Neurodiversity in the Workplace

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Objectives

- Develop an Understanding of Neurodiversity
- Appreciate the importance of neurodiversity in the workplace
- Understand how to create a neuroinclusive workplace
- Understand the diversity of communication and collaboration preferences and needs
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I know what neurodiversity means
What is Neurodiversity?
By Jessica Lauren McCabe
What is Neurodiversity?

“Neurodiversity refers to the virtually infinite neuro-cognitive variability within Earth’s human population. It points to the fact that every human has a unique nervous system with a unique combination of abilities and needs.” Judy Singer

A social movement that emphasizes that challenges experienced by neurodivergent persons are due to how the neurotypical majority designed the world and advocates for social change to break down barriers that keep neurodivergent individuals from thriving in ways conducive to their needs.
What is Neurodiversity?

1 in 7 people are neurodivergent
“neurodiversity advocates generally consider autism to be both a natural variation and a disability.

Advocates therefore concurrently campaign for acceptance and respect for autistic people as valuable members of society and also fight for appropriate support and services to meet the needs of the autistic community.”

Neurominorities include...

Co-occurring variations

Invisible differences

- Autism spectrum
- ADHD
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Tourette Syndrome
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Other variations
Neurodiversity variations appear in one or more of these areas:

- Social understanding
- Emotional regulation
- Attention regulation
- Motor regulation
- Working memory
- Language & development
- Sensory processing

The diagram illustrates a color spectrum representing a range from not neurodivergent to very neurodivergent.
Neurodiversity variations appear in one or more of these areas:

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- Emotional regulation
- Attention regulation
- Motor regulation
- Working memory
- Information processing
- Sensory processing
- Language & development

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If you’ve met one neurodivergent person, you’ve met one neurodivergent person.

Key challenge: we often judge variations in behaviors and needs that we do not understand.

That comes at a high cost!
Neurodivergent adults have much lower employment outcomes despite their intellectual ability.

- Neurotypical (DOL): 5% unemployment
- Autism: 80% unemployed
- ADHD: 33% (1 in 3) unemployed
- Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia: 46% unemployed
If you’ve met one neurodivergent person, you’ve met one neurodivergent person.

Key challenge: The neurotypical world forces people to assimilate.

That comes at a high cost!
Many neurodivergent employees expend energy on masking to “fit in” our neurotypical world!

- Exhausting
- Anxiety-inducing
- Meltdown
- Shutdowns
- Burnout

Negatively impact health & wellbeing
Neurodiversity Movement

Emphasizes

• that challenges experienced by neurodivergent persons are due to how the neurotypical majority designed the world

The goal

• is to break down barriers that keep neurodivergent individuals from thriving in ways conducive to their needs rather than masking in order to assimilate to the our neurotypical world
My understanding of neurodiversity was spot-on
Objectives

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2. Appreciate the importance of neurodiversity in the workplace
3. Understand how to create a neuroinclusive workplace
4. Understand the diversity of communication and collaboration preferences and needs
Neurodiversity enriches the workplace in the following ways
Neurodiversity Movement Emphasizes Strengths

Created by Dr. Nancy Doyle based on the work of Mary Colley
Neurodiversity emphasizes strengths neurominorities bring to the workplace

**Unique strengths**
- Attention to detail
- Focus on work and results (productivity)
- Accept repetitive tasks
- Analytical thinking
- Visualization
- Pattern recognition
- Systemizing
- Less groupthink
- Multi-tasking
- Hyperfocus
- Risk-taking
- Creativity/ingenuity

**Employee characteristics**
- Trustworthiness
- Reliability
- Innovative
- Work ethic
- Continuous learners
To gain the benefits of neurodiversity, organizations must create the right support and cultivate a neuroinclusive culture.

Our normative expectations favor neurotypical preferences which lead to misunderstanding, conflict, and exclusion of neurodivergent people.
What is your organization’s readiness to include neurodivergent employees?

How do you foster a neuroinclusive environment that celebrates the strengths and provides the supports to empower people to tap into their strengths?

How do we co-create common ground and an inclusive environment?
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Neurodiversity Variations and Preferences

Variations in these dimensions of the mind-body of a neurodivergent person manifest in differences in behaviors, needs, preferences, and impact.

Understanding preferences and needs to minimize negative impact and pressure to assimilate against one’s nature is key to inclusion and celebrating strengths.
Identify where our practices and culture exclude neurodivergent people

Normative expectations across the employee lifecycle create barriers for neurodivergent people.

Understanding how variations in communication, social interaction, cognitive processing, and other dimensions of behavior manifest is critical to mitigating barriers.
Will I know who is neurodivergent?

Shouldn’t they tell me?

If they don’t tell me, I will not know to use these strategies.

I will try to diagnose them myself!

Some may not know they are neurodivergent

Disclosure is a personal decision

You may not ask or try to diagnose or assume

Learning neuroinclusive strategies is good management and leadership behavior

It is about becoming more effective in our collaboration and management practices

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What can I do?

Start with self-awareness
Focus on strengths
Recognize the individual and their unique needs
Ask questions
Follow the individual’s lead
What can I do?

Depends

• Your position & privilege
• Your sphere of influence
• Your risk profile – which may also depend on your identity

Options

• Individually
• In partnership with peers and allies with more influence
How to create a neuroinclusive culture?

- Be clear on why neuroinclusion matters to your organization
- Secure and make public the executive support for neuroinclusion
- Leverage the strengths of your current organizational culture
- Build capacity of your organization to operationalize neuroinclusion in work practices
- Follow your neurodistinct employees’ lead
- Identify and address norms and practices counter to neuroinclusion
How do we build the capacity of your team for neuroinclusion?

- **Train**
  - Train employees on neuroinclusion communication and collaboration practices.

- **Assess and transform**
  - Assess and transform recruitment to identify barriers to neuroinclusion.

- **Redesign**
  - Redesign policies to align them with neuroinclusion principles.

- **Emphasize**
  - Emphasize a strength perspective towards diversity by encouraging and modeling curiosity towards differences.

- **Accommodate**
  - Accommodate individual needs so everyone can perform at their best.

- **Normalize**
  - Normalize flexible work arrangements - available to all team members and yourself.

- **Cultivate**
  - Cultivate a culture of constructive feedback and recognition – job specific.

- **Design and develop**
  - Design and develop easy-to-find resources for neurodivergent employees.

- **Make**
  - Make all team members at all levels accountable for inclusion.
Identify one practice you can commit to improve neuroinclusion in your workplace
Objectives

Develop an Understanding of Neurodiversity

Appreciate the importance of neurodiversity in the workplace

Understand how to create a neuroinclusive workplace

Understand the diversity of communication and collaboration preferences and needs
Creating Common Ground

Communication Preferences

- Mode (Face-to-Face or online)
- Frequency
- Predictability
- Tempo/speed
- Use of direct vs. indirect language and humor
- Managing group conversations
Creating Common Ground

Work Preferences

- Alone or in a group
- Independent vs. guided work
- Detailed step-by-step instructions vs. goal
- Detail work vs. big picture
- Repetitive tasks vs. varied tasks
- Level of information about the context of the work
Creating Common Ground

Tolerance for Change and Certainty

• Context of work (steady vs dynamic)
• Constant team membership
• Ambiguity and uncertainty
• Clear prioritization of tasks
• Explicit specification and clear timelines
Creating Common Ground

Organizational Skills

- Organization and clutter in the workspace
- Timeliness to meetings
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Level and length of focus
- Tolerance for stress and pressure of work
- Memory of details, tasks, dates, processes
Creating Common Ground

Focus and Regulation

- Meeting deadlines
- Staying focused on tasks
- Reacting/responding when frustrated or stressed
- Switching tasks/multitask
Creating Common Ground

Sensory Preferences

- Touch
- Sight (brightness, patterns, flickering light)
- Hearing (quietness, sudden noise, white noise)
- Smell
- Movement (level of movement, coordination)
- Emotion
Creating Common Ground

Interpersonal Skills/Emotion

- Recognizing facial expressions
- Empathizing
- Recognizing one’s feelings and those of others
- Reading facial expressions and body language
- Conversational style (details, interest, small talk, facts)
- Remembering names and faces
- Needing for clear explanation of rules and norms of the team/org
- How talkative one is
- Comfort level in social events
- Need for inclusion

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Start with Self-Awareness

- **Perceptions/assumptions**
  - e.g., competence, benefits

- **Existing norms**
  - e.g., work hours, “acceptable” social behaviors

- **Expectations**
  - e.g., ability and role, specificity

- **Self-agency**
  - e.g., control your own success

- **Communication styles**
  - e.g., asking questions, details or metaphor

- **Preferences**
  - e.g., email vs. in person, group work

- **Power differential**
  - e.g., privilege of dominant group

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Be Mindful of Microaggressions

✓ You don’t look autistic
✓ You seem to be doing your job just fine – you don’t seem disabled
✓ Everyone is a little neurodiverse/divergent
✓ Have you tried..... (diet, therapy, treatment, etc.)?
✓ That’s retarded/weird
✓ Talking down/much slower
✓ You can’t have autism, you can show emotions and even express empathy...
✓ You can’t have autism, you’re a girl/woman
✓ Isn’t autism only in kids? Don’t they grow out of it?
✓ Oh, you have autism? You must be like a computer genius or something, right?
✓ You are so inspirational!
✓ That’s not appropriate behavior
✓ But you are a leader/Ph.D., you can’t be neurodivergent!

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Foundation

- Start with self-awareness
- Focus on strengths
- Recognize the individual and their unique needs
- Ask questions
- Follow the individual’s lead
AUTISM @ WORK
PLAYBOOK
Finding talent and creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with autism

NEURODIVERSITY @ WORK
PLAYBOOK
Employee Engagement and Growth Series

Peter Drucker once said, "Culture sets strategy for有效性." Are strategy for neurodiversity training is essential to build if the culture is not neuroresponsive.

What do we mean by neuroinclusive culture?

A neuroinclusive culture refers to an organizational culture that is consistent with the neurodiversity movement, which emphasizes the value of neurodiversity and the inclusion of neurodiverse employees. Such a culture is characterized by a belief that a neurodiversive working environment encourages neurodiverse people is essential to address the complexity of the world of work and society. Furthermore, including neurodiverse people increases firms’ resilience in their pursuit of a culture that is critical to the success of the organization and the wellbeing of all employees.

Why neuroinclusion matters

There is abundant evidence that an inclusive organizational culture is essential for productivity and innovation. True inclusion means creating opportunities for individuals, both internal and external, to optimize their potential and gain recognition for their unique contributions. These opportunities include recognition, fair treatment, and access to resources that help employees feel valued and included.

What is neuroinclusive culture?

Neuroinclusive culture is an environment that values and promotes the unique perspectives, strengths, and abilities of neurodiverse employees. It is characterized by open communication, understanding, and support.

Why you should care

Understanding neuroinclusive culture can help you create a more inclusive and supportive workplace. It can also help you attract and retain talented employees, improve productivity, and reduce turnover.

resources

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