



Small Scenarios for Changing Times:

# Hiring Einstein

By Heather Bussing, Michael Kannisto, and John Sumser

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*It is said that every society is three meals away from chaos. If this pandemic has shown us anything, it's that it doesn't even take missing meals for the chaos to appear. One day people are dropping clip art into their latest slide deck; a few weeks later, they're hoarding toilet paper, screaming at unmasked strangers, ordering pounds of yeast, and hosing down their mail with bleach.*

Many of us are having a really hard time with the fear and uncertainty. People are reporting heightened anxiety and depression. We struggle with the isolation. Liquor stores are doing a brisk business. People are struggling to make sense of scientific facts about how a virus spreads and how to slow the spread.

It would be great to have some of our best historical thinkers here to assess the data and give us advice. We could use some really smart people like Charles Darwin, physicist Paul Dirac, Steve Jobs, Albert Einstein, Sir Isaac Newton, Nikola Tesla. But I'll bet you a case of paper towels that your company

would never hire any of them if they applied for a job. That's because they are all people who were likely on the autism spectrum.

Neurodiverse people often possess remarkable technical and problem-solving capabilities. Because of the unique lens through which their brains view the world, they end up being very good at seeing patterns, making unlikely connections, and surfacing insights that others miss. But there are things they can be terrible at: managing up, demonstrating emotional intelligence, detecting social cues, networking, and giving presentations.

When your organization returns to work and has to decide how to re-staff, it's a good time to think about hiring brilliant people who can bring solutions to you that you can't even imagine today. Here are some ways you can bring neurodiversity into your post-pandemic organization.

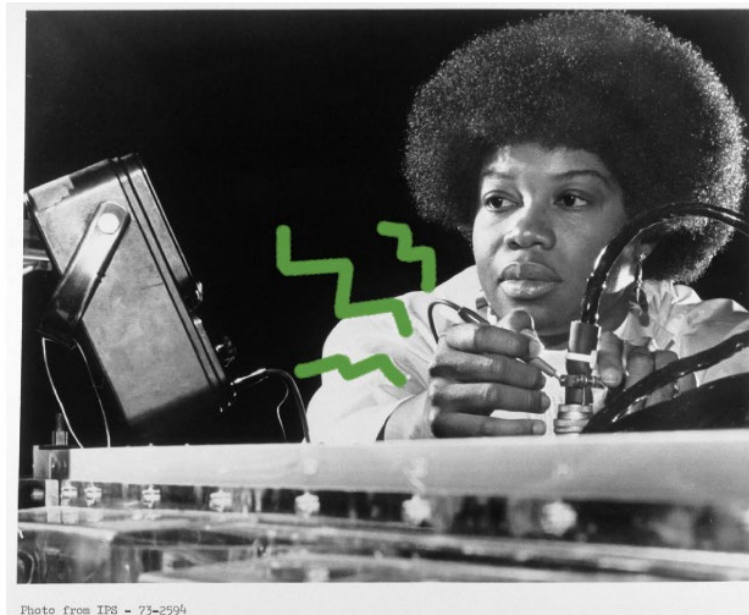


Photo from IP8 - 73-2594

*The Way We Worked: Engineer Delores Brown, 1973, National Archives, Records of the U.S. Information*

## Change the way you hire and promote

There are a few companies actively seeking to increase the neurodiversity of their workforce. It's hard and takes time. It's not just a matter of hiring

more neurodiverse people. The systems, processes, and culture needs to be able to welcome them and give them the opportunity and resources to succeed.

The “ritual” of hiring is also difficult for people who are not neurotypical. For example, many have auditory processing delays and don’t do well in traditional phone interviews. There are many ways to reconfigure the recruiting process to make it easy for qualified candidates to successfully make it through, but it takes care and intention.

A great resource for information and tools for hiring and managing people with autism is Autism Speaks. The Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Agency also has a great resources for hiring and retaining neurodiverse employees.

## Actively seek out neurodiversity

Despite many valuable capabilities, people with neurological differences have appallingly high rates of unemployment and underemployment. There is no shortage of qualified candidates who are ready to work. Many cities have resources that serve this population, and would welcome access to a contact that could provide access to corporate opportunities.

Companies who do this well understand that brain differences are normal and do not indicate a deficit when compared to neurotypical brains. But differences in behavior and interpersonal interactions are often noticeable. So, it’s important for companies to have the education and ability to manage these differences in ways that work for everyone.

## Ask your current neurodiverse employees to help you

We have seen success in diversity and inclusion through employee resource groups that advocate for employees who are underrepresented or have special challenges such as LGBTQ employees, parents, and most protected classes. We are just starting to see this type of advocacy for people who are not neurotypical. Much of this success is the result of employee advocates helping companies learn how to create a welcoming culture. In all likelihood, you have a great deal of neurodiversity “hiding” from you today. Ask them for help.

*The return to work will offer new challenges and opportunities. Things will not work the same and we will need new kinds of intelligence, different viewpoints, and skills to adapt and thrive. Companies who actively cultivate a neurodiverse workforce will be well positioned to meet those challenges.*

## About the Small Scenarios series:

Massive change is afoot. The pandemic gives us the opportunity to rethink and reappraise. The small scenarios project is designed to provoke thought about the medium-term future and how it will be different. The goal is to help HR prepare for the future we will encounter in a few short months.

## The Small Scenarios Team



**HEATHER BUSSING** Heather Bussing is an employment attorney, HR Tech analyst, writer and editor where she explores the intersection of people, technology, law, and work. She also teaches internet law. She's appeared in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, CNN, Mashable, Business Insider, and NPR discussing employment issues and tech.

**MICHAEL KANNISTO** Michael is the Scenario Director at MindemicLab, and hosts an ongoing series of Scenario Planning events designed to help HR Leaders better prepare for the future.



**JOHN SUMSER** For 25 years, John Sumser has been chronicling the comings and goings in HRTechnology. These days, his primary focus is on intelligent tools (AI) and People Analytics. He is a Senior Fellow at the Conference Board, the Intelligent Tools columnist for HRExecutive magazine and the founder/principal analyst at HRExaminer.

## About HRExaminer

HRExaminer is a research and publishing company focused on the evolving edges of HR and HRTechnology. The publications team includes a 25 member editorial advisory board who deliver insight and opinion. The company also produces two award winning podcasts (live on Thursday and Friday mornings at 8:00 AM Pacific). Each year, HRExaminer delivers the market benchmark report on the evolution of Intelligent tools in HRTechnology.

### Contact

Web: [hrexaminer.com](http://hrexaminer.com)

Phone: 415.683.0775

### John Sumser,

*Principal Analyst*

@johnsumser

[john@hrexaminer.com](mailto:john@hrexaminer.com)

+1.415.683.0775

### Heather Bussing,

*Principal Analyst*

@heatherbussing

[heather@hrexaminer.com](mailto:heather@hrexaminer.com)

+1.415.683.0775