

HOW TO CREATE A NEUROINCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

GUIDE FOR TEAMS AND MANAGERS



IF YOUR WORKPLACE IS DESIGNED FOR NEUROTYPICAL PEOPLE YOU ARE UNINTENTIONALLY EXCLUDING NEURODIVERGENT TALENT

NEURODIVERSITY TERMS

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the natural diversity of human minds. It is a biological fact that we are diverse in our minds, just like we are diverse in our ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.

Neurodiversity acknowledges the whole spectrum of neurodiversity from neurodivergent individuals to neurotypical individuals.

(Judy Singer)

Neurodivergent

Neurodivergent is an umbrella term for individuals who have a mind or brain that diverges from what is typical. It can be acquired or genetic, an innate part of you or not.

Neurodivergence just means having a mind that functions differently to what is considered the norm, including learning, processing, interpreting, feeling, etc.

(Kassiane Asasumasu)

Neurotypical

Neurotypical refers to having a mind or functioning that falls within the society standards of what is deemed "typical", "common" or "normal".

Neurotypical is the opposite of neurodivergent, someone who diverges, and is not a negative word at all, but a neutral word.

(Sonny Jane Wise)

Neurodiverse

Neurodiverse is a term to describe a group of individuals who represent the spectrum of neurodiversity, which includes neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals.

Remember, an individual cannot be neurodiverse. Individuals who aren't neurotypical would be neurodivergent.

(Sonny Jane Wise)

Neurodiversity



Neurotypical



Neurodivergent



2 in 10 people are neurodivergent

Neuroinclusion

Neuroinclusion refers to the practice of actively including and accommodating individuals with diverse neurotypes, including both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals, in all aspects of society.

It emphasises creating accessible, supportive environments that value and empower individuals with varying cognitive styles.

BENEFITS OF NEUROINCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

A neuroinclusive workplace is one that actively embraces and supports the diversity of neurotypes. Creating a neuroinclusive workplace benefits individual employees and the organisation. Here are some benefits of a neuroinclusive workplace:

1

Enhanced innovation and creativity: Neurodiverse teams bring a variety of perspectives and ways of thinking, leading to more innovative solutions and creative approaches to challenges.

2

Better problem-solving and decision-making: By bringing together individuals with diverse cognitive styles and problem-solving approaches, neuroinclusive workplaces are better equipped to address complex challenges and make informed decisions.

3

Improved employee engagement and retention: When employees feel accepted and valued for their unique strengths and differences, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and satisfied with their work. A supportive and inclusive work environment can lead to higher employee retention rates and lower absenteeism, as employees feel more connected to their work and are less likely to experience burnout or disengagement.

NEUROINCLUSIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

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TEAM PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY THUS DESCRIBES AN INTERPERSONAL CLIMATE CHARACTERIZED BY TRUST AND RESPECT, IN WHICH PEOPLE ARE COMFORTABLE BEING THEMSELVES

In a neuroinclusive workplace, culture plays an important part in ensuring neurodivergent colleagues stay, grow and advance.

When employees feel accepted and valued for their unique strengths and differences, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and satisfied with their work. A supportive and inclusive work environment can lead to higher employee retention rates and lower absenteeism, as employees feel more connected to their work and are less likely to experience burnout or disengagement.

A neuroinclusive culture comes down to two main points: psychological safety and how neurodivergent staff are supported in growth and advancement by managers.

Psychological safety [is] a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.

(Amy Edmondson)

READ MORE



Disability:IN's Neurodiversity @ Work Playbook: Employee Engagement & Growth Series, is a resource that supports the growth and advancement of neurodivergent employees. Developed in collaboration with Dr. Annabi from the University of Washington iSchool and 20+ leading companies and organisations, the series of in-depth Playbooks and (mainly) 1 page Manager Quick Guides is a great resource.

NEUROINCLUSIVE WORKPLACE COMMUNICATIONS



CLEAR IS KIND

INVOLVE NEURODIVERGENT VOICES



The key to neuroinclusive communications is understanding that everyone is different. Involving neurodivergent colleagues will help with wider engagement and should avoid a one size fits all approach. You can consider creating neurodiversity champions or a neurodivergent focus group. Be accepting, some neurodivergent colleagues can be literal and struggle with non-verbal communications (For example body language).

MESSAGE



Your messages should be clear, concise and consistent. Be clear by using plain and literal language. Be concise by using simple and short phrases, avoid jargon and unnecessary information. Be consistent, repetition can be a good thing with neurodivergent colleagues. Clearly outline expectations (with deadlines and priorities) - think 'what by when'. Requesting neurodivergent colleagues to decipher innuendos, discern unspoken internal dynamics, or read between the lines can lead to feelings of alienation, confusion, and anxiety, ultimately impeding productivity and collaboration.

FORMAT



A simple and logical structure will ensure your neurodivergent colleagues are focused and engaged. Make your emails clear from the subject to the contents. Lots of text and long paragraphs will not appeal. Include an overview/summary, use headlines, short paragraphs, bullet points and simple instructions. Signpost with simple visual icons. Choose larger text, a simple sans serif font (For example: Arial) and a plain background. Avoid bright colours, distracting shapes or auto-replay videos.

DELIVERY



Neurodivergent colleagues will have different ways of processing information - there is no one size fits all. By diversifying your communications delivery, you are more likely to meet the needs of different cognitive styles. When giving instructions, send them in an email as well as saying them in person/in a video meeting. Communicate in different ways (text, visual and/or audio) and via different methods (For example: email or meeting). Your communications should also provide options to find out more information or context with links to supporting resources or explainer videos. Context can be important for some neurodivergent colleagues to make a decision.

PACE

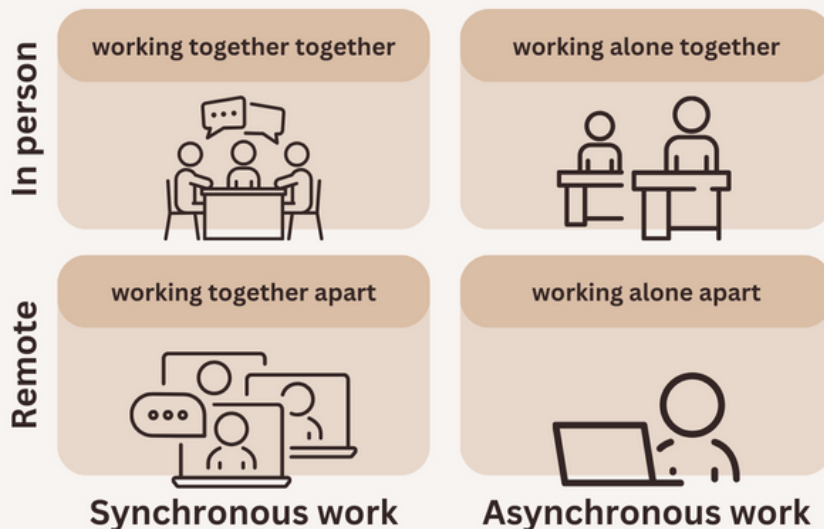


Be mindful of sensory load. Some neurodivergent colleagues may have heightened sensitivities, with a tendency to be easily overwhelmed by information. Some may struggle with the perception of time and/or need additional processing time, especially with verbal information. Find the right pace for your communications, include silences, provide plenty of time for processing information and asking questions. Be clear about timing. If you need a decision allow for extra time and silence, and where possible supply information in writing.

NEUROINCLUSIVE WORKPLACE COLLABORATION



DON'T CONFUSE A LACK OF VISIBILITY WITH A LACK OF ENGAGEMENT



Collaboration

Consider how you collaborate - in person, remote, synchronous or asynchronous - to ensure that your neurodivergent colleagues are able to add value. In the debate of in person vs remote there is a focus on where people work, rather than how they can work best together.

Some neurodivergent colleagues collaborate best working alone together, working together apart or working alone apart:

- Asynchronous collaboration may reduce the urgency to respond promptly, affording individuals additional time for thoughtful consideration before contributing. It also supports colleagues who prefer written rather than verbal contributions.
- Virtual collaboration provides individuals with the opportunity to contribute within a controlled and predictable environment, which can help to alleviate feelings of anxiety or sensory overload.

Video meetings

Virtual meetings can be challenging for some neurodivergent colleagues, as interpreting social cues and managing the increased sensory input can feel confusing and tiring.

Considerations:

- Camera off doesn't mean disinterested - being on camera can be distracting and can cause anxiety due to heightened self-awareness (some neurodivergent colleagues may like a specific environment, like sitting on the floor, due to sensory needs)
- Fidgeting or doodling doesn't mean a lack of focus - it is a mechanism to focus
- Avoid impromptu meetings where possible and be explicit about why you are meeting - to reduce anxiety and aid planning
- Consider meeting size - larger groups can be taxing for neurodivergent colleagues
- Share a clear agenda in advance - state what will be discussed, what is expected in the meeting and what you're hoping to achieve
- Provide different options for contribution - during the meeting or via the chat
- Offer written follow-ups and one-to-ones

Team agreement

Microsoft use Team agreements so everyone is empowered to have a voice about how they prefer to collaborate. Teams have open discussions about how they can support different communication styles to be at their best together, based on trust and mutual understanding. Use the "Neuroinclusive checklist for teams" on the last page to agree your own Team agreement.



NEUROINCLUSIVE WORKPLACE DESIGN

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59% OF COMMON ADJUSTMENT TYPES COST NOTHING FOR THE EMPLOYER

Onboarding

A “one size fits all” onboarding process that has been in place for some time may not be neuroinclusive (For example: remember that icebreaking activities may cause anxiety in neurodivergent colleagues).

Environment

In a traditional office environment, sensory stimuli can be overwhelming for some neurodivergent colleagues.

READ MORE



The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is the leading source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on job accommodations and disability employment issues. Their Accommodation and Compliance: Neurodiversity helps support and guide employers with accommodating neurodiverse professionals in the workplace (from key accommodations considerations to breaking down common workplace challenges).

Flexible working

A workplace culture centred around the office/in person environment tends to benefit extraverted individuals and those at ease with in-person interaction. Workplace flexibility levels the playing field by creating space for alternative ways of connecting, including remote and asynchronous collaboration.

Neurodivergent colleagues may experience fluctuating energy levels throughout the day and require time to recuperate from social interactions or periods of intense focus. Workplace flexibility enables them to synchronize their working pattern with peak productivity times and incorporate necessary recovery breaks, to mitigate the risk of exhaustion or burnout.



Neurodivergent colleagues should have control over their sensory environment



Neurodivergent colleagues should have control over their work location and pattern



Neurodivergent colleagues should have control over how they connect with their colleagues

NEUROINCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT



A CONVENTIONAL INTERVIEW PROCESS IS OFTEN PRINCIPALLY A TEST OF RECALL AND “SOCIAL COMPETENCE”

Securing the best talent

Employers continue to overlook exceptional talent, simply because the traditional interview process doesn't provide the platform for neurodivergent candidates to excel.

Following the steps for neuroinclusive communications, you should set out clear, concise and consistent communications from job advert to every email they receive as part of the application process. Set out the expectations of each step of the recruitment process in different formats.

Job description

In job descriptions consider whether people or communications skills are an appropriate requirement (For example “must have strong teamworking skills” and “must be a good communicator”) or whether this traditional terminology restricts your recruitment pool by excluding some neurodivergent people. These skills may be a genuine requirement for some roles, but it's unlikely to be essential to all roles. Instead of these traditional skills, narrow down the skills you are looking for and be explicit about them. Craft roles for specialists rather than generalists.

Ensure the job description (and any related resources) are in an accessible format, if possible provide them in different formats (audio and/or video).

Make sure you include an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statement within the job description and highlight how neuroinclusive your workplace is.

Application process

As part of the application process, allow candidates to show their work, rather than talk about it. Skills-based assessments are more beneficial for neurodivergent candidates.

Interview

At interview, start by understanding what accommodations should be made to make the interview neuroinclusive. An interview can be a very stressful situation for a neurodivergent person so consider what may help (For example: you can provide the candidate with questions in advance to allow the candidate to prepare).

Feedback

Constructive feedback is essential for all neurotypes, not just neurodivergent people. Following the steps for neuroinclusive communications, you should be clear, concise and consistent. Remember: clear is kind.

Author

Georgia Broome has over 13 years of experience in communications. She has worked in high-profile UK public sector roles - from leading a strategic communications team for the financial regulator at the height of the credit crunch, to managing numerous international media events attended by the late Queen and the Prime Minister - and as the founder of gb communications.

As a communications specialist, she understands how to bring together audiences, content and channels to deliver strategic and effective communications. She believes that neuroinclusive communications is going to be a core skill for communications professionals as audiences change, and has spent the last year researching this topic.

Georgia is currently the Head of Strategic Communications at the Department of Computer Science, University of Oxford.

A special thank you to Neurodiversity at Oxford (a project dedicated to supporting, empowering and celebrating the University's neurodiverse community of students and staff) for reviewing early drafts and to Tarena Shanaberger, Inclusive Hiring Program Manager at Microsoft, for encouraging Georgia to create this resource.



Resources

- The National Autistic Society estimates that around 20% of the population could be neurodivergent in one way or another (2018)
- Sonny Jane Wise (they/them) is a 'Lived Experience Educator' raising the profile of neurodiversity and ensuring neurodivergent individuals are no longer labelled or viewed as disordered www.livedexperienceeducator.com
- For a more detailed breakdown of neurodiversity please go to: <https://geniuswithin.org/what-is-neurodiversity/>
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development CIPD 2018 Neurodiversity at work https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/guides/neurodiversity-at-work_2018_tcm18-37852.pdf (please note that this uses the outdated term of neurodiversity instead of neuroinclusion) and Neuroinclusion at work 2024 report <https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/2024-pdfs/2024-neuroinclusion-at-work-report-8545.pdf>
- Birkbeck Research Centre's Centre for Neurodiversity at work <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/research/centres/neurodiversity-at-work> and in particular the Universal design for neurodiversity at work (PDF) <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/downloads/schools/business/universal-design-across-the-employee-life-cycle/>
- Disability:IN's Neurodiversity @ Work Playbook: Employee Engagement & Growth Series <https://disabilityin.org/resource/neurodiversity-at-work-playbook-employee-engagement-growth-series/>
- The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) Accommodation and Compliance: Neurodiversity <https://askjan.org/disabilities/Neurodiversity.cfm>

NEUROINCLUSIVE CHECKLIST FOR TEAMS



EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT SO JUST ASK

FOR TEAMS AND MANAGERS

Communication preferences

How do you like to be contacted?
Do you have any boundaries that I should respect? (For example: can I contact you via Teams Chat? can I call you unexpectedly?)

Collaboration preferences

Do you prefer to collaborate in person, remote, synchronously or asynchronously?
Do you prefer to have your video on or off during video meetings?
How do you prefer to collaborate during video meetings: verbally or written?
Would walking meetings suit your collaboration style?
How to you prefer to build working relationships?

Environmental preferences

What kind of working environment suits you best?
What sensory sensitivities should we be aware of?
Are you comfortable in social settings? Are there any accommodations that can be made to help with this?

Task management/delegation preferences

How do you prefer to receive instructions?
What strategies do you find useful in organising your work?
What information is useful to include in task management or delegation of tasks? (For example: break down the task, discuss time needed for each task, deadlines, context, check ins)

FOR MANAGERS

Professional Development preferences

How do you prefer to receive feedback? (For example: in writing, verbally, one-to-one, in a group setting)
Do you prefer one-to-ones in person or remote via video meeting?
What type of recognition resonates with you? (For example: one-to-one, in a group setting, physical reward)
How do you prefer to receive constructive feedback?
What format of training suits you best?
How can I support your professional development needs?

Wellbeing preferences

What wellbeing practices help you and how can I enable them?
Are there any workplace triggers I should be aware of?
How can I help you feel comfortable to be yourself at work?

