



The Autistic Spectrum exists at the extreme male brain side of the scale, with autistic behaviours increasing in predominance and severity the further away from the middle of the scale you go. At the opposite end of the scale there is the extreme female brain. In the middle section of the scale there is a balance of Systemising and Empathising behaviours, suggesting the behavioural flexibility to engage usefully in both *male* and *female* cognitive and behavioural strategies.

I would suggest that we don't exist at one point of the scale, but rather like the People/Task Continuum, we have an x and y point of behaviours within which we feel comfortable operating. In other words, we have a spectrum of behaviours and strategies, and it is very likely that there will be some similarities for you in your scores and ranges for each of the two models. For some people, their comfort range might be quite short, whilst others will have a much broader range. Additionally, people's ranges might start and end at different points. Once again, the longer someone's span is on the scale, the more flexible their cognitive, emotional and behavioural strategies will be. Therefore the more adaptable and effective team member, colleague and leader they will be.

### **The Exercise**

- This exercise will identify your range of flexibility on the continuum. Looking at the diagram, put an 'A' on the left side where you feel comfortable operating up to, bearing in mind that your Systemising focus will become more extreme, (at the expense of Empathy), the further towards the left end of the scale you go.
- Now put a 'B' on the right side of the continuum towards the Empathising end of the scale where you also feel comfortable operating.
- Join the two points, 'A' and 'B' with a straight line, putting a little arrow head for clarity, like this, <-----> . This represents your 'comfort zone' on the continuum.
- Now add two more arrows, also with double arrow heads, on the other side of your 'A' and 'B' points, like this <----> A< ----> B <-----> (remember your arrows will be the length that is representative of your scores and may not look like the ones I have used here for illustrating the point). These two new outside arrows represent your ability to operate on the scale outside of your comfort zone.
- This is very useful information to have, especially when you can recognise it. In fact, the military in the UK design many of their leadership development exercises deliberately to push people outside of their natural area of comfort whilst still being able to operate effectively, until such a time when they can move back to within their comfort zone. This is especially critical in a war zone situation where a leader's order may well mean that, potentially, not all of their military personnel may come back in one piece, or at all.
- The longer your lines are and the more of the continuum you are able to cover, the greater your flexibility will be, and therefore the more flexible, supportive and yet achievement-oriented you will be.

You may also find it useful to complete the exercise on the People/Task Continuum which you will find on the Resources page at [www.unitedbychocolate.com](http://www.unitedbychocolate.com)

More resources can be freely downloaded from [www.fionabeddoesjones.com](http://www.fionabeddoesjones.com)

Adapted from Beddoes-Jones, F., (2016). *Divided by Gender, United by Chocolate: Differences in the Boardroom*. Blue Ocean Publishing: Cambridge, UK.