
Name: Michael Coles

Email: admin@deepdiveau.net

Phone: 0411221540

Organisation (if applicable): The Deep Dive AU

Submission Title: Lived Experience Insights into Structuring Supported Employment for Autistic Individuals

Submission Type: Personal Submission

Submission:

I am Michael Coles – an autistic adult, public speaker, podcast host, advocate, and parent to two young autistic and ADHD children, one formally diagnosed, the other in the process of being diagnosed. I did work full-time in accounting administration through supported employment up until November 2023, where I had a severe autistic burnout episode due to stress caused by changes in management, and changes in process where I had not been trained properly, and where my needs were supported initially, and then suddenly revoked for no reason, and with no explanation. I currently engage in public speaking and host a podcast through my platform [The Deep Dive AU](#), where I advocate for inclusion and accessibility for neurodivergent individuals.

This submission outlines practical, lived experience-based recommendations for improving supported employment for autistic individuals in Australia. It reflects my personal journey, professional challenges, and insights gained from years of navigating the workplace with Autism and ADHD, as well as supporting my AuDHD daughter and son.

Key Issues Identified:

1. Transition Challenges and Lack of Planning Support

Transitions—both large and small—are particularly difficult for many autistic individuals. Sudden changes in workplace expectations, task processes, or management without adequate communication or training can lead to meltdowns or shutdowns. This has been a recurring challenge in my workplace, especially when training is lacking or priorities shift without warning.

2. Workplace Misunderstanding of Autism

Many workplaces still lack understanding of how autism affects day-to-day functioning. This includes challenges with verbal communication, reading non-verbal cues, and needing time to process instructions or decisions. Autistic burnout from masking and emotional labour is often misread as poor performance.

3. Inadequate Accommodations and Inflexible Structures

I thrive with structure: clear checklists, routines, pre-briefed meetings, and advance notice of deadlines. These strategies allow me to plan and manage my energy effectively, yet are not consistently implemented or understood in most workplace settings.

4. Emotional Toll and Mental Health Strain

Working without proper accommodations or emotional support can lead to psychological harm. I have experienced panic attacks, required mental health intervention, and taken stress leave due to workplace mismanagement of my needs.

Recommendations for Reform:

1. Co-Design Employment Supports with Autistic Individuals

Policies should be informed by lived experience. Autistic people know what works for them. Templates such as “Working With Me” documents can help clarify needs, triggers, and strategies for support.

2. Provide Training for Employers on Autism in the Workplace

There needs to be mandatory training for employers and colleagues on autism, including communication styles, reasonable accommodations, and how to recognise signs of distress.

3. Promote Structured Employment Strategies

Employment should centre around structured schedules, routine, energy management strategies, and clearly defined task expectations. These strategies significantly improve outcomes and reduce anxiety.

4. Fund and Facilitate Access to Allied Health Professionals

Allied health workers (e.g., OTs, Psychologists, Speech Therapists) are critical in developing sustainable, individualised workplace accommodations. Their expertise should be funded and integrated into supported employment planning.

5. Implement Interview Accessibility Tools

Job interviews are often a barrier for autistic individuals. AI tools, pre-submitted interview questions, or alternative formats (e.g., visual or written responses) should be adopted broadly to create equity in hiring.

Final Statement:

Supported employment should mean sustainable, emotionally safe, and fulfilling work – not just a placement. I hope this submission can contribute meaningfully to reform that truly listens to and empowers autistic people.

I’m also available to discuss these insights further by directly contacting me or in any professional speaking capacity.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

Sincerely,

Michael Coles

Email: admin@deepdiveau.net

Phone: 0411221540

Website: www.deepdiveau.net

Podcast: [The Deep Dive AU](#)

Let me know if you'd like this formatted as a downloadable PDF or tailored further for uploading as an attachment.