questions from the public about the program in a live, uncensored/unedited setting. The addition of the webinar transcripts comes from my concerns about analysis, mainly from my inability to interview trainees or employees in the program. I wanted to include the voices of ASN employees, and before attending one of these webinars, I only had my observations and the PR documents. While the documents include the voices of ASN employees, there was no way to tell if these voices were edited or even manufactured (I assume that they are actual employees, but I wanted to err on the side of caution).

Explanation of Design

The study design draws from current data to support this improvement project focused on a small sample of trainees observed in the A2W initiative JRT. I collected data with coding based on findings within the literature review and the confines of the conceptual framework. I delineated primary and secondary goals in the following way.

Primary goals as observed are focused on general professional development and generalizable job readiness skills. I am making this distinction for two reasons. First, the need for ASN-focused job readiness training leads me to conclude that the primary goals are to assess and prepare/onboard ASN trainees for interacting within a normed workforce. Second, based on the literature, modeling professional behavior and assessing job readiness are two focal points for these types of autism programs (Hong et al., 2017; Pecora, Mesibov, and Stokes, 2016; Post et al., 2012; Post et al., 2014; Wang, Cui, and Parrila, 2011). These areas are highly transferable skills that a trainee could use in any job type or setting.

Secondary goals as observed are focused on skill-building in areas specific to CAI's solution needs, such as software knowledge and team participation/management approaches. I chose to list these areas as secondary goals because CAI could change their focus or if their clients' needs drastically changed. For example, if a new teamwork system became more popular than scrum, CAI would be best served by updating those training portions to the new system. These areas are more job-specific skills that a trainee may or may not apply if they leave the firm.

While it was impossible to include an outside moderator for validity assurance in the data collection, I employed member checks during the eight-day training observations. At the end of each training day, these member checks occurred when I shared observational information in areas where I needed clarification. The addition of the webinar transcripts triangulates the information included in the publicly available documents. I completed this project without the outside influence of funding or sponsorship. I did not compensate participants. This study excludes deception, and participation was voluntary and could be rescinded at any time through writing. I received written consent of participation from CAI. All participants are anonymous

and referenced without gender representation. I listed persons in the observations as either ASN trainees, NT trainers, employees/facilitators, or managers. Only persons listed within the publicly available PR documents are named, and those names are first only, based on CAI's gender and nominal designations at the time of publication. All webinar participants and moderators are anonymous and designated only CAI employees, panelists, or participants. Gender is removed from the webinar notes as well.

Findings

Finding One:

Based on my observations of the eight-day JRT, the primary goal of the training is to assess potential employees for job readiness through a series of tasks and interactions. The secondary goal of the training is to modify behaviors toward working within a professional, agile team-based system using the scrum framework and agile approach for information technology teams.

To discuss these findings and the subsequent recommendations, I am delineating primary and secondary goals in the following way. Primary goals as observed focus on general professional development and job readiness skills. In contrast, secondary goals focus on skill-building in areas specific to CAI's solution needs, such as software knowledge and team participation/management approaches. These distinctions are mine and supported by my observations of the training, document review, and webinar review included herein as data. Within the context of this paper, I am defining professional development as goals around learning new skills tied to one's job or general employment. Based on my training observations, I describe job readiness skills as the skills needed to gain, keep, and excel at a job.

The primary goal of the training is to assess potential employees for job readiness through a series of tasks and interactions over the eight-day JRT period. As a B2B solutions firm,

according to our meetings and company marketing, CAI builds teams that work with contracting firms on various technical jobs such as software quality control and testing, information technology, software development, and other strategic business solutions. One member of the A2W team stated that:

> The roles we currently have individuals on the spectrum are quite diverse and they include customer service claims, processing access management, data analysis, manual automated testing, production support, Java development, and even mainframe development support. There's really no limit on type or level of work individuals on the spectrum can do (qtd. in Pacilio, 2021, 7:35).

Throughout the eight-day training, practices reinforced job readiness by employing approaches meant to simulate the workday experience to assess and modify behaviors. Evidence under this primary goal section may overlap with secondary goal evidence as many training activities assessed and changed trainee behaviors in place. This evidence mainly draws from the data collected through observing the eight-day JRT and secondarily through the documents and webinar transcripts.

The secondary goal of the training is to modify behaviors toward working within a professional, agile team-based system using the scrum framework and agile approach for information technology teams. Scrum, developed by Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland in the early 1990s and released as a guide first in 2010, "is a lightweight framework that helps people, teams and organizations generate value through adaptive solutions for complex problems" (2020, p. 3). CAI and many of their clients use scrum for software development projects. A scrum master leads each scrum team and is tasked to:

> foster an environment where: 1.) A Product Owner orders the work for a complex

> problem into a Product Backlog. 2.) The Scrum Team turns a selection of the work into an Increment of value during a Sprint. 3.) The Scrum Team and its stakeholders inspect the results and adjust for the next Sprint. 4.) Repeat (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020, p 3).

The Scrum Guide (2020) accounts for the team, team lead (scrum master), sprints, values, events, issues, artifacts, and project completion. Understanding how to function within one of these teams is paramount to success, as many A2W teams work as development solutions groups. The trainees were given an overview of a scrum on day one and prepared to participate in scrum review sessions each day beginning on day two. This repetitive process held with many elements and remained throughout the training. The scrum approach is part of the secondary goals within the training program.

Another methodology taught in the JRT is agile software development. Listed in alphabetical order, The Agile Manifesto's authors include Sutherland and Schwaber of scrum fame (Beck et al., 2001a). While scrum is considered a framework, agile is a comprehensive approach that works alongside frameworks and practices. Agile focuses on "collaboration and the self-organizing team," and these teams are "cross-functional" with the ability to make decisions about how they will approach a given project (Beck et al., 2021b, p.2). Agile workflow methodology includes an important activity taught in the JRT: user story mapping. This activity is called many things such as storyboarding, story mapping, or user story mapping. The purpose of this activity is "to facilitate product discovery and prioritization of development work….by putting user activities and tasks on a map that serves to keep them in context" (Digité, 2021, p.1). The trainees began learning the tools to build user stories on day one of training through an introductory activity wherein they began storyboarding and discussing the agile mindset. By day three, they were making user stories for their group projects.

Each day began with a round-robin morning check-in wherein each trainee was to share a current emotion, a goal for the day, and starting on day two, a reflection on yesterday's learning. This approach simulates the morning standup meetings used at many software and IT solution firms, particularly those focused on the agile mindset. I base this inference on my training observations and knowledge of software development firm practices. The session's principal trainer was explicit about the check-ins being a standup simulation, and the goals were to get everyone used to sharing both backward- and forward-looking information along with training on how to express emotional states (behavioral change agent training).

Finding Two:

Over eight days, the participants engaged in a variety of activities to assess their job readiness and modify behaviors toward a professional, team-based setting using the agile approach and scrum framework for information technology teams. Such participation requires trainees to show up each day at the specified time, interact in a professional setting and manner, and engage with potential coworkers in an agile team-based system using the scrum framework. The facilitators assessed participants throughout the eight-day training period for their professional skills and level of preparedness for the job.

Daily, I observed changes in the trainees' interactions; The trainees progressed from being quiet and reserved the first two days to joking and responding more in the middle of the training. By the end, they were expressing emotions both verbally and nonverbally about the program ending. They displayed emotion in their goodbyes and exits, which were staggered due to their completion of the exit survey and one-on-one interviews along with the final LMS module. According to the lead trainer, the emotional response is typical for the last day.

Each day began with a standup and ended with a debriefing or scrum meeting review. The principal trainer greeted each participant in the mornings as they joined the Zoom room. The trainees shared stories of date night dinners, pet antics, sleepiness, late-night homework completion, and local weather reports. As the days went on, the trainees opened up more and more, chatting not only when asked direct questions by the trainer but also similarly asking one another questions. This type of behavior modeling is a cornerstone in ASN change agent activities, which I discuss more extensively around affordances. Many ASN persons who have attended other programs or were diagnosed as children have experience with this growth approach, but I have no way of knowing who or if any trainees fall into those categories. To organize the practices, I delineated the following sections by day.

Day One: While the first day contained many quiet work periods for the trainees to complete small tasks within the LMS individually, the day was also full of many meaningful learning and modeling activities. This first-morning check-in round-robin focused on sharing an emotion and a goal for the day. All staff members participated along with the trainees. Every morning, the group used a popcorn approach (each person calling on the next person). Leading into this initial check-in, the trainer discussed what constitutes an emotion based on Plutchik's Wheel of Emotion (see Appendix D; Plutchik & Kellerman, 1980). The trainees focused on what they wanted from the day and how they felt going into the morning's activities as they shared emotions and personal goals. The trainees shared sentiments often related to the training and their anxieties about the unknown. For example, trainees often spoke about being nervous or excited about specific activities on that day's schedule. The staff members focused on intergroup goals, meaning they included promising and positive outcomes for interactions with the trainees. After the check-in period, the day's scheduled activities began.

The trainees learned to use Zoom's whiteboard for interactions, including discussing the relevance of this tool in the virtual workspace. The whiteboard became a space where trainees shared quotes or statements relevant to the activity debriefing. For example, they shared words or phrases about what they learned from the activity. During these share-outs, the trainees took time to think through what they just learned or participated, then shared these concepts on the whiteboard. When prompted, the trainees would speak further on the ideas they posted to the whiteboard.

A portion of the day was spent discussing professional development and preparing presentation videos for CAI's interview event. These two elements fit into the schema of the training replacing a typical job interview. The trainees in this session averaged in early adulthood age-wise, so the pedagogy is what I use at the undergraduate level. These techniques include reinforcement through repetition and feedback models and explicitly stating good or proper approaches to each element. In neurodivergent teaching, we have factors sometimes considered obvious or pandering in neurotypical or normative systems for the age group. These elements within the training included talking about proper attire, cleanliness, timeliness, virtual backgrounds, and distractions. Each trainee had the opportunity to show off their work and met one-on-one with a staff member to review their story and images for their introductory videos. The day included a variety of lectures, including introductions to scrum, the agile mindset, emotional intelligence, and a brief review of the LMS modules and the prework assigned before the start of the training sessions. Trainees had opportunities to ask questions, get and give feedback, and complete various activities within the LMS.

Day Two: The morning check-in round robin included the same emotion and goal statements from the first day, but this time, the principal trainer added a reflection on the learning

from the day before. Most participants focused on successful learning areas, such as what they felt they learned rather than what they struggled to understand or learn the day before. This reflection aids in the reinforcement of learning and allows each trainee to hear takeaways from their peers. The staff continued the established practice of participating in the morning check-in; Their learning responses focused on what they learned about the trainees. Some answers were specific to one trainee and others more general about the group. This activity was always popcorn style where the person before would call out the next to speak, which created a mix of trainees and staff speaking at random intervals. This approach created a horizontal power structure, where the trainees spoke openly. The morning's activities began with a discussion on how to use virtual backgrounds in Zoom for the presentations. This discussion included reasons for using these virtual or blurred backgrounds for all video meetings, along with best practices for picking an appropriate image to use. The staff all use virtual backgrounds, and many use backgrounds branded to the firm. When managers appeared, they also had office space or branded backgrounds in their windows.

Additionally, they reviewed protocols and best practices for the sessions, with trainees engaging in an open discussion of what they thought would be best and the staff either affirming or modulating the responses to fit the actual protocols. The principal trainer asked the trainees to keep their videos on and use a blurred or virtual background. Within the firm's virtual office etiquette, having one's video off meant the person was observing without participating unless they established that they were having connectivity issues. In a few instances, trainees did have connectivity problems and used the established protocols to notify the group of their situation. Many of the systems established on day one continued on day two.

The group continued using Zoom's whiteboard for collaborative interactions and established a new system of formative check-ins using percentages of completeness. This system allowed trainees to work in the LMS modules and report their progress before breaks. Each day, there were midmorning, lunch, and midafternoon breaks. A management team member sent out two video links for everyone to join the live Zoom sessions; each day had a morning and afternoon link, so no one worried about closing their session for lunch. Staff used breakout rooms for review sessions, but I was not privy to the discussions within these one-on-one review sessions. While these sessions occurred, the other trainees worked quietly on the LMS modules. While day one contained information on emotional intelligence, day two focused on stress management. The trainees completed activities within the LMS modules, often by watching videos, then completing homework submissions to show their progress and learning within the specific modules. This session was timed to share information and be at the top of the trainees' minds during the upcoming peer review activity. This lesson on stress management allowed the trainees to be mindful of their interactions and reactions during the peer review activity. The session focused on giving critical feedback using a specified model of stating something positive and then sharing an enhancement opportunity they saw in the project. During these feedback sessions, I noticed that the staff would go into breakout rooms instead of talking in front of trainees. These breakout discussions were another time I was not privy to the ongoing discussion, but they frequently happened throughout the training program. The trainees were not privy to these staff conversations either; These breakouts were akin to teachers stepping outside of a physical classroom to have a private conversation.

After the peer review, the trainees listened to a lecture explaining various elements to make the videos. The main discussion around improving and delivering the trainees' videos

focused on a mantra repeated throughout the eight days: Adapt, Improvise, Overcome. Adaptability (being able to adjust to new conditions), improvisation (making something from what is available), and overcoming (successfully handling a difficulty) are explicit in the training because they encapsulate many of the negative or improper behaviors ASN employees demonstrate in times of stress or high anxiety. The trainees took note of these elements and would bring them up or point them out as they appeared in training.

Then the trainer pulled names out of a hat to pick the presentation order. Trainees presented to a larger audience, including various managers and staff members who work for CAI's A2W initiative. The trainees received positive support and feedback after they showed their videos. The videos showcased information about each trainee's personal and professional background and allowed them to show their skills in building a slide deck, voiceover work, and video editing. Once the other employees left, the trainees discussed their experience of presenting. The trainees talked about various topics, most notably, the anxiety of presenting, their excitement to learn more about one another, and takeaways for improving future recorded presentations. These videos are a significant element of CAI's interview event within the overall training. Before the pandemic restrictions, trainees participated in meet-and-greet sessions with CAI employees and managers, which constituted a large portion of the interview event. Since the pandemic began and CAI instituted these Zoom sessions, CAI added these presentations as equivalencies to replace the original in-person interactions during the interview event.

The remainder of day two focused on completing LMS modules. The trainees used the chat feature to verify the completion of various steps in LMS, such as uploading assignments, watching videos, and completing modules. Trainees were able to practice an informal version of an end-of-day scrum meeting. This element began formally on day three, but today's approach

focused on practicing what to say and do. This practice meeting ended with discussing strengths that came from the presentations. The day ended with an explicit debrief followed by a review of the day three plan and an open question and answer session to clarify or address any concerns.

Day Three: The morning check-in round robin included the same emotion and goal statements from the second day: Share an emotion you are feeling, share a goal for today, and reflect on your learning from the day before. I observed behavioral shifts, particularly in language, such as joking and frankness, arise within the repetition of the check-ins. These repetitions build a sense of normalcy and safety, allowing participants to grow comfortable and begin to trust one another. Following the check-in, the day started with reviewing their agile user stories. Day three was also the first day of group work. The principal trainer divided the trainees into two teams and gave each team a project to complete. I was not allowed to engage with the specifics of their projects because this information is considered proprietary and not permitted within this capstone project. At this point, the participants began to interact with each other at a greater rate, building their team projects and dividing labor and team roles using the agile workflow methodology and scrum framework. Each team designated a scrum master and used this framework for managing their projects.

The next activity focused on video modeling through the LMS. After viewing the module video individually, the group used the interactive Zoom whiteboard to share high points, focusing on questions to ask in an interview. Like many other LMS-driven activities, this activity modeled beneficial interview approaches, particularly how to think about and formulate questions to ask an interviewer. The group discussed the issues at hand by breaking down the module and sharing their takeaways. After this professional development skill-building, the group applied team skills with the agile mindset and user stories in their two teams. The trainer

regularly checked in on the two groups by pulling them back from the breakout rooms into the entire group setting. Toward the end of day three, I went into a breakout room due to internal privacy around group projects. The day ended with a scrum standup meeting to share their project progress and review what to expect on day four.

Day Four: By the start of day four, the daily check-in was a rhythmic popcorn participation model, focused on the same concepts as the two days prior; Each person shared their current emotional state, a goal for the day, and what they learned the day before. The trainer set up the "peanut butter toast activity" to get the trainees to think about preconditions, states, items, and tools. This same activity goes by many names in the education world, but it almost always involves making toast or a sandwich and expressing the necessary steps. Participants create a set of instructions to articulate the various stages of the process to focus explicitly on their ability to reason out the essential elements for project mapping. Each trainee submitted their instructions anonymously so no one would be embarrassed or feel called out if their submission failed to yield peanut butter toast. The trainer noted that they had to go out the night before to buy bread because they did not have enough for the activity. This reflection of care was well-received by the trainees who expressed excitement for the activity.

The trainer set up their computer so everyone could see the counter with the element (tools) needed for the task and began one-by-one reading the instructions and following them precisely as they were listed. For this activity to work and teach the intended lesson, the person performing the instructed activities cannot make any assumptions or do any steps not listed in the written instructions. As the trainer completed, and in all cases, failed to make peanut butter toast, the participants laughed and expressed understanding of how silly or incomplete the instructions were each time. Some failures or omissions did not state that one should remove bread from the

bag, assuming the bread was sliced or unsliced, not giving specific instructions on how to get the bread in or out of the toaster, and misunderstanding or omissions around the use of the knife and accessing the peanut butter. After the principal tested each person's instructions, she conducted a share-out. Lessons gleaned from the activity included the idea that they must consist of details, not make assumptions about variables, and be sure to note how to use tools. The trainees also realized that teamwork would have meant they could share ideas and would have made a better set of instructions together. From here, the next activity focused on how to go about mind mapping. Again, I was removed from Zoom due to internal privacy around mapping the details of the group projects. Mind mapping is an activity that allows participants to consider how ideas and concepts relate to one another. Participants reinforce learning concepts through visualization of these relationships.

When I was permitted to return, the group discussed using the virtual sandbox. A sandbox is where a person or a group of people test code in a safe and controlled environment without that code infecting or interfacing with the hardware or cloud-based services. The group walked through how to use this virtual sandbox, and then a volunteer trainee worked through it live before the groups went back into breakout rooms to work on their projects. Only one group at a time could be in the sandbox, so while one group used the tool, the other group worked individually to complete the DO-IT Profiler assessment (https://www.doitprofiler.com).

The DO-IT Profiler is a "web-based person-centered neurodiversity, cognitive and wellbeing screening and assessment tool" focused on ensuring neurodivergent persons "can achieve their potential in the context of their lives" (2021, p.1). Companies such as CAI use the Neurodiversity Workplace+ Profiler "to minimize challenges that can occur" "practical tools, links to resources dependent" on each individual's assessment. This assessment is marketed as a

tool to help employees “have the words to explain and the confidence to have a better conversation” around various affordance needs (DO-IT, 2021, p. 2). This assessment is time-consuming, so the trainees were reminded they would be given time on multiple days to complete it. As the trainees worked, personalities started to flourish and surface; more interactions and talking occurred than in previous days during work time. The group reviewed the agenda for day five, followed by the share-out and scrum standup. CAI managers were popping in and staying for extended periods with their cameras off to observe. Staffers also went into breakout rooms with the trainer or manager(s) to have private discussions away from the trainees.

Day Five: The established pattern of the daily check-in happened, followed closely by the first activity focused on teaching the trainees about the concept of burn-down hours. Burn-down hours are used in software development as part of the agile mindset and focus on how quickly the team is *burning* through the client’s user stories. Burn-down hours focus on three data elements: user stories, sprint data, and velocity. A sprint is a length of time within a project, such as a 30-day or 90-day sprint. Velocity here is the speed at which the team is progressing. A burn-down chart will include a line item for each user story included in the project (see Appendix E). The peanut butter toast activity from the day before was an explicit experiment in how these three elements work together successfully or unsuccessfully, based on how well the planning stage is built out.

Following this discussion, the teams broke off to continue their group work. After a designated time, everyone returned to the main room to check on the time needed and view burn-down hour examples. After returning from lunch, the groups were back in their breakout rooms with more staffers and managers floating in and out of the two breakout rooms. During this

afternoon, issues arose with the sandbox. As a group, the trainer, trainees, and staff worked on troubleshooting and discovered instruction issues from the last round of training sessions. The trainer used this opportunity to demonstrate agile shifting of workflow with the teams due to the sandbox issues while other CAI employees worked to fix the setup. The trainees returned to working on their DO-IT profiler assessments during this time. Once the CAI employees working on the issue were sure it was resolved, the teams returned to their breakout rooms to check the new IP address for sandbox changes. The whole group then returned to check the status of each person's DO-IT profiler level of completion.

Due to the technical difficulties with the sandbox, the trainer took time to review and manage everyone's expectations for day six. This management of expectations discussion referenced the professional development discussion on day two about engaging with criticism and feedback. Day five was a Friday, so the group discussed the assigned homework in the LMS focused on interview skills using the STAR method. This method "involves providing an example of a past behavior which includes a situation or task, the specific action taken, and the result of the action" (Brumm, Mickelson & White, 2006, p. 29; see Appendix F). As a change from the regular share-out and scrum standup, this share-out covered the whole week rather than only today. The principal trainer asked each person to share their main takeaway from the week.

End of Week One: As day five fell on a Friday, it makes sense to reflect on the end of this week because this day was framed as the end of a week as well. At this point in the training, the participants reflected on the high levels of psychological safety with their personalities beginning to come out. The group projects display how teamwork reinforces individual strengths. In several cases, trainees and staffers would call out areas of growth or ways other

participants were helping them. Several themes began to arise: Innovation, creativity, and patterns of expectation and interaction.

Day Six: As day six began a new week, the trainer modified the daily check-in; the last question switched to discussing homework review rather than learning from the day before—the elements of sharing an emotion and a goal held. The group reviewed interviewing, particularly the STAR method from Friday's lesson. After this review, the two teams split off to continue their group work. This particular week only contained three meeting days, so the staff and managers held one-on-one sessions with trainees throughout the day. Although I was not allowed to attend these one-on-one sessions, the trainees met with staff and managers to discuss the firm, the JRT, and potential opportunities. These sessions happened while group work was ongoing not to disrupt the learning modules. The groups focused on compensating for members leaving for the one-on-one sessions. This lesson is in professional teamwork and stress, so scheduling these interruptions tests the trainees' reactions in this observable environment. The days of this week reflected the controlled chaos of natural office flow in a remote setting.

The group came back together to review their burn-down charts, how they delegated tasks, and when each team would have sandbox access. Next, the trainees individually reviewed an LMS module and shared time management strategies using the whiteboard as in week one. Following this activity, the group discussed kanban boards for agile workflow. These boards are a digital space where a team can move to-do items, often represented as digital sticky notes, from various buckets to designate their place in the overall project workflow. In their most simplistic form, kanban boards show items *to do, doing, in progress*, and *done*. In higher-level approaches, these major buckets are divided by teams or team members and include various levels of doing

or progress steps (see Appendix G). Following this lesson, the trainees broke into pairs to peer-practice the STAR method for interview questions in breakout rooms.

These breakout groups and the one-on-one sessions then were ongoing in tandem until the peer practice was complete. The next activity was an LMS module review of building a professional profile card in place of a standard resume to share with CAI's solutions clients. Each profile card included a power statement, professional experience, job interests, availability, educational background, personal success enablers (affordances), skills, hobbies, awards & certifications, links to projects, and computer languages with proficiency levels. While participants worked on these cards, the trainer established the goal of finishing and preparing to present their group projects by 2:00 pm on Wednesday. A group of visitors would attend the presentations.

Following this discussion, the trainees shared a completion check (percentage done) for each person's profile cards. These profile cards go to outside firms as a way of getting to know the potential employees, much in the same way a potential employer may review a LinkedIn profile. The end-of-day scrum standup focused on reflecting on each person's goal for the day. This standup was closely followed by a review of the day seven agenda. A new element of homework discussion was added to the end of this day. For individualized work, such as the DO-IT profile assessment, the professional profile cards, and various LMS modules, the trainer asked participants to keep on track to be done by the end of day eight (Wednesday). The homework focused on scrum meetings and kanban boards in a more general discussion for the groups. This day felt more intense than prior days; Participants began wearing signs of stress in their nonverbal and, in some instances, verbal cues.

Day Seven: As time was winding down and only two days remained, day seven began with an agenda review and a check on individual homework completion rates. The groups had approximately six hours to prepare their project presentations. The daily check-in returned to the standard questions of sharing an emotion, a goal, and something learned the day before. This discussion around the remaining time led to a debate about cutting out some of the DO-IT profiler questions to make its completion more manageable. They spent most of the morning on group work for the team projects.

The groups shared their project status before lunch. After returning from the lunch break, individuals completed their professional profile cards.

The day's first lesson focused on two LMS modules on speaking, listening, and creative problem-solving. Some trainees finished the modules sooner than others. Those who finished first began working on kanban boards and scrum workflow before the group came together for another LMS learning share out with the whiteboard space. This sharing out time led to a review of kanban boards with examples. The group quickly moved into a discussion around the software testing life cycle. The groups then used this new information to build team-specific kanban boards. The trainer also helped individuals who brought up issues posting links on their profile cards. Throughout what was an increasingly busy day, I noted incredible leadership, caring, and empathy within these interactions from everyone in the group. (In a moment of humanity, I shared this observation with the staff while the trainees were on a break.)

After the break, a CAI employee held a tech talk for the trainees. I was not allowed to be in the room due to internal shared info. After the tech talk, the trainees returned to completing the LMS modules on speaking and listening as well as creative problem-solving they began earlier in the day. At this point in the training sessions, the trainees were moving at various rates

toward completing individual assignments amidst time spent on lessons and group work. Despite all of these moving parts, the group as a whole decided to move the project presentations up to 11:00 am on the last day (Wednesday, day eight). After this decision, the teams broke off again to spend time on their projects in breakout rooms. Each group picked a scrum master in preparation for the end-of-day share-out. These share-outs included each team's workflow (scrum) and screen sharing and discussing each group's kanban boards. After the share-outs, individuals asked questions, shared concerns, and pursued clarifications in preparation for the final day. These so-called housekeeping items included what clothing to wear, how and when they would finalize modules and homework uploads in the LMS, and expectations around project completion and the presentations. Trainees discussed their plans for the evening and the next day. They shared words of encouragement as well.

Day Eight: On this final day of the training, everyone arrived on camera dressed up for their presentations. The trainer explicitly mentioned how great everyone looked, which elicited smiles and laughs all around. For the final check-in, the standard approach of emotion, goal, and learning occurred, although most of their emotions and goals focused squarely on the presentations. The trainer reassured everyone that they would do very well. This statement appeared to relieve some of the stress and anxiety in the trainees as reflected in the faces and some shared responses (thank you statements and affirmations).

Immediately following the check-in, the teams moved into breakout rooms to finalize their presentations. At 10:00 am, the groups held rehearsals, and at 11:00 am, the presentations began. Both teams presented then received feedback from the visitors and the staff. After both presentations concluded, the visitors left. The trainer explicitly stated that it was time to breathe and share. This debriefing period included emotions, kudos for teammates, room for

improvement, and a general sense of a well-done job. Each trainee received individual feedback from the course trainer and staff. The remaining trainees who had not done so yet had their one-on-one meetings with various managers and staff. At the same time, they worked on the final LMS module on team development for quality assurance (QA) projects, including personal growth and challenges. Trainees finalized any incomplete LMS modules and homework submissions. They also completed an end-of-program survey and finalized written group feedback.

During the early afternoon, the trainer discussed the next steps after the JRT. Each trainee would receive feedback from the facilitator (trainer), followed by individual follow-up meetings and potential job offers. There was no formal end to the program, and goodbyes were scattered as people finished up and excited for the last time. Some of the trainees were tearful and emotional as they struggled with the end of the program.

Finding Three:

The trainer and staff used a series of measurably proficient pedagogical practices to engage the trainees in activities focused on development outcomes using a variety of affordances, such as video-based training modules, peer modeling, group interactions, share out sessions, and cascading affordance building where necessary.

As noted in Finding One, the observed primary goal of the training is to assess potential employees for job readiness through a series of tasks and interactions over the eight-day JRT period. I triangulated affordances provided to the ASN participants during the Job Readiness Training (JRT) through the public relations documents and webinar transcripts. Affordances allow the participants to engage in various practices, particularly enabling them to participate outside of the normative job training and onboarding practices. I relied on the Virginia

Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence (VCU ACE) rubric to code my training observations (see Appendix C). Those codes attend to high-quality teaching for ASN students and point to affordances given to trainees so they may participate in robust ways. These affordances align with the system of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model's (1994) development outcomes, which allowed me to map development through the interactions and responses of the trainees. One ASN employee who completed the JRT said the experience:

> was really valuable for me. It allowed me to ask questions and interact with management prior to employment. It also helped me understand how things are done in office environments that are different than the field mental health work I was doing. Understanding expectations is very helpful for me (CAI, 2021b).

Before this process, they felt interviewing "was too nerve-wracking," and this employee "avoided job interviews with people he didn't know" (CAI, 2021b). The affordances within the JRT allowed this employee to find a means of coping with the stress brought on by interviewing while acquiring knowledge and skills necessary to engage with a new job in a different setting (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994; Greeno and Gresalfi 2008). For a neurotypical applicant, the idea of needing to know the interviewer might seem excessive or even a far-fetched need. For an autistic-identifying applicant, this need can become an insurmountable barrier to employment. In one of the CAI documents, one participant talked about how growing up; they found "understanding norms and managing expectations became increasingly difficult," which in turn created stress and anxiety responses, particularly around socializing (CAI, 2021b). Paradoxically, both team leads who supervise them at CAI speak highly of this employee's ability to handle pressure, think practically, and support their teammates in times of stress. Suppose we conflate a

lack of normative social behaviors with a person's potential for professional success. Then, we miss out on people joining our teams to the detriment of everyone involved.

Another viewpoint comes from a manager at CAI during a webinar that focused on debunking myths surrounding what neurodivergent employees can do for work. "For individuals on the spectrum there's really no right or wrong type of work; the right role is really based on each individual's talents or abilities or interests" (qtd. in Pacilio, 2021, 6:35). This manager discussed why the affordance of the interview event is crucial to their work. The interview process "brings focus to these challenges, such as expecting eye contact, certain body language you know, fast-paced questions and answers which doesn't allow people on the spectrum the opportunity to really showcase their strengths" (qtd. in Pacilio, 2021, 6:53). As one webinar discussion continued, the manager focused on ideas such as the A2W program providing an opportunity for ASN participants to "showcase their strengths… talents and abilities… in a more supportive environment" (qtd. in Pacilio, 2021, 7:16). This opportunity is prevalent in each participant's videos for the interview event during the JRT.

Within the same webinar, a self-identifying ASN employee spoke to their experiences in past positions, stating these normative expectations do not occur within their current role at CAI. This employee said that past jobs treated them as if they could not do certain things and demonstrated lowered expectations of their abilities. They counseled those in attendance to understand it might take longer to get to know and "understand" a new ASN employee's "viewpoint." Still, once you did, "you can definitely see that they're capable of doing a wide range of jobs… have a wide range of skill sets, and a lot of it comes down to they will tend to have an interest in certain things, and… have a high level of expertise in those areas and… be very dedicated and consistent with their work output" (qtd. in Pacilio, 2021, 8:23).

The secondary goal of the training is to modify behaviors toward a professional, agile team-based setting using the scrum framework and agile approach for information technology teams through the teaching of systems within technologies. Affordances within this area are focused on software and team-based activity training over the eight days. Suppose we conceive of these affordances within computer-mediated communication (CMC) framing. Then, it is essential to return to Evans et al. (2017), who argue for "a relational view of affordances in that the materiality of technology influences but does not determine, the possibilities for users" (p. 37). Additionally, they "advocate for conceptually defining communication affordances in terms of the multidimensional relationship between the object or technology and the user, and how that relationship offers possible (and actual) outcomes" (p. 39). With these conceptual constraints in mind, I found the team-based elements of the training focused on the affordances of software education and team-based frameworks.

Throughout my observations of the training, the trainer and staff used a series of measurably proficient pedagogical practices to engage the trainees in activities focused on development outcomes using a variety of affordances, such as video-based training modules, peer modeling, group interactions, share out sessions, and cascading affordance building where necessary. When I attended to the affordances in the training for everything from participating in the sessions via Zoom through the more granular affordances within the team projects, the facilitator and staff scored in the *exemplary* category for all activities within the VCU ACE rubric (see Appendix C). The teaching tools and methods align with best practices found in the literature. My observations led me to believe that CAI takes excellent care in hiring professional educators to create and facilitate these sessions. I want to highlight a few areas where the observations support this finding at an exemplary level.

By day four of the training, the trainees engaged in reciprocal dialogue with one another and the staff/trainers. The participant responses to the peanut butter toast activity show how the training pedagogy aligned with the rubric's high demands for professional knowledge, instructional delivery, and learning environment (see Appendix C). Without exemplary approaches in each area delivered by confident professionals, the point of the activity and the teambuilding lesson might not work. This reflection displays the expertise of the CAI's instructional designers and trainers. While the trainees might feel they concluded the benefits of teamwork on their own, the activity is built to lead them there.

Additionally, the confidence instilled in the trainees through care ethics built into the learning modules and interactions allowed for moments like day five. On this particular day, employees from CAI, the JRT staff, and the trainees worked together to troubleshoot a major issue with the sandbox. Suppose the training staff had not effectively flattened the power structure and built the trainees' confidence over the first week. In that case, the trainees may have responded to the sandbox issues much differently.

Within the observational data, I found many examples of cascading affordances. A cascading affordance is when something is provided and either another layer is added to aid the participant or the next affordance exists to scaffold the participant to the next level (Evans et al., 2017; Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008). In most cases, a detectable level of care was nested within a set of opportunities or potential next steps. For example, when the sandbox issue arose, the facilitators pivoted the groups to reduce possible anxiety about getting their projects done while finding ways to rearrange the schedule quickly and efficiently. This change led to cascading affordances when the teams divided access to the sandbox. This separation gave those not working in the sandbox time to complete their DO-IT profiler. Even when there were

connectivity, video, or sound issues, the facilitators kept the group calm and moving forward. It was, at many times, very remarkable to watch. On a personal level, as a professor, I learned new techniques for keeping everyone calm when unforeseeable issues arise.

Recommendations

Recommendation One:

Overall, the JRT program is sound and well within the bounds of the recommendations within the literature. Modeling behavior is a pedagogically sound approach prominent within the reviewed literature (Hong et al., 2017; Pecora, Mesibov, and Stokes, 2016; Post et al., 2012; Post et al., 2014; Wang, Cui, and Parrila, 2011; Wang & Spillane, 2009). The staff modeled behavior throughout each day, most notably by holding themselves to a standard of participating in the check-ins and standup sessions at the beginning and end of each day. Elements such as video modeling with the LMS modules to deliver content in the areas of professional development and emotional intelligence align with and are supported by findings in the prevailing literature (Hong et al., 2017; Pecora, Mesibov, and Stokes, 2016; Post et al., 2012; Post et al., 2014; Wang, Cui, and Parrila, 2011; Kuder & Accardo, 2018; Koegel et al., 2018). The training included peer mentoring and group support within the live sessions, which align with care ethics (Noddings, 2012). Peer mentoring, in particular, grew organically from the well-built instructional design and the excellent care shown by the facilitators. Peer mentoring is imperative for successful social skill building (Hong et al., 2017; Pecora, Mesibov and Stokes, 2016; Post et al., 2012; Wang and Spillane 2009; Wang, Cui and Parrila, 2011; Watkins et al., 2017). The group supports, much like peer mentoring, also grew organically from the groundwork done before the sessions began and were upheld by the staff's high level of care and attention to detail. These supports require a mixed group setting and applied behavioral analysis techniques to function at

the high level observed in the sessions (Kuder and Accardo, 2018; Ospina et al., 2008; Wang, Parrila, and Cui, 2013; Wolstencroft et al., 2018; Jordan & Caldwell-Harris, 2012).

My research and the prevailing literature also support CAI's use of self-identification rather than a medical diagnosis to enter the program (Uljarevic & Hamilton, 2003; Kapp & Sarrett, 2019; Jordan & Caldwell-Harris, 2012; Ohl et al., 2017; Hong et al., 2017). I encourage CAI to use the inclusive term of ASN going forward to remove any medical or diagnostic stigma from self-identification. This change aligns with the high level of engagement and care I observed from the staff throughout the sessions. In alignment with the VCU ACE rubric, the trainer and staff's level of professionalism, instructional delivery, and learning environment fell within the rubric's exemplary level; the modeling of good practices and behaviors was explicit and well-planned (see Appendix C). While the JRT is one element of the overall hiring and training process, it is an essential and valuable resource for ASN trainees.

Recommendation Two:

Training limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic led to discoveries around the usefulness of video-based synchronous training. They should be continued as an avenue for future JRTs if and when possible. The main components of this practice focus on the successful use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a tool for bringing together training groups. Suppose the company continues using Zoom or another video platform to hold the training sessions. In that case, the findings suggest that mediation and teaching within the platform provide valuable affordances and opportunities for the ASN trainees. The trainees worked from their homes, the training groups were not limited to one location in the country, and the trainers and managers could use digital tools to enhance the training sessions.

As CAI considers this recommendation, they should weigh it against their in-person training session results. The in-person and online models offer their unique affordances and constraints. Since I collected data during the pandemic, I did not have the opportunity to travel to and observe an in-person JRT. The camaraderie of the trainees could potentially be enhanced or reduced by being in-person or synchronous online. Still, I cannot conclude this point, given that I only observed online. If, however, CAI is moving toward more remote work for all employees, then the training would fall in line with that new work model. CAI currently has fully remote employees, and some of the firms they service are fully remote. Such a change would enhance the training, particularly the affordance of learning through an online video meeting platform. Implementing such a lasting change would fall within the A2W management and HR teams. The use of such an affordance aligns with the literature surrounding CMC affordances (Evans et al., 2017), video modeling (Hong et al., 2017; Pecora, Mesibov, and Stokes, 2016; Post et al., 2012; Post et al., 2014; Wang, Cui, and Parrila, 2011; Wang & Spillane, 2009), peer mentorship (Hong et al., 2017; Pecora, Mesibov and Stokes, 2016; Post et al., 2012; Wang and Spillane 2009; Wang, Cui, and Parrila, 2011; Watkins et al., 2017) and group support (Kuder and Accardo, 2018; Ospina et al., 2008; Wang, Parrila, and Cui, 2013; Wolstencroft et al., 2018; Jordan & Caldwell-Harris, 2012). While remote work increased during the pandemic, such systems already existed for workers within the IT and tech fields. Suppose CAI wishes to continue in-person training sessions. In that case, a combination of synchronous video sessions, asynchronous LMS modules, and in-person activities could provide a well-rounded approach to the overall training program.

Recommendation Three:

I recommend considering including specific affordances related to professional development and emotional intelligence. In particular, two areas of the Bioecological Model could be implemented: Establishing and maintaining mutually rewarding relationships and modifying and constructing physical, social, and symbolic environments. One way to add these areas would be to reduce or remove the DO-IT profiler and add an observational review within the first few days. This review should use a tool supported by empirical data such as the ABI. The ABI is easy to use and effective in determining a person's behaviors, leading to the opportunity for specific affordances added in ad hoc during the time relegated to the DO-IT profiler.

Professional Development. The training currently includes professional development segments focused on presenting oneself, interviewing, evaluation, and teamwork. Additional areas recommended include modules on appropriate and professional relationships with coworkers, engaging in mentorship, and participating in civic activities.

Emotional Intelligence. The training currently includes areas focused on emotional intelligence (EQ) around expressing feelings and emotions, giving and receiving feedback and criticism, advocating for oneself, and regulating emotions in times of stress. Additional areas recommended include advocating for one's needs in a professional setting (physical and social environment) and expanding one's understanding of symbolic environments through interpersonal skill-building.

Recommendation Four:

My last recommendation is for consideration within the overall company and not simply with the A2W program. If CAI sees added value delivered to the company and their hires

through the JRT, then use an abridged version of JRT for all hiring processes. This abridged version would fall as a one or two-day training period rather than eight days. These sessions could take place over one or two days as full days or as partial days over a longer timeframe. This change could reduce the strain of an interview cycle and allow potential employees the opportunities afforded to the ASN trainees. Such opportunities focus on showcasing their abilities in teamwork, software proficiencies, programming languages, and leadership and interpersonal skills. In an industry such as information technology solutions, a practice of allowing potential hires to show rather than tell CAI about their abilities could reduce mismatched hires and missed potential employees.

As I observed the JRT, I realized how many people could be served by such an approach to hiring. What do we learn about someone in a short, 30-minute interaction? What more could we learn by seeing them solve a problem, interact with potential teammates, and engage with managers? These are a few of the questions that surfaced when I considered who could be served by such affordances. Implementation of this approach would require members of the A2W team to train other members of the overall CAI team to implement these hiring practices. Human resource changes would include considerations for managing hiring cycles best and how and when to engage managers and team leads in reviewing or observing these sessions. The necessary competencies exist within the company inside of the A2W program. A cost-benefit analysis would shed light on the practical matter of whether or not such an intervention would benefit CAI overall.

Conclusions and Future Study

The purpose of this capstone project was to explore improving Computer Aid, Inc's Job Readiness Training for their Autism2Work initiative. I conducted the project by gathering training observations and reviewing public relations documents and webinar transcripts related to the initiative.

Finding One. Based on my observations of the eight-day JRT, the primary goal of the training is to assess potential employees for job readiness through a series of tasks and interactions. The secondary goal of the training is to modify behaviors toward working within a professional, agile team-based system using the scrum framework and agile approach for information technology teams.

Finding Two. Over eight days, the participants engaged in a variety of activities to assess their job readiness and modify behaviors toward a professional, team-based setting using the agile approach and scrum framework for information technology teams. Such participation requires trainees to show up each day at the specified time, interact in a professional setting and manner, and engage with potential coworkers in an agile team-based system using the scrum framework. The facilitators assessed participants throughout the eight-day training period for their professional skills and level of preparedness for the job.

Finding Three. The trainer and staff used a series of measurably proficient pedagogical practices to engage the trainees in activities focused on development outcomes using a variety of affordances, such as video-based training modules, peer modeling, group interactions, share out sessions, and cascading affordance building where necessary.

Future Study

This project led me in the direction of some fascinating future studies. In particular, data analysis about the unemployment rate for people who self-identify as ASN. This work also led me down the path of a new question: *What constitutes an ethical affordance?* The findings focus on what happens if the affordance is removed. I am also interested in how the Peter Principle interacts with the ASN community. The Peter Principle states that we are promoted to our level of incompetence. In the case of someone with autism or neurodivergence, does this mean their level of incompetence or beyond their capabilities without appropriate affordances to support their successful participation? This work is vital for those who self-identify as part of the ASN community and all of us. Greater awareness and understanding of affordances are beneficial. As I continue this work, I look to a future where neurodivergence is no longer stigmatized as a disability but seen as an integrated part of humanity.

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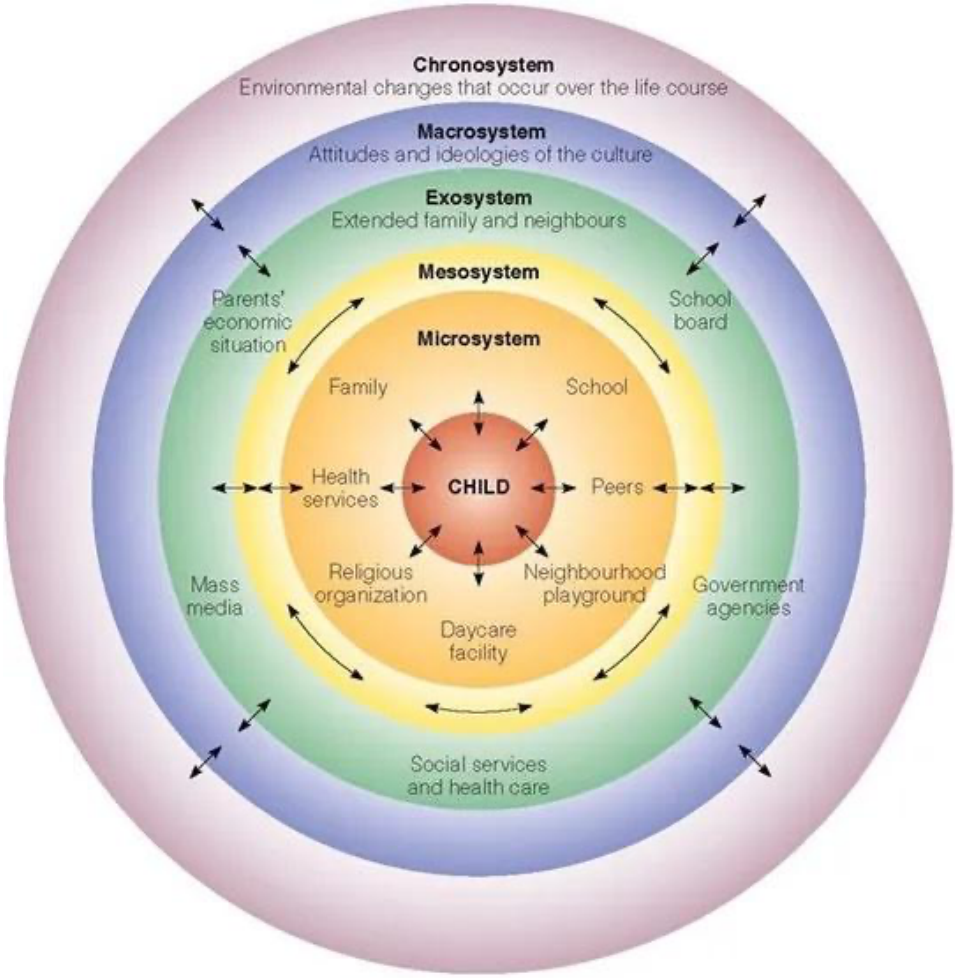
Appendix A



Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model is an update from his earlier Model of Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994). While this model places "child" at the center, my work uses this model to demonstrate interactions with an ASN person at the center.

Appendix B

Links to public relations documents and web pages used for document review:

- Overview of Autism2Work program: https://www.cai.io/capabilities/autism2work/
- Agile Transformation Consulting: https://www.cai.io/capabilities/agile/
- Partner with CAI A2W: https://www.cai.io/capabilities/autism2work-partner-with-a2w
- Making Data More Meaningful: https://www.cai.io/success-stories/a2w-making-data-more-meaningful/
- Flourishing in the Right Environment: https://www.cai.io/success-stories/a2w-flourishing-in-the-right-environment/
- Inclusivity Brings Big Benefits: https://www.cai.io/success-stories/a2w-for-health-insurer-inclusivity-brings-big-benefits/
- Meet Josh: https://www.cai.io/profiles/josh/
- Meet Nick: https://www.cai.io/profiles/nick/
- Exceeding Expectations: https://www.cai.io/success-stories/a2w-exceeding-expectations/
- Moving Forward with A2W: https://www.cai.io/moving-forward-with-autism2work/

Appendix C

Autism Spectrum Disorder Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria Rubric

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

ace Autism Center for Excellence

1. Professional Knowledge
The teacher demonstrates an understanding of curriculum, subject content, and the developmental needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.

Category	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing/Needs Improvement	Unacceptable	Where to Find Evidence
Demonstrates accurate knowledge of ASD and the characteristics	Teacher consistently demonstrates knowledge of ASD by addressing core deficits (social, communication, sensory, and behavior) in instruction and daily routines. Teacher is also able to instruct other professionals in addressing core characteristics in the educational setting.	Teacher consistently demonstrates knowledge of ASD and can address at least two core deficit areas (social, sensory, communication, and behavior) through instruction and daily routines in the educational setting.	Teacher demonstrates some knowledge of ASD but may have difficulty addressing core deficits (social, sensory, communication, behavior) through instruction.	Teacher does not demonstrate knowledge of ASD and does not address core deficits.	Lesson plans, teacher interview, classroom observation
Effectively addresses appropriate curriculum standards based on students' individual needs	Teacher consistently addresses student needs by implementing curriculum aligned with state standards, is socially relevant, and will support student growth. Teacher is able to teach other educators to address appropriate curriculum standards based on students' individual needs.	Teacher consistently addresses student needs by implementing curriculum that is aligned with state standards, is socially relevant, and will support student growth.	Teacher demonstrates knowledge of appropriate curriculum standards but is unable to implement them on a consistent daily basis.	Teacher does not demonstrate knowledge of appropriate curriculum standards. Does not base instruction on students' individual needs.	Lesson plans, teacher interview, classroom observation
Bases instruction on goals that reflect high expectations and are based on students' IEPs	Teacher consistently provides rigorous instruction with high expectations of student growth, based on students' IEP goals and objectives. Teacher is able to assist other educators in promoting rigorous instruction.	Teacher consistently provides rigorous instruction with high expectations of student growth, based on students' IEP goals and objectives.	Teacher provides some rigorous instruction but does not base instruction on students' IEP goals and objectives.	Teacher does not provide rigorous instruction or does not base instruction on students' IEP goals and objectives.	Lesson plans, teacher interview, classroom observation
Understands the sensory needs of students with ASD and is knowledgeable about ways to proactively use sensory strategies	Teacher understands the sensory needs of students with ASD, and consistently uses proactive sensory strategies in the classroom. Teacher is also able to instruct other professionals in proactive sensory strategies that can be used in the classroom setting.	Teacher understands the sensory needs of students with ASD and consistently uses sensory strategies proactively in the classroom setting.	Teacher inconsistently uses proactive sensory strategies in the classroom setting. May also use sensory strategies reactively.	Teacher does not understand sensory needs of students with ASD. Teacher does not use sensory strategies or supports proactively.	Lesson plans, sensory or behavior plan, student data, teacher interview, classroom observation

Category	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing/Needs Improvement	Unacceptable	Where to Find Evidence
Demonstrates understanding of functions of behavior and is knowledgeable of interventions matched to each	Teacher understands the functions of behavior and is able to consistently match interventions to each. Teacher is able to instruct other professionals about functions of behavior and how to effectively match interventions.	Teacher understands and is consistently able to identify functions of behavior and implement inventions that are matched to each function.	Teacher may understand the functions of behavior, but inconsistently demonstrates that knowledge. May have difficulty matching interventions to behavioral function.	Teacher does not understand functions of behavior and is not able to articulate interventions matched to each.	Lesson plans, behavior intervention plans, behavior intervention data, teacher interview, classroom observation
Demonstrates accurate knowledge of evidence-based teaching practices (reinforcement, prompting, visual schedules, antecedent based interventions, etc)	Teacher is consistently able to demonstrate knowledge of a variety of evidence-based practices specific to students with ASD and consistently implements these practices in the classroom setting. Teacher is able to provide accurate information to other professionals on evidence-based practices for students with ASD.	Teacher has knowledge and is consistently able to implement at least five evidence based practices for students with ASD in the classroom setting. Teacher is able to individualize these practices based on students' needs.	Teacher may have knowledge of evidence-based practices for students with autism but inconsistently implements these practices in the classroom setting.	Teacher does not demonstrate knowledge of evidence-based practices for students with ASD.	Lesson plans, student data, teacher interview, classroom observation
Demonstrates knowledge of content curriculum and matches appropriate evidence-based practices	Teacher consistently demonstrates knowledge of a variety of evidence-based curriculum and learning materials that are aligned with state standards. Teacher is able to share this information with other professionals.	Teacher consistently demonstrates knowledge of a variety of evidence-based curriculum and learning materials that are aligned with state standards.	Teacher consistently demonstrates knowledge of at least one evidence-based curriculum and/or learning materials that are aligned with state standards.	Teacher does not demonstrate knowledge of evidence-based curriculum and learning materials for students with ASD.	Lesson plans, student data, teacher interview, classroom observation
Understands the importance of communication and its day to day impact for students with ASD	Teacher understands the need for communication training in the school setting for students with ASD. Teacher consistently implements strategies to target this skill area multiple times a day in the classroom setting. Teacher is able to coach other educational professionals to do the same.	Teacher consistently understands the need for communication instruction in the school setting for students with ASD. Teacher consistently implements strategies to target this skill area multiple times a day.	Teacher understands the need for communication instruction to occur throughout the day, but has difficulty implementing communication instruction on a daily basis.	Teacher does not demonstrate knowledge of the importance of communication instruction in the school setting. Instruction in communication training not evidenced in lesson plans.	Lesson plans, student data, teacher interview, classroom observation
Understands the importance of social skill development and it's day to day impact for students with ASD	Teacher understands the importance of social skill instruction for students with ASD and implements strategies to target this skill area multiple times a day. Teacher is able to mentor other professionals to target social skill instruction in the classroom.	Teacher consistently understands the importance of social skill instruction in the school setting for students with ASD and implements strategies several times a day. Teacher consistently implements strategies and supports to target this skill area at least four times a day.	Teacher consistently demonstrates understanding of the need for social skill training in the school setting. Teacher does not consistently implement strategies to target this skill on a daily basis.	Teacher does not understand the importance of social skill instruction and training for students with ASD. Teacher does not provide social skill instruction in the classroom setting.	Lesson plans, student data, teacher interview, classroom observation

3. Instructional Delivery

The teacher effectively engages students in learning by using a variety of instructional strategies in order to meet individual learning needs.

Category	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing/Needs Improvement	Unacceptable	Where to Find Evidence
Engages and maintains students in active learning	All students are consistently engaged in work related tasks that are appropriate for their instructional level. Any breaks are closely monitored so they are not too long but give appropriate time for students. Teacher is able to model and coach other professionals in this practice.	Students are consistently working on assigned tasks without excessive breaks. Assigned tasks are appropriate for students' instructional levels.	Most students are working on assigned tasks that are mostly appropriate to their instructional level. Some students may take excessive breaks at times.	Students are off task or have little to work on, instructional is too far above or below their instructional level. Students tend to take excessive breaks and may have more break time than actual work time.	Observation, lesson plans
Promotes independence by using a variety of effective instructional strategies and resources to meet student needs	Teacher consistently uses a variety of effective instructional strategies and resources that are based on individual student needs that promote student growth and independence. Teacher is a resource to others on effective instructional strategies. Teacher is able to model and coach other professionals in this practice.	Teacher consistently uses a variety of effective instructional strategies and resources that are based on individual student needs that promote student growth and independence.	Teacher uses few effective instructional strategies and resources that may or may not be based on individual student needs.	Teacher uses few or no effective instructional strategies and resources and these are not based on the individual needs of the student.	Observation, Lesson Plans
Provides motivators for students based upon their individual needs and preferences	Multiple and various motivators are present for each student and students are allowed to choose their motivators. Teacher uses preference assessments and alters reinforcers on a regular basis. Teacher is able to model and coach other professionals in this practice.	Multiple and various motivators are present for each student and students are allowed to choose their motivators.	Multiple motivators are available for at least some students. Students are not typically given a choice in their motivators.	Few motivators are present and are not based on students' preferences or needs.	Observation, lesson plan, teacher interview
Effectively uses and fades prompts to support students to promote independence	Teacher has a systematic plan for using prompts to encourage student success, especially on new or difficult skills. There is a systematic plan for fading prompts to promote independence. Teacher is able to model and coach other professionals in this practice.	Teacher systematically uses prompts to encourage student success, especially on new or difficult skills. Prompts are faded as student shows success and independence.	Teacher uses prompts, though not always systematically, to promote success. Prompts are not always effectively faded and prompt dependence or over-prompting occurs.	Prompts are not used effectively or are used minimally. Prompts that are used are not faded and prompt dependence or over-prompting is common.	Observation, prompting procedures, interview
Implements accommodations and modifications defined in the IEP	Accommodations and modifications are consistently implemented as dictated by the IEP and data are collected on the effectiveness of the accommodations and modifications. Teacher is able to model and coach other professionals in this practice.	Accommodations and modifications are consistently implemented as dictated by the IEP.	Accommodations and modifications are usually implemented as dictated by the IEP.	Accommodations and modifications are not implemented as dictated by the IEP.	IEP, observation, teacher interview
Differentiates instruction to meet students' needs	Instruction is consistently planned to include different teaching methods, different materials, and student choice to meet students' needs. Teacher is able to model and coach other professionals in this practice.	Instruction is consistently planned to include different teaching methods and different materials to meet students' needs.	Instruction is inconsistently planned to include different teaching methods and different materials to meet students' needs.	Instruction is planned to be uniform for all students and may not meet students' needs.	Observation, lesson plans, teacher interview

5. Learning Environment

The teacher uses resources, routines, and procedures to provide a respectful, positive, safe, student-centered environment that is conducive to learning.

Category	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing/Needs Improvement	Unacceptable	Where to Find Evidence
Establishes a student centered climate that promotes dignity and respect	Teacher consistently uses positive language including person first language when talking about students. Teacher uses activities that promote independence for the student. Concerns about the students are handled privately away from other students. Confidentiality is maintained. Teacher coaches others in these skills.	Teacher consistently uses positive language including person first language when talking about students. Teacher uses activities that promote independence for the student. Concerns about the students are handled privately away from other students. Confidentiality is maintained.	Teacher uses mostly positive language including person first language. Teacher uses some activities that promote independence for the student. Concerns about the students are mostly handled privately away from other students. Confidentiality is mostly maintained.	Teacher uses little if any positive language when talking about students. Teacher uses few or no activities that promote independence for the student. Concerns about the students are not handled privately away from other students. Confidentiality is not always maintained.	Observation
Uses visual supports including classroom and individual visual schedules to promote independence	Visual supports such as visual schedules or other visual cues based on student need are available in the classroom. Visual supports are individualized to the student and are used consistently. Students consistently have access to visual supports. Students are taught to use visual supports in the classroom to promote independence. Can model and coach other professional in this practice.	Visual supports such as visual schedules or other visual cues based on student need are available in the classroom. Students have access to visual supports. Students are taught to use the visual supports to the classroom to promote independence.	Visual supports such as visual schedules or other visual cues are available in the classroom. Student are not consistently taught how to use visual supports.	Visual supports such as visual schedules or other visual cues are not present in the classroom or individually.	Visual supports, observation
Multiple simultaneous activities occur that are supported by classroom layout	All students are consistently actively engaged in productive tasks in the classroom. The teacher supports multiple instructional groups simultaneously including individual, small group, and/or large group instruction. Students consistently have little down time.	Most students are consistently actively engaged in productive tasks in the classroom. The teacher supports multiple instructional groups simul-taneously including individual, small group, and/or large group instruction. Students consistently have little down time.	Some or few students are actively engaged in productive tasks in the classroom. The teacher uses multiple instructional groupings including individual, small group, and/or large group instruction on an inconsistent basis. Students have more down time than needed.	Few or no students are actively engaged in productive tasks in the classroom. The teacher uses one instructional grouping such as individual, small group, and/or large group instruction. Students have more down time than needed.	Observation
Classroom environment promotes language development	Teacher models use of good language. Teacher plans for communication instruction daily and takes advantage of natural opportunities to teach communication skills daily.	Teacher models use of good language. Teacher plans for communication instruction at least three times per week and takes advantage of natural opportunities to teach communication skills multiple times per week.	Teacher sometimes models use of good language. Teacher plans for communication instruction at least once per week and takes advantage of natural opportunities to teach communication skills at least once per week.	Teacher inconsistently models use of good language. Teacher plans for communication instruction less than once per week and does not takes advantage of natural opportunities to teach communication skills on a regular basis.	Lesson plans, observation
Uses routines and procedures to promote a structured and predictable environment	Routines and procedures are evident for multiple tasks during the day. Routines and procedures are taught to students and practiced until they are mastered. Routines and procedures are used to promote independence. Routines and procedures are supported with visual supports.	Routines and procedures are evident for multiple tasks during the day. Routines and procedures are taught to students and practiced until they are mastered. Routines and procedures are used to promote independence.	Routines and procedures are evident for at least two tasks during the day. Routines and procedures are inconsistently taught to students and/or are inconsistently practiced.	Routines and procedures are evident for less than two tasks during the day. Routines and procedures are not taught to students and are not practiced.	Observation

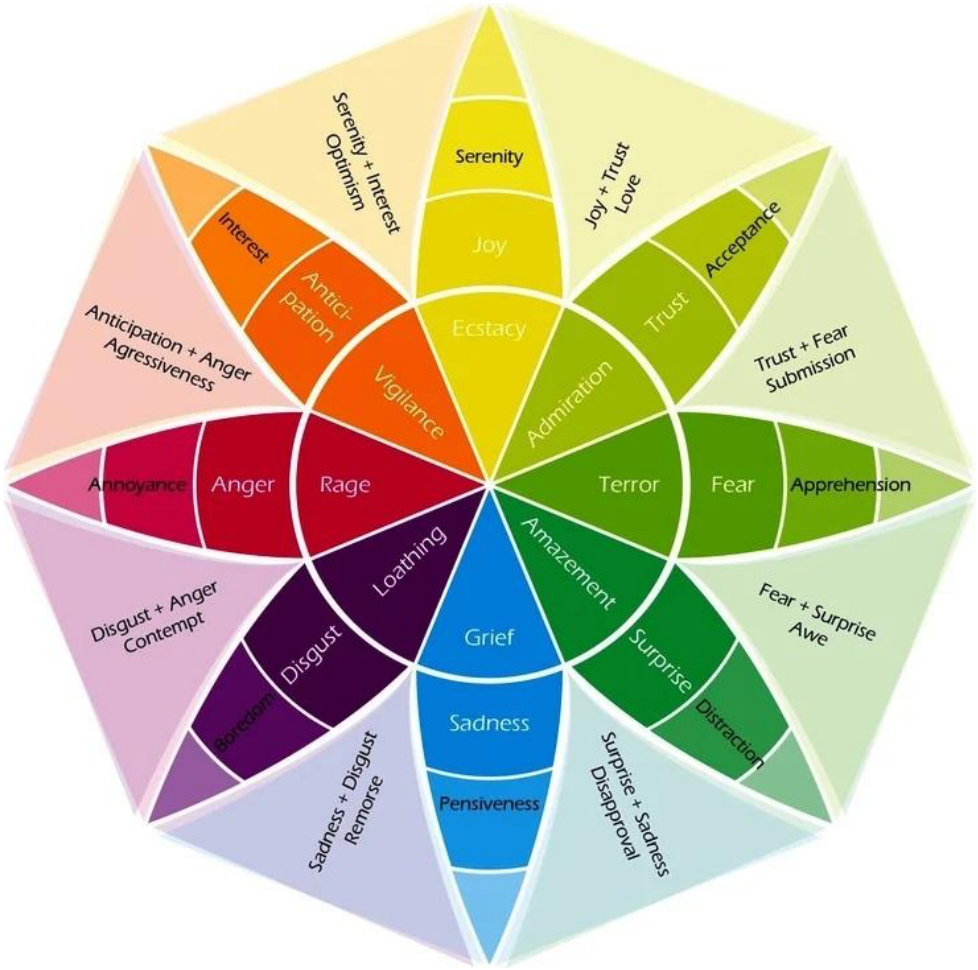
6. Professionalism

The teacher maintains a commitment to professional ethics, communicates effectively, and takes responsibility for and participates in professional growth that results in enhanced student learning.

Category	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing/Needs Improvement	Unacceptable	Where to Find Evidence
Collaborates and communicates effectively within the school community to promote inclusion and student success	Teacher consistently collaborates with other teachers and support staff for the students on his/her caseload. Teachers consistently plan together at least once per week, share resources on a regular basis, and engage in long term planning to promote successful inclusion of students and student success. Collaborative planning to focus on instructional strategies, accommondation/ modifications, promoting independence, increasing communication and social skills, and data analysis, among other appropriate topics. Teachers can model and coach others in this practice.	Teacher consistently collaborates with other teachers and support staff for the students on his/her caseload. Teachers consistently plan together at least once per week, share resources on a regular basis, and engage in long term planning to promote successful inclusion of students and student success. Collaborative planning to focus on instructional strategies, accommondation/modifications, promoting independence, increasing communication and social skills, and data analysis, among other appropriate topics.	Teacher inconsistently communicates with other teachers and support staff about the needs of the students on his/ her caseload. Teachers plan together one time per month and share some resources in order to promote greater inclusion of students and student success. Collaborative planning to include items such as scheduling, content, and accomondation/ modifications.	Teacher infrequently communicates with other teachers and support staff about the needs of the students on his/her caseload. Teachers do not plan together on a regular basis.	Observation, collaboration logs, teacher and team interviews
Adheres to federal and state laws, school policies, and ethical guidelines	Teacher adheres to federal and state laws, school policies, and ethical guidelines on a consistent basis. Teacher asks the appropriate personnel questions about unknown issues related to any laws, policies, or guidelines. Teacher is a resource for others in these areas.	Teacher adheres to federal and state laws, school policies, and ethical guidelines on a consistent basis. Teacher asks the appropriate personnel questions about unknown issues related to any laws, policies, or guidelines.	Teacher inconsistently adheres to federal and state laws, school policies, and ethical guidelines or is late in adhering to such requirements and guidelines. Teacher is inconsistent about asking the appropriate personnel questions about unknown issues related to any laws, policies, or guidelines.	Teacher does not adhere to federal and state laws, school policies, and ethical guidelines on a consistent basis.	Observation, personnel file, IEPs, progress notes, student files, teacher interviews
Works in a collegial and collaborative manner with administrators, related service personnel, paraprofessionals, other school personnel, and the community	Teacher consistently collaborates with others in the school and community and is often leads collaborative efforts. Teacher has a positive attitude about collaborating with others and frequently offers support to others.	Teacher consistently collaborates with others in the school and community both when required and as a voluntary activity. Teacher has a positive attitude about collaborating with others. Teacher offers support to others.	Teacher inconsistently collaborates with others in the school and community or does so only when it is required. Teacher usually has a positive attitude about collaborating with others.	Teacher does not collaborate with others in the school and community. Teacher has a negative attitude about collaborating with others.	Observation, teacher interview
Follows division and school policy on use of technology including use of personal cell phones	Teacher consistently follows division policies on use of technology and personal cell phones. Teacher promotes the use of technology in his/her class in accordance with these policies. Teacher supports others in the school on the use of technology models division and school policies on the use of technology.	Teacher consistently follows division policies on use of technology and personal cell phones. Teacher promotes the use of technology in his/her class in accordance with these policies.	Teacher inconsistently follows division policies on use of technology and personal cell phones. Teacher sometimes uses their personal cell phone during the school day not in accordance with the division policy. Teacher is inconsistent in monitoring the use of technology in his/her class in accordance with these policies.	Teacher does not follow division policies on use of technology and personal cell phones. Teacher uses their personal cell phone during the school day on a consistent basis not in accordance with the division policy. Teacher does not monitor the use of technology in his/her class in accordance with these policies.	Observation

Category	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing/Needs Improvement	Unacceptable	Where to Find Evidence
Builds positive and professional relationships with parents/guardians through frequent and effective communication concerning students' progress	Teacher communicates with parents on a consistent basis in a mutually agreeable format such as phone calls, letters home, and/or e-mails. Teacher communicates students' progress to parents in a timely manner and shared positive feedback with parents.	Teacher communicates with parents on a consistent basis in a mutually agreeable format such as phone calls, letters home, and/or e-mails. Teacher communicates students' progress to parents in a timely manner and shares positive feedback with parents.	Teacher communicates with parents on an inconsistent basis or in a format decided upon by the teacher without regard to parent preference such as phone calls, letters home, and/or e-mails. Teacher sometimes communicates students' progress to parents though not always in a timely manner and shares some positive feedback with parents.	Teacher does not communicate with parents on a consistent basis or in a mutually agreeable format such as phone calls, letters home, and/or e-mails taking into consideration parents' preferences. Teacher does not communicate students' progress to parents in a timely manner and feedback is typically negative when it is shared.	Parent contact log, copies of notes home, observation
Demonstrates consistent mastery of standard oral and written English in all communication	Demonstrates consistent mastery of standard oral and written English in all communication and supports others in this area.	Demonstrates consistent mastery of standard oral and written English in all communication.	Demonstrates inconsistent mastery of standard oral and written English in some communication.	Demonstrates inconsistent mastery of standard oral and written English in all communication.	Observation, written communication
Models appropriate social and communication skills with students and adults	Teacher consistently models appropriate social and communication skills with students and adults in all school environments and in the community. Teacher is a resource for others in this area.	Teacher consistently models appropriate social and communication skills with students and adults in all school environments.	Teacher inconsistently models appropriate social and communication skills with students and adults in some school environments.	Teacher displays inappropriate social and communication skills with students and adults in the school setting.	Observation
Avoids the use of seclusion and restraint and follows all division policies and procedures	Teacher follows all division policies on restraint and seclusion and avoids the use of both unless absolutely necessary for safety of the student or others. Teacher provides support or training to others in how to avoid the use of restraint and/or seclusion.	Teacher follows all division policies on restraint and seclusion and avoids the use of both unless absolutely necessary for safety of the student or others.	Teacher inconsistently follows all division policies on restraint and seclusion but uses them more than necessary.	Teacher does not follow all division policies on restraint and seclusion and uses them unnecessarily.	Observation
Follows division and school dress code	Teacher consistently follows the division and school dress codes and ensures that attire is appropriate for the students with whom he/she works.	Teacher consistently follows the division and school dress codes.	Teacher inconsistently follows the division and school dress codes.	Teacher does not follow the division and/or school dress codes.	Observation

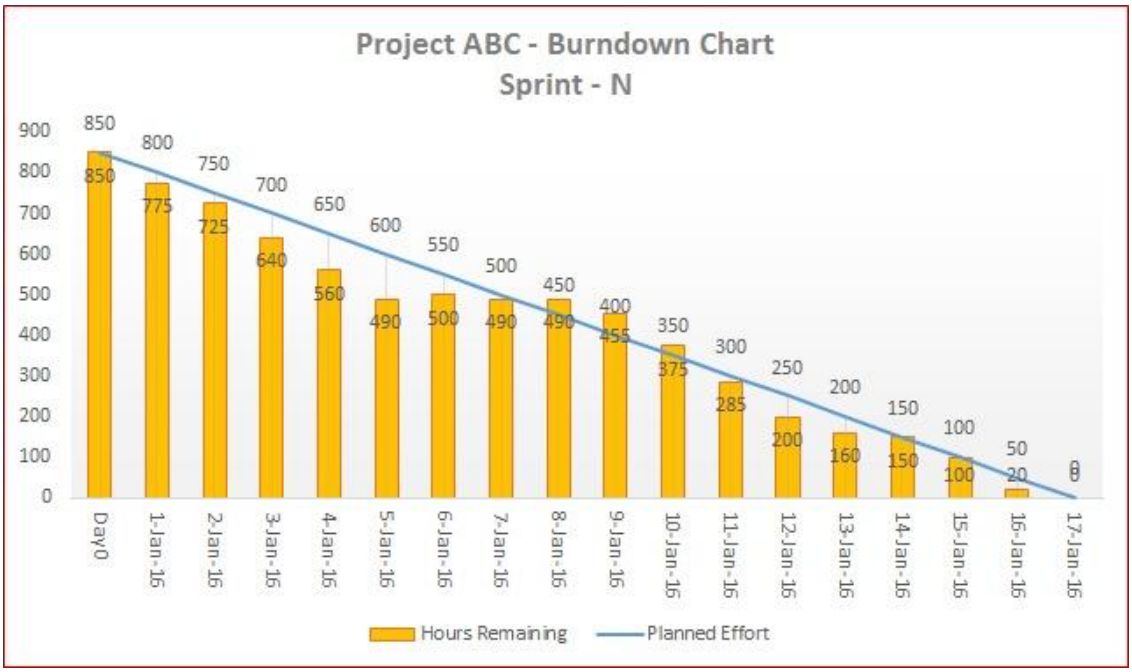
Appendix D



Robert Plutchik's (1980) Wheel of Emotion is used to help ASN persons designate their current feelings and determine the difference between an emotion and need. This wheel aids JRT trainees during the morning standup sessions.

Appendix E

Burn-down hours chart example:



A flexible, agile burndown chart. (2021). *E is for Excel.* https://eforexcel.com/wp/download-template-03-an-felxible-agile-burndown-chart/

Appendix F

STARs

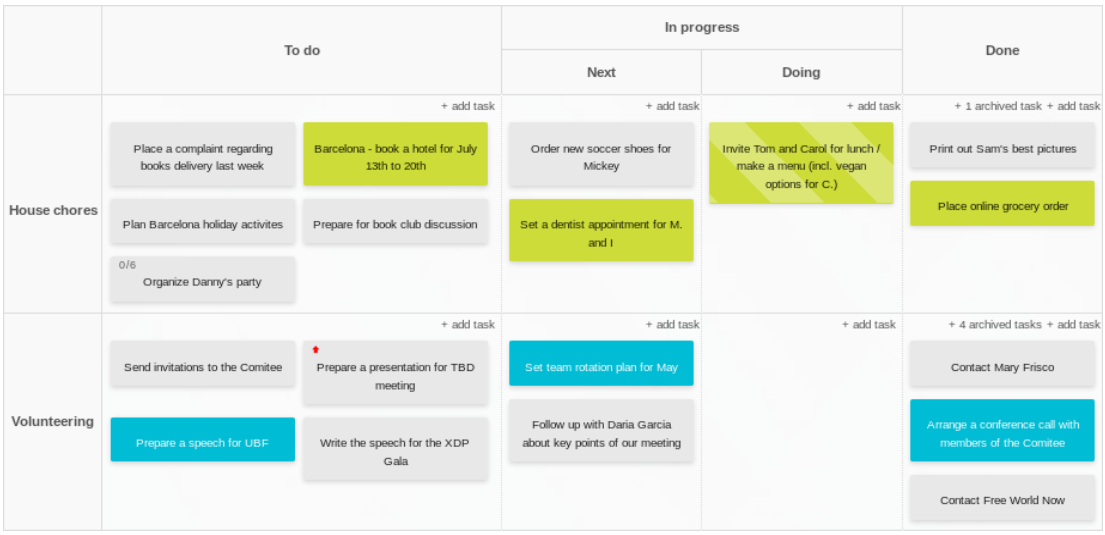
The STAR response method is helpful for keeping answers to behavioral-based interview questions focused while still providing the detailed information that the interviewer needs. Remember that behavioral-based questions ask about your previous experiences because the way that you handled previous situations is likely to be a good indicator of your future performance. STAR is an acronym for Situation - Task(s) - Action(s) - Result(s). Each word represents key information that should be provided in an answer.

	Start by explaining the situation so the interviewer understands the context of your answer. Don't spend too much time on this. It is not necessary for the interviewer to have a detailed understanding of the situation; they are more interested in how you handled the situation.
	Next, talk about the tasks that you took responsibility for completing or the goal of your efforts.
	Then, describe the actions that you personally took to complete the task(s) or reach the goal. (Tip: Instead of saying "We did xyx," say "I did xyz.") Be sure to highlight the skills or character traits addressed in the question. This is a very important part of your answer because it is essential for you to demonstrate that you have a good understanding of the particular skills the interviewer is trying to analyze.
	End by, explaining the positive outcomes or results generated by your actions. You might emphasize what you accomplished, or what you learned.

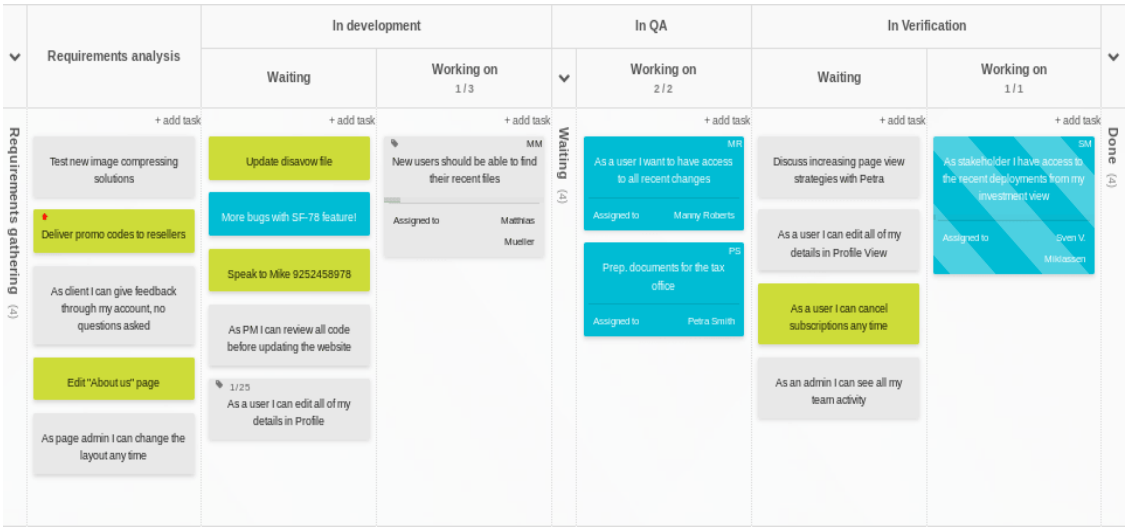
STARs (2021). Engineering career services: The employment process. *Iowa State University.* https://www.engineering.iastate.edu/ecs/students/the-employment-process/step-7-interview-and-follow-up/stars/

Appendix G

Simplified kanban board example:



Higher-level kanban board example:



Kanban Tool (2021). Kanban board examples. *Shore Labs.* https://kanbantool.com/kanban-board-examples