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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

Table of Contents 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 7

INTRODUCTION 8

CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERGENCE 10

1.1 Introduction 10

1.2 Overview of Neurodevelopmental and Trauma-Related Conditions 10

1.3 Dispelling Myths and Emphasizing the Spectrum of Abilities 12

1.4 Reframing Neurodivergence as Cognitive Diversity 13

1.5 Conclusion 14

References 14

CHAPTER 2: STRENGTH-BASED HIRING: MATCHING SKILLS TO ROLES 17

2.1 Recognizing unique talents 17

2.1.1 Common strengths 17

2.1.2 Practical examples 18

2.1.3 Tips for employers: 18

2.2 Concerns and difficulties in employment 19

2.2.1 Typical concerns 19

2.2.2 Common challenges and solutions by condition 19

2.2.3 Autism spectrum 20

2.2.4 ADHD 20

2.2.5 Trauma backgrounds 20

2.2.6 Dyslexia 20

2.2.7 OCD 20
2.2.8 Tourette 21
2.2.9 Internships as a pathway 21
2.3 Knowledge that supports inclusion 21
2.3.1 Core principles 21
2.3.2 The importance of job design 21
2.3.3 Practical ways to build inclusion 22
2.4 Practical tips for employers 22
2.5 From strengths to success 23
References 23
CHAPTER 3: RETHINKING RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESSES 25
3.1 Critique of conventional interviews and CV-based filtering 25
3.2 Alternatives: work trials, practical assessments, structured interviews 27
3.3 Case studies of inclusive hiring practices 30
3.3.1 Case Study 1: Piadineria – Diversity & Inclusion programme 31
3.3.2 Case Study 2: Microsoft's Neurodiversity Hiring Program 31
References 32
CHAPTER 4: WORKPLACE ADAPTATIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN 35
4.1 Sensory-Friendly Spaces, Noise Control, Flexible Seating, Lighting 35
4.1.1 Practical adaptations for employers: 35
4.2 Providing quiet rooms, visual schedules, and self-regulation tools 36
4.2.1 Practical solutions for employers: 37
4.2.2 Effective practices include: 38
4.3 Country-Specific Examples from Finland, Spain, and Cyprus 39

4.3.1 Lessons for employers everywhere: 40
4.3.2 Key insights for action 40
References 40
CHAPTER 5: COMMUNICATION & INTEGRATION 43
5.1 Training Managers and Teams in Neuro-Inclusive Communication 43
5.1.1 Set Clear Objectives 44
5.1.2 Build Foundational Awareness 44
5.1.3 What is Neurodiversity? 44
5.1.4 What is a neurotypical person? 45
5.1.5 Teach Practical Communication Techniques 46
5.1.6 Practice on active listening 46
5.1.7 The benefits of Active Listening 47
5.1.8 Steps for Active Listening 47
5.2 Communication Styles 49
5.2.1 Verbal and written Communication 49
5.2.2 Nonverbal communication 50
5.2.3 Multiple channels of communication 50
5.3 Adjusting Expectations for Eye Contact, Small Talk, and Indirect Speech 50
5.4 Role of Clear, Written Instructions and Structured Feedback 51
5.4.1 Clear, Written Instructions 52
5.4.2 Structured Feedback 52
5.5 Integrating Neuro-Inclusive Communication into Culture 53
5.5.1 Prepare a communication guide that recognizes diverse preferences. 53

5.5.2 Regularly review policies and training materials with neurodiverse advisory input 54
5.5.3 Run inclusive meetings and events 54
5.5.4 Training for managers and staff 55
5.5.5 Be open about neurodivergence 55
References 56
CHAPTER 6: EMOTIONAL SAFETY AND DISCLOSURE 60
6.1 Fear of stigma or discrimination 60
6.2 Past negative experiences 61
6.3 Unclear or inaccessible processes 61
6.4 Lack of role models 61
6.5 Masking feels easier 62
6.6 Corporate culture 62
6.7 Empathy from leaders and managers 63
6.8 Confidentiality and control over information 64
6.9 Education and training 65
References 67
CHAPTER 7: THE ROLE OF MENTORS AND PEER SUPPORT 70
7.1 Importance of trained internal mentors for onboarding and ongoing guidance. 70
7.2 Peer-to-peer programs and their role in easing transitions. 71
7.3 Real-World Examples. 72
References 73
CHAPTER 8: INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE 76
8.1 How leadership sets the tone for inclusion. 76

8.2 Moving from tokenism to authentic inclusion. 76
8.3 The shift from accommodation to appreciation. 77
References..... 78
CHAPTER 9: SECTORAL INSIGHTS AND CONSTRAINTS 81
9.1 Sector-specific challenges in security, hospitality, consulting, IT, and education. 81
9.1.1 Security 81
9.1.2 Hospitality 82
9.1.3 Consulting 83
9.1.4 IT..... 84
9.1.5 Education 85
9.2 Legal, safety, and productivity considerations by country..... 86
9.3 How sectors tailor roles for neurodivergent individuals. 88
9.3.1 Security 88
9.3.2 Hospitality 89
9.3.3 Consulting 89
9.3.4 IT..... 90
9.3.5 Education 91
References..... 92
CHAPTER 10: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS .. 95
10.1 Introduction 95
10.2 A Toolkit of Practical, Scalable Strategies..... 95
10.3 Legal Frameworks, Financial Incentives, and Inclusive HR Policies..... 99
10.3.1 Summary of Training Needs and Modules 103

10.4 Conclusions 106
References 107
CONCLUSION 109
ABOUT THE PROJECT PARTNERS 110
V-Systems sp. z o.o. (Poland) – Project Coordinator 110
Międzynarodowa Akademia Nauk Stosowanych w Łomży (MANS) (Poland) 110
LUISS Guido Carli University (Italy) 110
University of Vaasa (VAMK) & MUOVA (Finland) 111
EDITC Limited (Cyprus) 111
Innopares Consultores y Formadores S.L. (Spain) 111

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The modern workforce is becoming more diverse than ever before. It is estimated that 1 in 44 people may be identified with a neurological condition such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and 1 in 20 may be diagnosed with trauma (PTSD) — a number exacerbated by recent global events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which has led to a significant influx of displaced refugees.

Despite possessing extraordinary skills and high intellectual capabilities, students and young graduates with neurological disorders or trauma backgrounds face immense social boundaries when searching for their first job. Without proper workplace accommodations and an inclusive culture, these individuals often struggle to adjust, leading to high rates of unemployment or underemployment.

The Spectrum-Cohesion project (COHESION) aims to address this urgent challenge. Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, the project unites a transnational consortium of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Small and

Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from Poland, Italy, Finland, Spain, and Cyprus. The project shifts the perspective from searching for the right "care context" to establishing the right "real context" — equipping both vulnerable students and the private sector with the tools necessary for mutual success.

This comprehensive guide is the culmination of the project's efforts. It provides a dual approach: offering tailored training packages for private sector employers to foster neuro-inclusive work environments, and providing actionable strategies for students with neurological disorders to successfully navigate their employment journey. By transitioning from mere accommodation to genuine appreciation of cognitive diversity, the COHESION project strives to create a labor market where every individual's unique talents can thrive.

INTRODUCTION

The world of work in 2023 and beyond presents complex challenges. For many young adults, their formative years have been severely impacted by the isolation of a global pandemic and the instability caused by international conflicts. Today, graduates entering the workforce face unprecedented pressures. This transition is particularly daunting for students with neurological disorders — such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and dyslexia — as well as those affected by trauma (PTSD), including refugees and migrants.

According to United Nations studies, 1 in 6 individuals will experience neurological disorders. While these conditions are not illnesses but lifelong human conditions, they can profoundly affect workplace performance and social integration. Often, vulnerable students resort to negative coping mechanisms when experiencing distress at work, which can lead to employment dropouts and long-term economic marginalization.

While educational institutions often provide institutional support, this safety net abruptly ends upon graduation. Consequently, neurodivergent youth frequently face stark social boundaries during their job search. However, these individuals often possess extraordinary skills — such as exceptional attention to detail, pattern recognition, and deep focus — that remain invisible due to behavioral difficulties in adjusting to a neurotypical society.

The Spectrum-Cohesion (COHESION) project was established to bridge this gap. Bringing together three Higher Education Institutions and three SMEs across five European countries, the project aims to improve the social cohesion and employment outcomes of students with neurological disorders or war-related trauma. COHESION seeks to set up a common ground between companies looking for extraordinary skills and young graduates looking for a supportive environment for their first job.

This guide presents a comprehensive methodology and dual training framework designed to:

1. Raise the skills and competencies of private sector staff, enabling them to successfully cooperate with and manage vulnerable graduates.

2. Empower students with neurological disorders by developing their soft skills and helping them navigate the modern labor market.

The chapters that follow detail a strength-based approach to hiring, rethink conventional recruitment processes, and provide practical guidelines on workplace adaptations, communication strategies, and inclusive leadership. Ultimately, this guide aims to normalize neurological disorders in the workplace and foster environments that value cognitive diversity as a crucial asset for innovation and competitiveness.

CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERGENCE

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, the concept of neurodiversity has gained increased attention within academic, social, and professional spheres. The term "neurodivergence" refers to natural variations in the human brain that affect how individuals think, learn, interact, and process information. Traditionally pathologized as disorders, conditions such as *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), trauma-related conditions like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*, and other neurodevelopmental profiles such as *dyslexia, dyspraxia, and Tourette's syndrome*, are now increasingly understood through the lens of cognitive diversity. In the context of employment, recognizing neurodivergence as a dimension of human variation rather than deficit opens the door to more inclusive, ethical, and innovative workplaces.

1.2 Overview of Neurodevelopmental and Trauma-Related Conditions

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Neurodevelopmental conditions manifest early in life and shape cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning across the lifespan. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is characterized by differences in social communication, sensory processing, and behavioral patterns. These differences are wide-ranging and vary significantly from person to person, which is why the term "spectrum" is used (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Some autistic individuals may have limited spoken language or require high levels of support, while others may function independently and excel in areas requiring attention to detail, systems thinking, or sustained focus. Autistic individuals may prefer routines, find certain environments overwhelming due to sensory sensitivity, or communicate in direct, literal ways. These behaviours are not flaws—they are variations.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition involving challenges with attention regulation, impulsivity, and sometimes hyperactivity. People with ADHD may struggle to focus on tasks they find uninteresting but can enter intense states of "hyperfocus" for topics they are passionate about. They might interrupt conversations, lose track of time, or procrastinate—not out of laziness but due to differences in how their brains manage motivation and executive function. Importantly, ADHD also comes with cognitive strengths, including rapid idea generation, creative problem-solving, and adaptability in dynamic environments (Barkley, 2015). These traits can be valuable in fast-paced industries or roles that require innovation.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Trauma-related conditions, particularly PTSD, fall within the broader category of neurodivergent experiences when trauma significantly alters neural functioning. PTSD results from exposure to overwhelming stress and is marked by emotional dysregulation, hyperarousal, memory disturbances, and difficulties in concentration. People with PTSD may seem irritable, anxious, or overly cautious in situations that others find routine. Trauma can fundamentally change how the brain responds to stimuli, particularly in high-stress or unpredictable environments (van der Kolk, 2014).

Additional neurodivergent conditions, such as *dyslexia, dyspraxia, and Tourette's syndrome*, also contribute to the diversity of cognitive experiences found in the workplace:

Dyslexia affects reading, spelling, and language processing. A person with dyslexia might mix up letters or read slowly but often excels in verbal communication, storytelling, or creative thinking.

Dyspraxia affects coordination and spatial awareness. It might show up as clumsiness or difficulty with fine motor tasks like handwriting, yet individuals often demonstrate strong problem-solving, empathy, or verbal reasoning.

Tourette's Syndrome causes involuntary motor or vocal tics such as blinking, throat clearing, or repeating phrases. These behaviors are not voluntary and do not affect intelligence.

1.3 Dispelling Myths and Emphasizing the Spectrum of Abilities

Despite growing awareness, neurodivergent individuals continue to face stigma, exclusion, and misunderstanding in professional environments. This is largely fueled by enduring social myths that reduce complex conditions to stereotypes. For example, a universal myth about autism is that autistic people are "emotionless" or lack empathy. But in reality, many autistic individuals experience emotions deeply and are capable of forming strong, meaningful relationships. However, they may communicate or express emotions differently from neurotypical expectations, leading to misinterpretation (Milton, 2012).

Similarly, ADHD is often mischaracterized as a sign of laziness or lack of discipline. The stereotype of the distracted, underperforming individual overlooks the neurological underpinnings of the condition. ADHD affects the brain's executive functioning system, which governs organization, time management, and sustained attention—not motivation or intelligence (Hallowell & Ratey, 2011). Many individuals with ADHD struggle not because they are unmotivated, but because they lack the neurological mechanisms that support consistent task regulation without external stimulation or structure. In fact, people with ADHD can show hyperfocus on topics of interest, and they can deliver a higher amount of work than neurotypical people.

Another dangerous myth is the assumption that trauma-related responses indicate weakness or an inability to "move on." This belief ignores the neurological reality that traumatic experiences rewire the brain's response to danger, often leading to chronic hypervigilance or emotional dysregulation. These are not personality flaws but adaptive responses to lived experiences (van der Kolk, 2014).

These misconceptions not only marginalize neurodivergent individuals but also obscure their strengths. For instance, autistic individuals often bring exceptional attention to detail, consistency, and honesty. ADHDers may generate rapid and original ideas that others might overlook. People with PTSD often develop a strong sense of justice, empathy, and hyperawareness that can make them highly intuitive in social or ethical contexts. Recognizing these attributes challenges the deficit model and affirms the value of neurodivergent perspectives in collaborative, creative, and socially responsible workplaces.

1.4 Reframing Neurodivergence as Cognitive Diversity

The deficit-based view of neurodivergence—dominant in clinical and institutional contexts—frames these conditions as dysfunctions to be corrected or managed. In contrast, the neurodiversity paradigm (Singer, 1999) proposes that neurological variation is a natural and beneficial aspect of human diversity, much like biodiversity is to ecosystems. This paradigm advocates for a shift from pathologizing difference to understanding and accommodating it.

Reframing neurodivergence as cognitive diversity allows organizations to move beyond compliance-based inclusion toward a more meaningful form of equity. Cognitive diversity expands a team's problem-solving potential, enhances adaptability, and increases the range of lived experience that can inform ethical decision-making. Research suggests that neurodiverse teams, when supported appropriately, can outperform homogeneous teams in tasks requiring innovation, pattern recognition, and non-linear thinking (Austin & Pisano, 2017).

This reframing also demands systemic adjustments and not just individual accommodations. It involves rethinking recruitment processes that privilege certain communication styles, redesigning work environments to reduce sensory overload, and ensuring that performance evaluations are inclusive of diverse working methods.

By investing in structural inclusion, organizations do not just support neurodivergent individuals—they create more humane, flexible, and resilient workplaces for all.

1.5 Conclusion

Understanding neurodivergence in the workplace is not a matter of political correctness or charity; it is a matter of recognizing and respecting the full range of human potential. Autism, ADHD, trauma-related conditions, and other neurodevelopmental differences do not indicate brokenness; they reflect different cognitive pathways that can enrich collective work. Dispelling the myths that obscure this reality is the first step toward more ethical and effective organizational cultures. By embracing the neurodiversity paradigm and framing these conditions as cognitive diversity, employers and institutions can move toward a future in which all minds are valued and all workers are given the opportunity to thrive. By hiring neurodivergent individuals, organizations not only create inclusive environments but also benefit from building teams with unique abilities that neurotypical individuals may not possess. When safe, flexible, and supportive conditions are in place, neuroatypical strengths—such as intense focus, unconventional problem-solving, or heightened pattern recognition—are no longer masked by stress or stigma, but allowed to thrive as powerful assets within the workplace.

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Illustration: Cognitive diversity in the modern workplace.

CHAPTER 2: STRENGTH-BASED HIRING: MATCHING SKILLS TO ROLES

2.1 Recognizing unique talents

Neurodivergent employees and those with trauma backgrounds can bring significant strengths to the workplace when their abilities are identified and roles are well matched. It is important to remember that a diagnosis does not define a person. Everyone has unique interests, skills, and work styles.

For employers, this means looking beyond labels and seeing the individual. A medical term may describe certain traits, but it does not capture the full range of a person's talents, motivations, or potential. Two people with the same diagnosis may have very different strengths, and they may thrive in completely different roles.

What often sets neurodivergent employees apart is the intensity and depth with which they engage in areas of interest. When matched with the right tasks, this focus can lead to exceptional accuracy, creativity, or persistence. These abilities may not always show in conventional recruitment settings, but in practice they can become a real competitive advantage for organizations.

Key message: there is no "typical job for autism" or "ADHD role." The right job fit is always individual.

2.1.1 Common strengths

Although every individual is unique, certain strengths are often seen more frequently in people with specific neurodivergent conditions. These are not rigid categories, but patterns that many employers have already observed in practice. Understanding these tendencies can help employers to recognize talent that might otherwise be hidden.

It is important to treat the following examples as guidance rather than rules. Not every autistic employee will excel in detail-oriented tasks, and not every person with ADHD will thrive in fast-paced environments. However, being aware of these strengths allows employers to design roles and opportunities in ways that maximize potential and support success.

Autism spectrum: accuracy, structure, long-term focus, error detection.

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder): creativity, high energy, quick idea generation, adaptability.

Trauma backgrounds: empathy, resilience, commitment, trust-building.

Other neurodivergence: visual thinking (Dyslexia), determination (OCD – Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder), independence (Tourette Syndrome).

2.1.2 Practical examples

- In IT development, an autistic employee thrived in highly structured programming tasks.
- An employee with ADHD energized a marketing team with rapid idea generation and flexibility.
- A trauma survivor enriched customer service by creating calm, empathetic interactions with clients.

2.1.3 Tips for employers:

- Ask applicants where they feel they perform best.
- Focus on strengths rather than labels.
- Highlight opportunities for different talents in job descriptions.
- Consider both technical and interpersonal strengths. Emotional stability, empathy, and listening skills can be just as valuable as technical expertise, particularly in roles involving teamwork, mentoring, or customer interaction.

2.2 Concerns and difficulties in employment

Once hired, employers may feel uncertain about how everyday work will go. Questions often arise around communication, teamwork, stress management, and productivity. These concerns are natural, especially if the organization has little prior experience with neurodivergent employees.

What matters is not to avoid these questions, but to address them openly and constructively. Many difficulties that appear at first glance to be major barriers can in fact be reduced or removed with small adjustments, clear communication, and a willingness to learn together. Employers who take this approach often discover that the benefits far outweigh the challenges.

2.2.1 Typical concerns

Interaction: How will the employee perform in teamwork or client-facing tasks?

Work arrangements: How much support or guidance is needed?

Stress and change: How will the employee cope with pressure or unexpected changes?

Productivity: Will the quality and pace of work meet organizational needs?

Practical solutions

Provide **clear roles and expectations** to reduce uncertainty.

Offer **regular feedback** to keep performance on track.

Adjust tasks to align with strengths and reduce overload.

Support stress management through calm spaces or flexible breaks.

2.2.2 Common challenges and solutions by condition

The following points outline typical workplace challenges linked to different conditions, together with practical solutions that employers can apply. These are

general patterns, not fixed rules. Every individual's experience is unique. The goal is to give employers a directional overview of what kinds of support may be needed, and how small adjustments can unlock employees' strengths.

2.2.3 Autism spectrum

***Challenge**:* Interpreting social communication, sensory sensitivities, anxiety in new interactions.

***Solution**:* Clear written instructions, visual aids, calm workspaces, predictable routines. Communication is easier when employees work with familiar colleagues and stable interaction structures.

2.2.4 ADHD

***Challenge**:* Time management, prioritization, handling interruptions.

***Solution**:* Break down tasks, use reminders/calendars, offer flexible schedules, provide varied responsibilities.

2.2.5 Trauma backgrounds

***Challenge**:* Stressful or unexpected situations, building trust, sense of safety.

***Solution**:* Calm and consistent leadership, predictable routines, safe feedback processes, mentoring or buddy systems.

2.2.6 Dyslexia

***Challenge**:* Text-heavy tasks, fast reading.

***Solution**:* Visual materials, assistive tools, option for oral instructions or feedback.

2.2.7 OCD

***Challenge**:* Rigidity, over-focusing on details.

***Solution**:* Clear job scope, realistic timelines, balanced feedback.

2.2.8 Tourette

***Challenge**:* Visible tics, social stigma.

***Solution**:* Stigma-free environment, opportunities for independent work, awareness-building in the team.

2.2.9 Internships as a pathway

Inclusion is not about lowering standards, but about opening opportunities for people to meet those standards in different ways. Internships and work placements provide a safe environment for candidates to build confidence, gain experience, and demonstrate their strengths. For employers, they are also an effective way to identify talented individuals who may become long-term employees.

Employers often report that the biggest challenge is not the employee's skills, but the attitudes of the work community. Open discussion, awareness training, and team-level support reduce stigma and make integration smoother for everyone.

2.3 Knowledge that supports inclusion

Knowledge and awareness are the foundation of strength-based employment. Employers do not need to be medical experts, but a basic understanding reduces uncertainty and builds trust.

2.3.1 Core principles

- Every person is unique – the same diagnosis does not mean the same abilities or needs.
- Stereotypes hide real talent and lead to missed opportunities.
- Small, thoughtful adjustments can remove major barriers.

2.3.2 The importance of job design

What matters most is not the job title, but how the job is structured. Roles considered “challenging” can become successful placements when expectations are clear and small adjustments are made.

2.3.3 Practical ways to build inclusion

- Define clear responsibilities and expectations.
- Use visual and written instructions.
- Provide mentoring and peer support.
- Create a culture where difference is valued, not hidden.
- Encourage employees to share an “About Me” profile describing their strengths, stress triggers, and preferred ways of receiving feedback. This helps managers assign tasks that fit well and prevent unnecessary difficulties. Mentoring or buddy systems are also valuable: a trusted colleague can provide everyday support, help navigate unwritten rules, and strengthen confidence in the new role.

2.4 Practical tips for employers

Below is a set of practical actions you can take to support neurodivergent and trauma-affected employees in your workplace. These tips focus on simple adjustments and management practices that help create an inclusive and productive environment.

- Focus on individual strengths, not diagnoses.
- Design clear, concrete roles and tasks.
- Provide consistent feedback and predictability.
- Use internships or trial periods as low-barrier entry routes.
- Remember: success is built together, employer and employee co-create solutions.

- Communicate requirements and expectations clearly. Give feedback in a direct but supportive way, and check in regularly. Be flexible where possible: small adjustments in schedules, breaks, or work methods can significantly improve retention and well-being.

2.5 From strengths to success

Strength-based hiring and employment is not charity; it is smart talent management. By recognizing and leveraging the abilities of neurodivergent and trauma-affected employees, organizations gain access to committed, capable, and innovative staff.

Inclusive workplaces are not only fair, they are productive. Diversity is not a limitation, but an opportunity to build stronger, more resilient, and more creative teams.

When the right match is found, many employers find that neurodivergent employees become among the most reliable and motivated staff members. Their persistence, creativity, or empathy not only benefit their own performance but also strengthen the entire team's cohesion and results.

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Illustration: Matching unique skills and strengths to roles.

CHAPTER 3: RETHINKING RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESSES

3.1 Critique of conventional interviews and CV-based filtering

As workplaces become more dynamic and inclusive, there is growing recognition that people bring value in different ways. Among them are individuals with cognitive and emotional traits that are often underappreciated in conventional recruitment: attention to detail, divergent thinking, and personal resilience. Whether shaped by autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADHD, trauma, or other neurodiverse experiences, these traits are often misunderstood or overlooked in traditional hiring. Employers who wish to build truly inclusive teams must go beyond compliance and intentionally design recruitment strategies that highlight potential rather than penalize difference. The goal is not to lower standards, but to rethink how ability is identified, assessed, and supported. For job seekers living with epilepsy or other conditions that affect their access to work, traditional recruitment processes often present unfair and unnecessary barriers. These barriers may not be intentional, but they are deeply embedded in how many companies select candidates. From the emphasis on polished CVs to subjective interviews that reward confidence over competence, it's clear that many standard hiring methods are outdated and exclusionary.

The CV is often the first hurdle in the recruitment process. However, CVs typically highlight academic history, previous employment, and linear career progression. This format assumes everyone has had the same opportunities and uninterrupted employment paths—an assumption that excludes many people with chronic health conditions such as epilepsy. Periods of illness or care may result in gaps in employment that do not reflect a person’s skills, resilience, or potential. In this way, the CV can act more as a gatekeeper than a gateway to opportunity.

Additionally, people with disabilities often face discrimination even before meeting an employer. Some studies have shown that applicants who disclose a disability receive fewer interview invitations, despite having comparable or even superior qualifications. This highlights how the traditional CV-based filtering system can reinforce existing inequalities, even unintentionally. The job interview is intended to assess a candidate's fit and capability, but too often, it becomes a test of confidence, charm, and performance under pressure. For candidates with epilepsy, this creates a double bind. On the one hand, stress or sensory triggers during interviews can pose health risks. On the other hand, the pressure to conceal a medical condition in fear of stigma can create additional mental and emotional strain. Unstructured interviews, where questions are not standardized, are particularly prone to bias. Interviewers may judge candidates based on vague impressions, which can disadvantage neurodivergent individuals or those who do not fit narrow expectations of professional behaviour. For instance, someone who is reserved, avoids eye contact, or needs extra time to process questions might be misjudged as unmotivated or underprepared. In reality, they may have the exact skills needed for the role but lack the ability, or desire, to perform in this artificial setting.

Rethinking recruitment and selection is not just a matter of compliance or corporate responsibility; it's a matter of fairness, effectiveness, and future-readiness. Traditional hiring methods are increasingly unfit for a diverse and evolving workforce. By moving toward inclusive practices like work trials, practical assessments, and structured interviews, employers can open the door to talented individuals who have long been excluded due to outdated processes. For candidates with epilepsy or other health-related challenges, these changes can mean the difference between being overlooked and being seen. More importantly, they help shift the conversation from what someone *can't* do to what they *can*. In the end, inclusive hiring doesn't just benefit individuals, it strengthens teams, improves performance, and builds a workforce that truly reflects the world we live in.

3.2 Alternatives: work trials, practical assessments, structured interviews

Individuals with strong attention to detail often thrive in areas such as quality control, data analysis, finance, software testing, and compliance. These skills are frequently found in candidates on the autism spectrum, who may bring exceptional precision, deep focus, and consistency. However, they may find it difficult to navigate unstructured interviews, vague questions, or fast-paced group assessments that do not reflect the tasks they would perform on the job. People with highly creative thinking styles, particularly those with ADHD, often demonstrate imaginative problem-solving, the ability to connect unrelated ideas, and the energy to drive innovation. Yet they may struggle in traditional application environments that prioritize linear thinking, long attention spans, or strict adherence to rules and schedules. Timed assessments, repetitive tasks, or rigid interview formats may prevent them from showing their full range of potential.

Those who have experienced trauma or long-term adversity often develop qualities such as emotional intelligence, perseverance, adaptability, and critical thinking. These candidates may have experienced interruptions in their education or career paths, which can look like instability when viewed through a conventional lens. However, these same experiences may have equipped them with maturity and the ability to manage high-stress situations, valuable traits in roles that require empathy, leadership, or crisis management. Understanding these dimensions allows employers to move beyond binary thinking about “qualified” versus “unqualified,” and toward a more nuanced, human-centered approach.

To create a more inclusive and accurate hiring process, many organizations are turning to alternative methods that prioritize real skills over appearances. These approaches can be especially empowering for candidates with epilepsy or other inclusion challenges, as they shift the focus from presentation to performance and potential. Work trials are short-term opportunities for candidates to try out the

actual job, or a part of it, on a trial basis. These can range from a few hours to a few days, and they offer employers a chance to observe how someone works in practice rather than how well they interview. For candidates who may struggle with verbal communication or anxiety in interviews, work trials provide a fairer playing field. For example, a candidate with epilepsy applying for an administrative job might be invited to perform basic tasks like data entry, scheduling, or responding to emails in a controlled, low-pressure environment. The employer gets to see real skills in action, while the candidate has the chance to showcase their strengths in a way that doesn't hinge on self-promotion or forced small talk. Work trials also give candidates an opportunity to assess the workplace for themselves. Is the environment accessible? Are the schedules flexible? Is the team supportive? This two-way evaluation is particularly valuable for those who may have specific health-related needs. Practical assessments are another tool that prioritizes ability over image. These involve giving candidates tasks that are directly related to the job. A marketing role might include designing a short campaign; a technical role might involve solving a coding challenge. The tasks are evaluated using clear criteria, reducing bias and making the process more transparent.

For candidates with epilepsy, practical assessments can be scheduled at flexible times or conducted remotely, allowing them to participate on their own terms. This not only reduces anxiety but also demonstrates that the employer values fairness and accessibility. Importantly, practical assessments allow people with non-traditional backgrounds to demonstrate their strengths. A candidate who may have taken time away from work due to health reasons can still show they are current and capable—without being penalized for gaps in employment.

When interviews are necessary, they can be improved significantly by being structured. This means all candidates are asked the same questions in the same order, and responses are scored using a rubric. This consistency minimizes the role of unconscious bias and levels the playing field. For instance, instead of asking vague questions like "Tell me about yourself," a structured interview for a project manager

might ask, “Can you describe a time you managed a project under a tight deadline? What tools did you use?” This allows candidates to prepare concrete examples and respond in a way that highlights their experience rather than their personality.

Employers can also give interview questions in advance or provide written versions during the interview, which can help candidates with epilepsy who may experience memory issues or need extra time to process information. These small adjustments can make a big difference in accessibility without compromising the quality of the hire. For candidates who are highly detail-oriented, clear communication and predictability are essential throughout the hiring process. Job descriptions should be explicit, outlining exact responsibilities, daily tasks, and performance expectations. Vague terms like “team player” or “good communication skills” should be avoided unless they are clearly defined in context.

In the application phase, forms and questions should be simplified and clearly structured. Employers should avoid using abstract questions that require interpreting social nuance or speculative thinking. Instead, the focus should be on concrete examples of relevant skills, such as project outcomes, task accuracy, or process improvements. During interviews, structured formats work best. Questions should be specific, job-relevant, and focused on past behaviors or technical skills. For example, asking, “Can you describe a time you found an error in a data set and how you corrected it?” is far more inclusive and revealing than a question like “What’s your greatest weakness?” Interviewers should also consider offering written versions of questions during the interview or in advance. Some candidates may process information better visually or may experience stress in high-verbal settings. Allowing time to think before answering can help ensure a candidate presents their skills effectively. Employers should be transparent about what sensory or social environments the job involves. If the workplace is fast-paced, noisy, or unpredictable, candidates should know this ahead of time so they can self-assess whether it fits their strengths.

3.3 Case studies of inclusive hiring practices

Candidates with ADHD may present as unconventional, energetic, and quick-thinking. However, they may also appear disorganized or scattered in traditional assessments. To better capture their value, employers should avoid over-reliance on time-pressured written tests or rigid logic-based puzzles that prioritize compliance over creativity. Job descriptions should emphasize the opportunity for innovation, variety, and initiative if those elements are truly part of the role. Candidates with creative minds are more likely to thrive in environments that reward new ideas and allow autonomy in how tasks are completed. Instead of assessing performance under pressure, practical tasks can be used to evaluate creativity in action. For example, asking a candidate to generate three new ideas for a marketing campaign, or to propose improvements to an existing product or service, allows for a freer expression of thought. These assessments can be open-ended and evaluated based on originality, usefulness, and alignment with the company's mission. In interviews, it can be helpful to include questions that allow for divergent thinking, such as "What's a time you approached a problem in a completely unexpected way?" or "If you had unlimited time and resources, what would you create to improve this service?"

Accommodations like flexible deadlines during assessments, breaks between interview rounds, or the option to respond in writing to follow-up questions can make a significant difference in candidate performance without compromising standards. Many individuals with lived trauma, whether from medical experiences, displacement, systemic injustice, or personal adversity, bring resilience that is invisible on a CV. These candidates may have career gaps, multiple short-term roles, or unconventional paths to education. Rather than interpreting this as instability, employers should look deeper for patterns of adaptability, initiative, and long-term growth. During application reviews, hiring teams can reframe how they interpret career timelines. Instead of viewing gaps as red flags, they can consider them in

context: What was the candidate doing during that time? Were they caregiving, undergoing treatment, volunteering, or acquiring new skills informally? These activities can demonstrate dedication and character, even if they are not part of formal employment. Interviews can be reframed to explore how a candidate has responded to setbacks, what they've learned from transitions, and how they've developed emotional intelligence or self-leadership. Questions like "Tell us about a time you had to overcome a major challenge and what you learned from it" offer a more holistic view of their potential. Employers should also be mindful of trauma-informed practices. Avoiding unnecessarily invasive personal questions, offering interview support (such as a support person or scheduled breaks), and clearly outlining next steps can reduce stress and promote dignity in the process.

Several organizations have already begun rethinking how they hire, with impressive results, both for their businesses and the individuals they've brought on board. These case studies highlight how inclusive hiring practices can benefit everyone, not just those with disabilities.

3.3.1 Case Study 1: Piadineria – Diversity & Inclusion programme

Piadineria is an Italian food company that also involves people on the autism spectrum, including individuals with neurological conditions such as epilepsy. Rather than relying on interviews, Piadineria uses an extensive screening process based on technical skills and workplace simulations. Candidates are evaluated for their actual job performance, not their interview abilities. Employees are then matched with projects that suit their strengths and sensitivities. The company also trains client teams on neurodiversity awareness, creating an ecosystem where inclusion is the norm, not the exception. Piadineria reports both low turnover and high employee satisfaction, proof that when people are given the right conditions, they thrive.

3.3.2 Case Study 2: Microsoft's Neurodiversity Hiring Program

Microsoft has developed a recruitment program specifically designed to attract neurodivergent talent, including candidates with epilepsy. The process begins with a multi-day skills assessment instead of a formal interview. Candidates are invited to demonstrate their abilities in a calm, supportive setting. The company also offers coaching, accommodations, and peer mentorship to ensure a smooth transition into the workplace. This program has not only led to successful hires but has also fostered innovation within teams. Managers report that neurodiverse employees often bring unique perspectives and solutions to problems—skills that were overlooked in conventional hiring methods.

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Illustration: Creating an accessible and comfortable recruitment process.

CHAPTER 4: WORKPLACE ADAPTATIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

Creating inclusive workplaces means more than just hiring neurodivergent individuals; it requires thoughtful adaptation of the physical and sensory environment to meet diverse needs. Environmental design and practical accommodations play a crucial role in enabling employees with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), trauma histories, and other neurodevelopmental differences to perform at their best.

Inclusive design benefits everyone, not just neurodivergent employees. Adjustments that reduce stress and improve focus often lead to higher job satisfaction, lower sick leave, and stronger overall performance across the workforce.

This chapter outlines effective strategies to design sensory-friendly spaces, provide necessary tools for self-regulation, and draw on international examples to illustrate best practices.

4.1 Sensory-Friendly Spaces, Noise Control, Flexible Seating, Lighting

For neurodivergent employees, sensory overload can quickly lead to stress, fatigue, or even temporary loss of work ability. The physical workplace environment has a major impact on concentration, comfort, and productivity. Noisy open offices, flickering fluorescent lights, or strong smells may create barriers that reduce performance and well-being. By making the environment more sensory-friendly, employers not only support neurodivergent staff but also create conditions that benefit everyone. Small, low-cost changes can make a big difference in improving focus, reducing stress, and supporting long-term engagement.

4.1.1 Practical adaptations for employers:

Noise Control

Use sound-absorbing materials such as acoustic panels, carpets, or curtains to reduce background noise. Providing noise-cancelling headphones or designating quiet zones gives employees the option to retreat when they need to focus.

Flexible Seating

Offer choices in workstations, such as secluded desks, cubicles, standing desks, or ergonomic chairs. Allowing employees to choose their setting helps them find the environment that best supports their comfort and productivity.

Lighting

Access to natural light improves well-being, but the ability to adjust lighting intensity is equally important. Provide dimmable lights or desk lamps for personalized control. Avoid flickering fluorescent lights, which can cause discomfort or even trigger migraines.

Temperature

Where possible, enable employees to adjust room temperature, or provide small solutions such as desk fans or heaters. Having some control over temperature reduces physical stress and increases comfort.

Smells

Strong odors can be distracting or overwhelming. Reduce unnecessary scents by using fragrance-free cleaning products, ensuring proper ventilation, and limiting perfumes in the workplace.

In many cases, the most effective changes are small and inexpensive, such as offering noise-cancelling headphones or a choice of seating. The key is to give employees options so they can adjust their own environment when needed.

4.2 Providing quiet rooms, visual schedules, and self-regulation tools

Beyond the general workspace, employees often need specific supports to help them regulate energy and manage stress throughout the day. Quiet rooms or sensory-friendly spaces give workers a place to retreat, recover from overstimulation, and return refreshed. Structured routines and visual tools help reduce uncertainty and provide clarity, which is particularly important for employees who experience anxiety around unpredictability. Self-regulation tools such as stress balls, fidgets, or mindfulness apps provide small but effective ways to maintain focus. Technology can also play a vital role: reminders, calendar alerts, and task management software support organization and time management. By providing these tools and spaces, employers help staff stay balanced, focused, and productive.

4.2.1 Practical solutions for employers:

Quiet Rooms and Relaxation Spaces

Designated quiet rooms or sensory-friendly spaces allow employees to take restorative breaks in calm, low-stimulation settings. These spaces are vital for managing stress, recovering from sensory overload, and practicing mindfulness or relaxation techniques.

Visual Schedules and Clear Task Management

Many neurodivergent individuals benefit from structured routines and clear expectations. Visual schedules, task lists, and step-by-step instructions can reduce anxiety related to unpredictability and help organize workflow. These tools can be physical charts or digital applications. Visual supports also improve task completion and time management.

Self-Regulation Tools

Providing items such as stress balls, fidget devices, or access to mindfulness apps encourages self-regulation and helps maintain focus. Employers can also encourage regular breaks for movement or exercise, which is particularly beneficial for employees with ADHD.

Role of Technology

Assistive technology is increasingly important in supporting neurodivergent workers. Reminders, calendar alerts, and task management software help with organization, while noise-masking apps or specialized keyboards enhance comfort and efficiency.

Communication and Supervision

Clear and structured communication is essential in supporting neurodivergent employees. Supervisors play a key role in creating clarity, providing regular support, and ensuring that tasks are manageable. Good communication not only reduces misunderstandings but also builds confidence and trust.

4.2.2 Effective practices include:

- Providing information in a clear, structured way.
- Encouraging the use of notes in meetings so employees can contribute without pressure.
- Offering constructive feedback, regular reviews, and positive reinforcement.
- Allowing flexible work options, such as occasional remote work.
- Supervisors checking in regularly and helping to structure tasks.

Encouraging Self-Advocacy

It is equally important to empower neurodivergent employees to express their own needs. As one expert emphasized: *"We should teach neuroatypical individuals to advocate for themselves, not just 'fit in.' They need tools to say, 'This is how I work best,' and we as institutions must listen."*

Employers can actively support self-advocacy by creating safe spaces for dialogue. Regular one-to-one conversations, anonymous feedback channels, or structured checklists for expressing needs can help employees communicate without fear of stigma. This not only empowers individuals but also provides managers with concrete insights into how to adapt roles and environments effectively.

4.3 Country-Specific Examples from Finland, Spain, and Cyprus

Different countries have developed unique approaches to workplace adaptations, shaped by cultural, legal, and organizational factors. While practices vary, they share common themes of flexibility, awareness, and practical support. Learning from these examples can inspire employers to adopt and adapt similar strategies in their own workplaces.

Finland: Emphasis on Flexibility and Accessibility

Finnish workplaces often integrate flexible work hours, remote work options, and ergonomic design to accommodate diverse needs. Quiet rooms and sensory-friendly workspaces are increasingly common, supported by legislation encouraging workplace accessibility. Finnish companies also invest in employee training to raise neurodiversity awareness, promoting empathy and inclusion.

Spain: Focus on Practical Training and Awareness

In Spain, organizations prioritize educating managers and teams about neurodiversity and practical workplace adaptations. Programs promoting sensory-friendly environments, such as noise control and visual task management, are complemented by mentoring initiatives. Many Spanish companies incorporate adjustments as part of broader corporate social responsibility efforts, aiming for systemic inclusivity.

Cyprus: Community Engagement and Tailored Support

Cypriot initiatives often link workplace adaptations with community support and education. Awareness campaigns target both employers and employees to reduce stigma and foster understanding. Workplaces in Cyprus emphasize the importance of quiet spaces and clearly defined tasks, along with flexible scheduling, to support employees with autism and ADHD. Partnerships between NGOs and businesses have helped implement these adaptations effectively.

These examples illustrate that while specific strategies vary, common themes include creating sensory-sensitive environments, offering flexible work arrangements, and

fostering a culture of understanding through training and awareness. Employers anywhere can adopt these principles, tailoring them to local contexts and individual employee needs.

The international cases show that successful workplace adaptations are not limited to large companies or countries with extensive resources. Even small organizations can introduce flexible hours, quiet spaces, or awareness training with relatively little investment. The main success factor is commitment from leadership and a willingness to listen to employees' needs.

4.3.1 Lessons for employers everywhere:

- Prioritize flexible work arrangements and accessible spaces.
- Train managers and teams to increase awareness and inclusion.
- Provide quiet spaces and clear routines to reduce stress.
- Collaborate with local networks or organizations when possible.
- Remember that small, practical changes often have the greatest impact.

4.3.2 Key insights for action

Creating work environments that truly support neurodiversity is more than arranging office furniture; it means designing spaces where every worker can thrive, regardless of sensory sensitivities or cognitive preferences. By incorporating sensory-friendly zones, quiet areas, visual guides, and flexible arrangements, employers can transform workplaces into catalysts for productivity and creativity. Inclusive design is not an optional extra, but a foundation for workplaces that keep all kinds of talented employees healthy, engaged, and motivated. Employers who invest in inclusive design often report a stronger sense of loyalty and engagement from staff. Adaptations signal that employees are valued, which in turn enhances motivation and retention.

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Illustration: Workplace adaptations and sensory-friendly environments.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNICATION & INTEGRATION

Effective communication is central to any inclusive workplace. Creating a neuro-inclusive workplace involves rethinking how communication is taught, practiced, and modelled. Many communication norms—often invisible and unspoken—can be unintentionally exclusionary. Neurodivergent employees, such as those with autism, ADHD, or dyslexia, may interpret or express communication differently. This chapter explores how organizations can build communication strategies that support inclusion, focusing on practical training, adjusting social expectations, and embracing clarity through structured communication. Neuroinclusive communication can help organizations foster an environment where all employees thrive.

5.1 Training Managers and Teams in Neuro-Inclusive Communication

Traditional diversity training often overlooks neurodiversity. Yet, the communication needs of neurodivergent individuals can vary widely and may not be immediately obvious to colleagues or managers. Proactive training helps bridge the gap.

To support neurodivergent team members, it is essential to educate managers and coworkers about different communication styles and needs. Neuro-inclusive communication training can include:

- Understanding common neurodivergent traits (e.g., literal thinking, sensory sensitivities, challenges with nonverbal cues).
- Promoting patience and openness to diverse expressions and pacing in communication.
- Building empathy
- practical communication strategies that accommodate neurodiverse individuals

The training must be an ongoing process, and it will normalize inclusive behaviour and reduce stigma.

5.1.1 Set Clear Objectives

Firstly, we need to identify what we want them to learn:

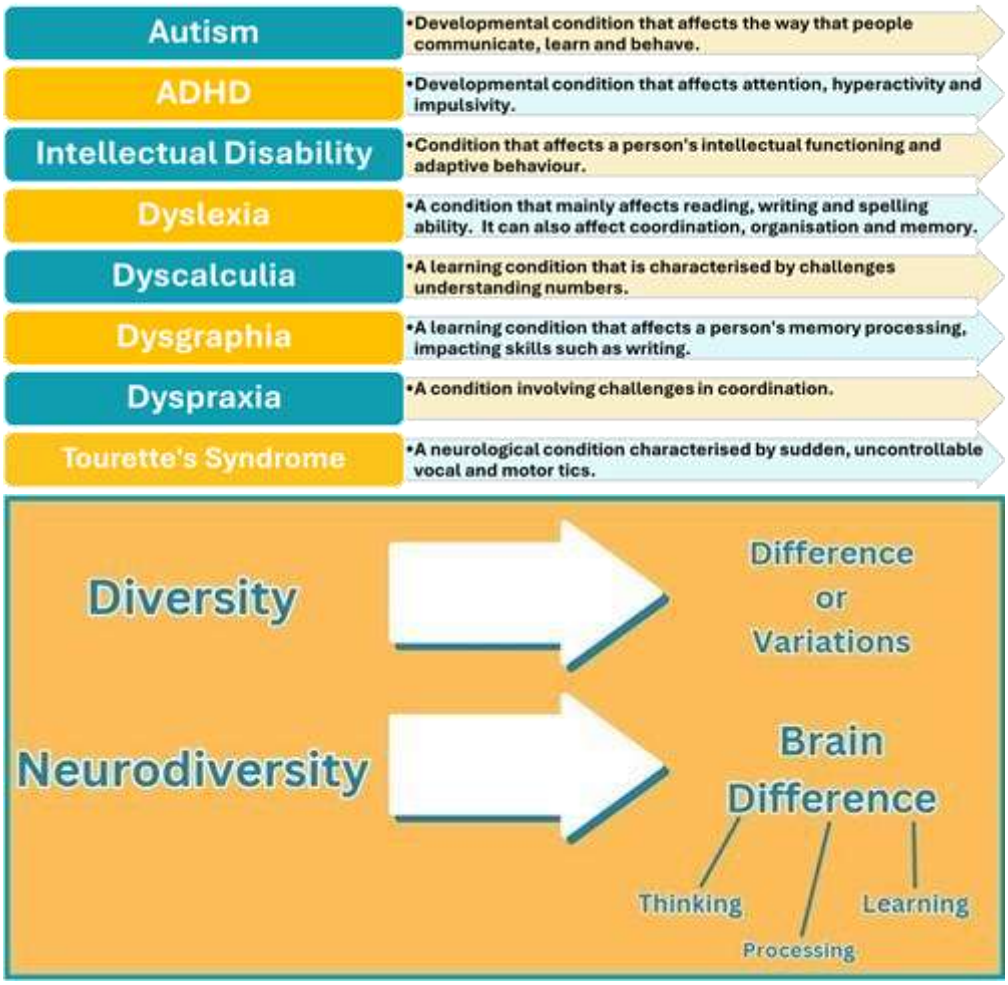
- Understand what neurodiversity is and why it matters at work.
- Recognize how communication needs differ across neurotypes.
- Practice inclusive communication behaviours.
- Identify and reduce unintentional bias.

5.1.2 Build Foundational Awareness

Then we need to familiarize the managers and teams with the forms of neurodivergence and their characteristics to reduce misinformation, misconceptions, stereotypes, bias, stigma and foster empathy.

5.1.3 What is 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). The term “neurodiversity” celebrates and appreciates the many different ways people think, learn, and experience the world.



5.1.4 What is a neurotypical person?

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)

Why Neuro-Inclusion Matters

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.

5.1.5 Teach Practical Communication Techniques

Embracing neurodiversity is not just about acknowledging the existence of neurological variations but actively valuing and integrating them into our societal fabric. By promoting understanding and respect for these differences, neurotypical colleagues can create workplaces, communities and environments where all individuals can thrive by leveraging their unique strengths and perspectives.

Unsurprisingly, communication challenges often lead to all sorts of misunderstandings, misinterpretations, stigma, and feelings of exclusion among neurodivergent employees. They may often be at the root of conflicts between different individuals. (Denis Boudreau, https://inklusiv.ca/normalizing-neurodiversity-in-the-workplace-communication-challenges/)

Not every employee has the same needs. Creating an environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their needs is essential. Encourage open dialogue in order to recognize each person's needs and preferences (for example handshakes, physical contact, work breaks, communication styles). Also ask directly the individuals what they need to succeed and feel comfortable in their environment.

5.1.6 Practice on active listening

In order to communicate well with a neurodivergent person, you need to be able not only to hear what he/she says but to listen to him/her actively. Active listening *requires the listener to fully concentrate, understand, respond and then remember* what is being said.

Listening is *an active process* in which a conscious decision is made to listen to and understand the messages of the speaker. We spend 70-80% of our waking hours in some form of communication.

- Nine percent writing
- Sixteen percent reading
- Thirty percent speaking
- Forty-five percent listening

Most of us are poor and inefficient listeners. We *remember less than 50% of what we hear in a conversation*.

5.1.7 The benefits of Active Listening

Builds deep trust – Active listening helps other people to open up. They can sense that you will not be jumping to conclusions based on superficial details. They also realize that you care enough about them to listen attentively.

Makes you approachable - As you present yourself as a patient listener, people feel more naturally inclined to communicate with you and they freely express their feelings.

5.1.8 Steps for Active Listening

Listen: You focus on the speaker. What is he /she talking about?

Think: While you listen, you gather information and at the same time you focus on verbal and non-verbal cues to better understand the neurodivergent person and what the neurodivergent person needs from your interaction. You also ask for clarifications

and you do not rely on assumptions made. At this step you make open ended questions.

Respond: When you respond you can:

- **Reflect** on what has been said, reflect the speaker's feelings.
- **Restate** major ideas and feelings.
- **Clarify** by asking questions or restate wrong interpretations to force the speaker to explain further.

However, neuro inclusive listening is different from traditional active listening in some ways. One must consider these differences:

- Maintaining eye contact is a sign of engagement and respect. However neurodivergent individuals may feel uncomfortable doing so. Therefore, when doing so you must not assume that they are disengaged. You can encourage alternative ways to show engagement, such as fidgeting with an object or looking at a neutral point.
- Neurodivergent persons may need extra time to process information and formulate responses. Do not rush the conversation. Give them additional time to process thoughts and emotions.
- When it is not easy for them to tell their thoughts verbally, ask them to write them down in order to feel more comfortable
- Neurodivergent individuals may express themselves non-verbally in unique ways. Respect these differences and do not misinterpret them as disinterest.
- Neurodivergent individuals may do repetitive movements or sounds to self-regulate and stay focused. You must be aware of this, and you must accept it.
- Neurodivergent individuals need to feel safe discussing their challenges and preferences without fear of judgment. Therefore, it is good to have an open dialogue with them, during which they can express their needs, preferences, feelings without you interrupting them. They need to feel they are valued and understood.

5.2 Communication Styles

5.2.1 Verbal and written Communication

An individual in the autism spectrum may have difficulty in understanding complex messages and understanding sarcasm. Someone with ADHD might struggle when it comes to following complex or lengthy instructions. Individuals with dyslexia might struggle with written materials.

Therefore, your messages should be *clear, concise and consistent.* Be clear by using plain and direct language. You must be concise by using simple and short phrases and avoid unnecessary information. Be consistent, repetition can be a good thing with a neurodivergent audience. In the case you are giving instructions, clear instructions must be given (what the task is, how to complete it, when it needs to be completed by, who to approach if there are questions). It is also a good idea to give *verbal instructions in written form* as well. You should *avoid idioms, sarcasm, metaphors or vague instructions* unless you are sure that these are understood.

One should try and use *simple and logical structure* in order to keep the neurodivergent audience focused and engaged. Lots of text and long paragraphs should be avoided. Can include a summary, short paragraphs, bullet points, and also simple instructions.

For example, when announcing a new project, organize the message like:

- What's changing
- Who it affects
- What actions are needed
- By when

In written communication one can use l*arge fonts, and plain background and calm colours.* Where possible *visual forms, drawings, diagrams and flowcharts can be used* like visual job schedules or instructional pictures. One should avoid bright colours, distracting shapes, animations or videos.

5.2.2 Nonverbal communication

Neurodivergent people's non-verbal expressions may differ from neurotypical norms. Recognizing and respecting these differences is key to successful communication. It is very important to avoid assumptions: for example, limited eye contact from an autistic person might not signify disinterest – it might be a sign of focusing on the content of communication. Likewise, an autistic person or a person with ADHD might fidget not out of impatience and definitely not out of disrespect, but as a self-regulation mechanism.

One should focus on what the neurodivergent person is saying, and not be distracted by trying to read their body language, unless something appears to be a clear sign of discomfort. In that case, it could make sense to ask directly how someone is feeling, rather than jump to a conclusion – they might be stressed by the topic of your discussion, or they might simply be cold. Understanding what is happening can help address concerns immediately and make necessary adjustments.

5.2.3 Multiple channels of communication

Neurodivergent individuals 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. For example, some neurodivergent individuals may prefer communicating through email messages, others through audio messages, others may prefer face to face communication, others prefer virtual meetings and others one to one communication. Since there is no one size fits all it would be a good practice to use multiple channels of communication.

5.3 Adjusting Expectations for Eye Contact, Small Talk, and Indirect Speech

Neurodivergent individuals may not conform to neurotypical social norms.

Traditional workplace norms—such as maintaining eye contact, engaging in small talk, or using indirect or nuanced speech—can create unnecessary barriers. Neuro-inclusive workplaces recognize that:

Eye contact is not a universal indicator of engagement or honesty.

Small talk may be uncomfortable or distracting for some individuals.

Indirect speech (e.g., "maybe consider doing …") can be confusing; clarity is often preferred.

Adjusting these normal expectations helps reduce miscommunication and social fatigue, enabling neurodivergent employees to participate more confidently and authentically.

For instance, eye contact may be uncomfortable or even painful for some autistic individuals and the lack of it can create misunderstandings with others. If a team member avoids eye contact, respect their behaviour and continue as normal in the interaction. Adaptability can help the individual to feel less uncomfortable and shows respect for their personal preferences.

Also small talk can feel meaningless or draining, and indirect speech may cause confusion. Therefore, avoid small talk and indirect speech when communicating with neurodivergent individuals.

Therefore, in a neurodivergent organisation:

- Employees that are not making eye contact may still be fully engaged.
- Employees may not like small talk like icebreakers and prefer structured introductions where possible.
- Employees do not like indirect speech and phrases like You might want to… They prefer clear and concise sentences.

5.4 Role of Clear, Written Instructions and Structured Feedback

5.4.1 Clear, Written Instructions

Verbal instructions can be fleeting and open to interpretation. Many neurodivergent people benefit from written instructions they can review at their own pace. Therefore, your messages should be clear, concise and consistent. Be clear by using plain and direct language. You must be concise by using simple and short phrases, avoiding jargon and unnecessary information. Be consistent, repetition can be a good thing with a neurodivergent audience.

When giving instructions, clear instructions must be given (what the task is, how to complete it, when it needs to be completed, who to approach if there are questions). It is good to give verbal instructions in written form as well. You should avoid idioms, sarcasm or vague instructions unless you are sure that these are understood.

One should try and use simple and logical structure in order to keep the neurodivergent audience focused and engaged. Lots of text and long paragraphs should be avoided. Can include a summary, short paragraphs, bullet points, and also simple instructions, visuals.

In written communication one can use large fonts, and plain background. Where possible visual forms, drawings, diagrams and flowcharts can be used like visual job schedules or instructional pictures. One can also avoid bright colours, distracting shapes or videos.

The benefits from clear written instructions are:

- Reducing misunderstandings.
- Offering a reference that employees can revisit as needed.
- Supporting individuals who process written information more effectively than verbal.

5.4.2 Structured Feedback

It is very important for a manager to schedule regular feedback sessions every week or every two weeks with neurodivergent individuals in order to know about their work in the workplace. Before scheduling the feedback sessions managers need to ask how they wish to have these sessions. Through the feedback sessions managers can provide direct feedback with specific examples in simple, clear, concise language about the neurodivergent individual's performance on what is going well so the neurodivergent individual can continue to do these things, /What could be better so that the neurodivergent individual tries to improve these things and understand their performance expectations and how to grow within their roles. At this point, the manager can make some suggestions and what to try next.

After the manager provides his feedback, he must ask the neurodivergent individual if everything is well understood and the neurodivergent employee can ask questions. Then the manager can ask the neurodivergent individual to give his/her feedback on his/her overall experience in the workplace (the work environment, colleagues, tasks assigned and anything else he/she wants to discuss).

In general, the structured feedback removes ambiguity and fosters a sense of security and trust.

5.5 Integrating Neuro-Inclusive Communication into Culture

Neuro-inclusive communication is not just a checklist; it is a cultural shift. Therefore, it must be integrated into an organisation's culture, so that the team creates a work environment where neurodivergent people feel comfortable being themselves. Within this environment the neurodivergent people can communicate with others because neuroinclusive communication is integrated.

In order to integrate neuroinclusive communication one needs to carry out the following activities:

5.5.1 Prepare a communication guide that recognizes diverse preferences.

This guide can include communication styles, channels of communication that one can use with neurodivergent people, tone of voice during communication with neurodivergent individuals and other tips that will help one to communicate better with neurodivergent individuals.

5.5.2 Regularly review policies and training materials with neurodiverse advisory input

The organisation must regularly review its policies and training materials regarding neurodivergent individuals. It is a good idea to involve neurodivergent people who work in the organisation, or experts on neurodiversity, in the review. These people will guide the organisation to improve its policies.

5.5.3 Run inclusive meetings and events

The organisation must share an agenda in advance in good time so people know what to expect.

Understanding that different people may have different needs when at a meeting. One person may want to use a fidget toy; another might take detailed hand-written notes. For online meetings, giving people the option to have their camera on or off. Using supportive technology, such as AI notetaking.

For events, when considering accessibility, think about neuroinclusivity. For example:

- You can ask staff and visitors if they need any accommodations.
- Offer a quiet space, which someone can access if they feel overstimulated or need some time away from the main event space.
- Share information in advance, such as photos of the space, or details of how to find the location.
- When selecting a venue, when possible, consider the acoustics. Is the space likely to be loud with lots of echoes? Has anything been done to reduce noise such as carpeted floors, curtains or sound-absorbing panels?

- Think about the lighting. Can the overhead lighting be dimmed slightly? Replace any flickering lightbulbs.
- If asking for feedback, include a question that considers sensory differences.

5.5.4 Training for managers and staff

Training can help managers and employee teams to know more about neurodivergence, leading to better understanding and a more supportive and open working environment.

5.5.5 Be open about neurodivergence

The organisation can prepare leaflets about neurodiversity and what steps the organisation takes in order to become neuroinclusive.

The organisation can also organise a Neurodivergent Awareness Day in order to inform both staff and clients about neurodiversity, neuroinclusion and the benefits of neuroinclusion like enhanced innovation, better communication, widespread feelings of psychological safety amongst employees

Source:Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre & La Trobe University, A*utistic people experience the world in a different way.Tuning your communication will make a big difference*.https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a88ab00f43b552a84c3b7c9/t/6009cb33eb45fc4725548b3b/1611254593129/Autism+%26+the+workplace+-+Communication.pdf

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Illustration: Effective communication strategies and clear feedback.

CHAPTER 6: EMOTIONAL SAFETY AND DISCLOSURE

In this chapter, disclosure refers to an action of voluntarily revealing information about one's neurodivergency, including ASD, ADHD, dyslexia, PTSD, epilepsy etc. It is especially important in professional settings to make one comfortable enough for them to share details about their conditions, as disclosure allows neurodivergent employees to seek support and understanding from their employer and coworkers. However, in order for a neurodivergent employee to want to disclose, employers need to create a friendly and welcoming environment, as well as be ready to implement solutions to allow this employee to thrive in their area.

Why is disclosure often delayed or avoided?

Disclosure is, of course, a personal decision that one needs to be ready to make. Neurodivergent individuals often avoid it, mainly because of fear of rejection, discrimination or being made fun of.

Research carried out by Zurich shows that almost half (49%) of neurodivergent adults have experienced discrimination in the process of recruiting by a hiring manager or recruiter because of their condition[1]. Additionally, 31% had been rejected from a role, only after disclosing their neurodivergency. Another 28% were turned down due to subjective reasons, such as communication style.

6.1 Fear of stigma or discrimination

Neurodivergent individuals struggle with fear of discrimination in their workplace. They worry about being treated unfairly, being stigmatised or judged based solely on their condition and employers' prejudice. In some cases disclosure may develop stereotypes of one being incapable, not suitable for the position or too demanding, even if they have already proven their competences. Other concerns include being denied a promotion or being refused leadership opportunities, both leading to career stagnation. This phenomenon is intensified especially in industries that value

conformity and efficiency, creating an increased pressure to fit in rather than use one's special traits to their advantage.

6.2 Past negative experiences

Some neurodivergent individuals who have already disclosed their condition in their working environment have been met with negative results, such as disbelief, dismissal or lack of meaningful intervention from the employer's part. In extreme cases, disclosure led to disciplinary consequences, bullying or marginalisation. These past experiences influence their current willingness to share similar information in the present, strengthening the feeling that disclosure is not worth it and it is better to stay silent rather than become vulnerable.

6.3 Unclear or inaccessible processes

Even in inclusive organizations, it is sometimes confusing how to obtain support and access accommodations, which discourages neurodivergent employees. Policies may seem too complicated, require specific documentation, or be written in an inaccessible way, using a complex and legalistic language. This may cause doubt amongst said employees, who might be wondering which kind of help is actually accessible and realistic, how to approach the matter, or if their disclosure will remain confidential. These unclear processes can generate anxiety and unease, putting an end to the idea of disclosure.

6.4 Lack of role models

Being represented is important, as it generates a feeling of belonging and comfort with your own self and within the environment. In situations when no one in leadership is neurodivergent or has not disclosed such identity, it may suggest that it is unsafe to reveal one's condition, even on the top of the command chain. Lack of disclosure at a leadership level creates silence across the organisation. This being

said, when senior figures do reveal their neurodivergency, it leads to normalisation, easier access to accommodations and sends a message that such a condition does not set limits on one's career. Without a representation amongst role models, employees often feel that they have to rely solely on themselves.

6.5 Masking feels easier

For many neurodivergent people it just feels safer and easier to hide and try to blend in, even after disclosure. However, it also means suppressing specific needs, concealing characteristics, including advantages, and camouflaging themselves as neurotypical. For them, it may seem as a somehow good solution, although it comes at a high cost of burnout, stress and exhaustion, draining employees mentally. It also prevents them from bringing out their full potential and competences. The effort involved in hiding one's identity might seem easier to bear than uncertainty related to disclosure, even though it influences long-term wellbeing.

Building psychological safety through empathy and confidentiality.

Psychological safety in this context should be understood as a common belief that a setting is safe and friendly for neurodivergent individuals to share their concerns, thoughts and ideas, speak up, ask questions and admit their mistakes without the fear of being judged, rejected or punished. Throughout the years it has been proven that this safety is crucial to foster inclusion and diversity, as these are the driving force of high performance in teams and satisfying results.

6.6 Corporate culture

To build psychological safety in the organization, it is important to take care of the corporate culture first. Creating a working environment that favors this safety and inclusion encourages neurodivergent employees to share their feelings, needs and reveal their true potential. It allows them to thrive and also increase their engagement, productivity and loyalty. Leadership commitment and supportive

culture play a key role in designing a setting in which neuroinclusion can benefit not only the people, but the organization as well. In other words, dissemination **of i**nclusive practices and policies should be of utmost importance.

6.7 Empathy from leaders and managers

Empathy is a crucial component needed to create an inclusive and prosperous workplace. It supports the culture of trust, compassion and respect, making all employees feel appreciated. As a result, fostering empathy within the organization leads to higher job satisfaction, improved communication and efficiency. It also helps to build a relationship based on trust between leaders and employees, including both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals. An empathic environment appreciates achievements, even the smallest ones, provides support and accommodations and takes all perspectives into account without any prejudices.

Fostering a supportive workplace means understanding neurodivergent employees, their needs and problems, as well as how to unlock their potential and talents. A human-centric approach is a major factor that helps to create a sense of belonging and promote supportive culture. These are some essential steps to cultivate an empathetic and inclusive workplace:

Recognize abilities: rather than emphasizing characteristics some may perceive as weaknesses, the main focus should be on individuals' strengths and talents, which can enrich corporate culture and produce outstanding results.

Spread awareness: personnel's and leaders' education in the area of neurodivergence and its uniqueness helps to establish an inclusive and safe setting.

Appreciate neurodiversity: recognizing perspectives, input and work styles of neurodivergent employees empowers them and builds a strong sense of inclusion and comfort, which benefits not only them, but also the organization as a whole.

Provide support: supplying neurodivergent employees with guidance, accommodations and assistance enables them to succeed and fosters trust.

Design safe spaces in the office: quiet areas, soothing music and neutral colors can help neurodivergent employees to focus, recharge their energy and boost their productivity and satisfaction.

Be versatile: implementing adjustable tools, flexible working hours and assistive technologies may lead neurodivergent individuals to thrive and unleash their hidden skills.

Control negative influences: challenges such as toxic coworkers and harmful environments hinder the development. It is fundamental to identify where the negativity comes from and to encourage supportive relations between colleagues.

Besides that, employers can also implement other empathetic practices that also do not interfere with one's personal matters, such as:

Regular check-ins: asking questions such as "How are you feeling today?" or "Is there any way I can support your method of working?".

Comfort-oriented questions: "Would you like to transfer to a quieter workspace?" etc.

6.8 Confidentiality and control over information

If a neurodivergent individual decides to disclose their condition, it is pivotal that this fact is known only amongst those people who will use it to provide necessary accommodations and support. The disclosure happens on a "need-to-know" basis, which protects one's privacy, fosters psychological safety and trust between the employee and the company.

For instance, a neurodivergent employee might decide to share their condition with HR or their direct manager in order to seek support and obtain certain accommodations. That information, however, should only be shared with others if

there's a clear, necessary reason. Respecting this boundary helps to maintain confidentiality and ensures the employee's personal information stays private.

Disclosure is a personal choice, and by no means an obligation. It is important to provide clear and accessible policies, as well as transparent communication in order to assure any neurodivergent individual that their condition will stay confidential. This way, any concerns about disclosure and confidentiality should be addressed appropriately.

6.9 Education and training

Educating staff and leaders on neurodivergency creates a sense of understanding and empathy and leads to building a genuinely inclusive and supportive workplace. This generates a shift in perception, which helps to eliminate discrimination and prejudice towards neurodiversity. Training paired with managerial support are key elements in construction of a neuroinclusive culture that appreciates flexibility, clear communication styles and diversity.

Research conducted by Acas and Birkbeck, University of London, shows that an obligatory and regularly updated training on neurodiversity is crucial to promote inclusive and friendly workspaces. Additionally, when paired with a proactive support towards neurodivergent employees, it can bring outstanding results. Study shows that one small business which practices neuroinclusion proactively, reduced its staff turnover to 8%, meanwhile the national average stands at 34%[2].

Another survey, organised by Eagle Hill Consulting, shows that 68% of U.S. employees are not familiar with the term "neurodiversity", while 22% have worked with a neurodivergent coworker[3]. This only emphasises the urgent need for formal training.

To summarize, neurodiversity training and education within organisations is crucial for building empathy and creating a psychologically safe environment. Supplying staff and leaders with adequate tools, awareness and skills creates a sense of inclusiveness and support, where both neurodivergent and neurotypical employees can flourish.

How employers can proactively invite disclosure without pressure.

Sharing information about a neurodivergent condition is a matter of personal choice that should not be forced by any means. However, employers can create suitable and comforting conditions that welcome openness and create trust. By concentrating on universal design, clear processes and transparent communication, organisations foster a supportive culture where neurodivergent individuals can share their thoughts and needs without fear of rejection and judgement.

Here are key hints on how to create such conditions without invading employees' privacy:

Universal design from the very beginning: employers should not wait for someone to disclose their neurodiversity. Instead, it is better to focus on building universal and flexible systems from the start, whether or not someone has already revealed their condition. Some good ideas are for instance designing comfort places, providing employees with flexible working schedules and assistive technologies.

Transparent procedures: clarify policies and communicate clearly about what happens after disclosure. Employers should include and explain information about the process, who's involved, how confidentiality is handled and what is going to be done next. Predictability and transparency help to build trust between neurodivergent employees and leaders.

Flexible support: from the process of recruitment to onboarding and career development. Implemented solutions should include alternative interview formats, adjustable tools and regular feedback. This way the neurodivergent individual feels supported throughout the whole employee lifecycle, regardless if the disclosure happened.

Respect towards privacy and neutral language: questions like "How can I support your working style?" are the most suitable in order to identify one's needs without interfering in personal matters, foster clear communication and avoid stigmatization.

Training and education: workplace training can increase understanding and awareness of neurodivergency. At the same time it decreases stigma and equips both staff and leaders with necessary skills in order to address neurodivergent individuals' needs.

Promote neuroinclusion: making neuroinclusion visible means implementing it in your DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) strategy. This way neurodivergency won't remain a hidden topic and will be actively promoted as something one does not need to be ashamed of.

The answer is to create a supportive and inclusive working environment that encourages (rather than forces) disclosure while respecting the fact that it is the employee's personal choice.

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Illustration: Fostering emotional safety, trust, and disclosure at work.

CHAPTER 7: THE ROLE OF MENTORS AND PEER SUPPORT

Implementing effective support mechanisms in the workplace is crucial for the successful onboarding, inclusion, and sustained retention of neurodivergent employees. Among these supports, mentoring and peer support stand out as impactful, cost-effective strategies that assist individuals in navigating both social interactions and procedural aspects of their roles. Studies have demonstrated that peer mentoring programs can enhance self-confidence, reduce anxiety, and improve job satisfaction for neurodivergent individuals (Siew et al., 2017).

Additionally, mentoring relationships promote a strong sense of belonging and psychological safety, critical factors in lowering turnover rates and increasing employee engagement (Morris et al., 2022). Beyond individual benefits, these interventions contribute to fostering inclusive organizational cultures that value cognitive diversity as a significant strength rather than a limitation.

7.1 Importance of trained internal mentors for onboarding and ongoing guidance.

Assigning trained mentors within an organization significantly eases the transition for neurodivergent employees by clarifying unwritten social and procedural rules and providing a trusted, safe space for questions and emotional regulation. Research highlights that mentors who are trained in neurodivergence and inclusive communication contribute to better onboarding experiences and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings or social isolation (Morris et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2023).

Mentors serve as cultural translators, narrowing the gap between the communication styles and expectations of neurodivergent employees and their teams, which can be a

major reason for stress and disengagement. Mentors are included in a formal inclusion strategy instead of an informal favor; therefore, mentoring is treated as part of an organizational investment, with more consistency and accountability.

Regular check-ins and structured direction from the mentors foster the idea of trust and psychological safety, which are key factors in employee retention and employee well-being. Moreover, mentors can also act as sometimes unnoticed bridges with Human Resource or the management departments, vocalizing some of the specific accommodations needed for the mentee without losing confidentiality and the mentee's comfort. This role supports a proactive approach to workplace inclusion by addressing needs early and sensitively.

7.2 Peer-to-peer programs and their role in easing transitions.

Peer support goes beyond formal mentoring. It fosters a strong sense of community and significantly reduces feelings of isolation among neurodivergent employees. Recent research indicates that peer-led initiatives, especially those co-designed with neurodivergent individuals, improve retention, wellbeing, and performance. For instance, a study by Coyle et al. (2025) details the co-design of a peer support programme for neurodivergent students in higher education, highlighting the positive impacts on student engagement and success.

These kinds of programs typically have buddy systems, where a new employee is partnered with someone with more experience to help the new employee settle in. There are also informal lunch and learning experiences, where team members can gather for lunch, share ideas or knowledge, or just talk about things of common interest. Meet-ups associated with professional hobbies, for example, coding clubs or design workshops, can provide opportunities to connect outside of the workplace or formal meetings. These kinds of activities support friendly informal connections, and make working together feel friendly and team-like. What is even better is everyone involved, whether neurodivergent or neurotypical, has a unique trial with these

experiences. They help everyone to understand one another, build empathy, and learn how to smooth their experience when working together. A review by Santuzzi et al. (2024) emphasizes the importance of inclusive practices throughout the employee lifecycle, from recruitment to retention, to support neurodivergent individuals effectively.

7.3 Real-World Examples.

When thinking about supporting neurodivergent employees, case studies or stories of companies and organizations can provide valuable insights. A successful example is how some workplaces are going beyond the norm of providing onboarding by creating mentoring programs that have an understanding and appreciation for neurodivergent employees. The following provides an example of how a company in Finland is taking a very inclusive and thoughtful approach to mentoring.

Gofore is a Finnish company that is striving to be an inclusive employer. They have created a structured model of mentoring or onboarding in corporate environments, where onboarding employees (particularly neurodivergent employees) are matched with trained mentors who already work in the organization. The mentors are aware of the real issues that neurodivergent colleagues may face, as well as their strengths, as they have been trained in neurodiversity awareness and inclusion. They can therefore provide support when the mentee is acquiring new knowledge through onboarding, and even more importantly, the relationship will continue after onboarding has ended. The professional relationship established with the trained mentor will help the mentee with the workplace culture (which is bound to be different from another place), how to indicate that they understand expectations, and support their confidence, which helps immensely with onboarding i.e., the new hire's success is drastically improved in terms of integration and retention. For more information on Gofore's approach to neurodiversity and inclusive hiring practices, you can visit their official blog post: Neurodiversity and recruitment: Creating inclusive practices at Gofore.

Also, a number of NGOs in Europe have implemented co-mentoring schemes. A key aspect of these schemes is that the relationship can also be reversed, rather than being only one-way as is more commonly practiced in mentoring. In co-mentoring schemes, neurodivergent participants are also mentors. Co-mentoring schemes begin to challenge what we think mentoring is, and challenge positive stereotyping about neurodivergence. Co-mentoring schemes are more likely to offer empowerment because they acknowledge that neurodivergent people have knowledge that is valuable and can be shared. Co-mentors also have mutual benefit, since they also bring experiences, and can therefore offer insights as the mentee, and be accompanied by the co-mentor. Ultimately, co-mentoring works to challenge workplaces to respect & learn about a diverse approach to the workplace culture that fosters the intention of inclusion.

These examples emphasize how mentoring can support transitions toward a more integrated means of building community with the goal of learning together, a practice that values and appreciates diversity and shared growth.

Finally, mentoring and peer support provide an important platform for inclusion when carefully considered to address the needs of individuals and foster relationships based on trust. However, lasting change requires more than relationships based on support; it also requires a culture of leadership that values equity and psychological safety. The next chapter discusses how inclusive leadership and an organizational culture can take these individual supports and scale them into systemic change where organizations go beyond the symbolic to truly embrace the neurodiversity of their workforce.

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Illustration: The crucial role of mentors and peer support.

CHAPTER 8: INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Inclusive leadership is essential in establishing workplace cultures that allow neurodivergent individuals to feel that they are valued, respected, and empowered. Leaders set the tone for what a culture looks like by modeling behaviors and attitudes that recognize cognitive diversity; this not only shapes organizational practices but also frames the experiences of employees in organizations. This chapter suggests that leadership has the capacity to evolve from incorporating non-authentic gestures, and shallow gestures of inclusion to foster organizational culture that authenticates neurodiversity as a strength - a source of bravery and ingenuity.

8.1 How leadership sets the tone for inclusion.

Leaders play a key role in creating an inclusive environment through the display of integrity and commitment to diversity; this, in particular, is critical as their integrity will allow employees to speak up on behalf of diversity despite adverse or objectionable workplace environments (Kundro et al., 2024).

The supportive climate established through the leadership pattern strengthens psychological safety and trust among neurodivergent employees, which encourages them to speak up about their experiences and needs without concern of stigma and/or retaliation. As leaders demonstrate inclusive behaviors and induct diversity initiatives within their organizations, employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention will have positive improvements across the organization.

8.2 Moving from tokenism to authentic inclusion.

Occasionally, organizations will make minimal or symbolic gestures toward inclusion (e.g., hiring neurodivergent employees for the sake of ‘ticking the box’), also referred to as *tokenism*, which may do minimal for supporting or valuing their employees.

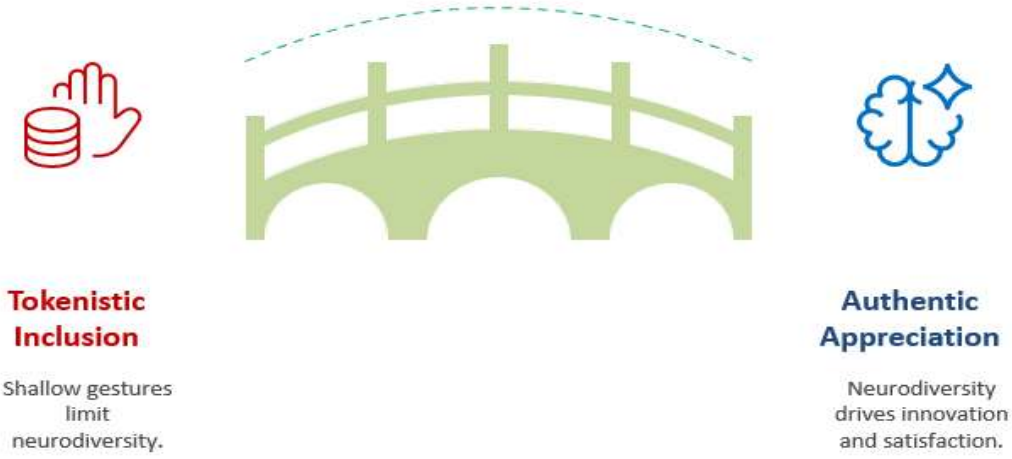
Inclusion requires more than just acts of representation. It takes respect and valuing other ways of thinking and working. When leaders are intentional about creating a culture where employees feel their contributions are valued and that they can feel safe in sharing their unique perspectives and ideas, they will create a place for collaboration and collective creativity (Shore et al., 2011). Further, leaders who display honesty and integrity, will inspire employees to speak up for diversity, even when the workplace is imperfect (Kundro et al., 2024).

8.3 The shift from accommodation to appreciation.

If we accept that true inclusion is more than representation, organizations should also move from accommodation of neurodivergent employees to the appreciation of neurodivergent employees' unique contributions. Accommodation often implies a reactive approach, making adjustments so that neurodivergent individuals can ‘fit in’ or cope within existing systems. While necessary, accommodation can sometimes feel like a begrudging concession or a way to ‘manage’ differences rather than celebrate them (Austin & Pisano, 2017).

Conversely, appreciation suggests that neurodivergence can offer incredible amounts of creativity, innovation, or diversity in approaches to problem-solving. This means integrating these strengths into the organizational culture and being intentional about understanding and valuing the insights that neurodivergent employees contribute. For instance, organizations like SAP have created their "Autism at Work" program to accommodate and not only accommodate, to recast very broadly the roles and workflows to exploit the talents of neurodivergent employees in areas like software testing and data analytics (Austin & Pisano, 2017).

Once appreciation has replaced accommodation, workplaces that have genuinely embraced neurodiversity become environments where difference is not only allowed but is an essential part of how they provide employee satisfaction and success as illustrated in the figure below:



This culture of appreciation only occurs when organizational leaders embrace the concept of neurodiversity, and advocate for neurodiversity, thus creating an organizational culture that embraces all employees for who they are and allows all employees to thrive.

As organizations begin to recognize the notion of inclusive leadership and move from surface-level tokenism to genuine recognition of neurodivergent talent, it is important to note that not all sectors are at the same stage. The next chapter is about specific insights and limitations by sector, and to see how they have responded to neuroinclusion, and where remaining challenges and opportunities exist.

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Illustration: Inclusive leadership moving beyond tokenism.

CHAPTER 9: SECTORAL INSIGHTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Each industry runs within its own unique set of conditions, pressures and goals, which form how neurodivergent individuals experience their roles. While analysing information and limitations specific to each sector, we can see both opportunities and barriers that stand before neurodivergent employees.

9.1 Sector-specific challenges in security, hospitality, consulting, IT, and education.

Neurodivergent individuals offer unique insights and skills, enriching the working environment and providing valuable perspectives. However, they often find themselves working in a setting that is not adapted to their needs. From the fast-paced hospitality industry to strict recruiting practices in security or consulting, there are many challenges awaiting, including sensory overload, fixed working schedules and the constant pressure to fit in. For that reason, it is important to analyze these barriers across various sectors and understand not only the struggles neurodivergent employees face at work, but also why overcoming these everyday obstacles is the true beginning of inclusion.

9.1.1 Security

When entering the security industry, neurodivergent individuals are often met with excess obstacles, which hinder their career development. Industry specific obstacles include:

Sensory sensitivities: many roles in the security industry oblige personnel to work in intense circumstances, including crowded spaces, brightly lit venues or noisy settings. For people with heightened sensory sensitivity, these conditions can easily overwhelm them, leading to stress and fatigue. In extreme cases, unpredicted crowd behaviour, loud alarms or flashing lights might pose a threat to one’s health or life, especially if

they suffer from PTSD or epilepsy. Without any suitable adjustments and awareness, these can negatively influence neurodivergent employee's overall well-being and contribution.

Communication barriers: security sector's standard communication style often depends on clear, fast reports under pressure, either through radios, briefings or incident announcements. This rapid manner may be unfit for individuals who need to process and share information at their own, slightly slower pace. For example, a neurodivergent employee who prefers easy and organised instructions may find it difficult to understand vague directions, while those favouring written communication can struggle when faced with high-speed conversations. These differences might cause misunderstandings, even if technical skills are exceptional. Small adjustments like written instructions or usage of plain and simple language can already diminish barriers and ease the collaboration for everyone.

9.1.2 Hospitality

This industry is shaped by fast-paced service, changing environments and constant interactions. While hospitality is considered one of the top 10 career choices for those with dyslexia and ADHD[1], there can still appear unique challenges for those with other neurodivergent conditions:

Workplace design: plenty of neurodivergent individuals struggle with heightened sensitivity to environmental stimuli, which makes hospitality settings especially tough to operate in. Overstimulation in such surroundings may be easily caused by background music, harsh lighting, and noisy conversations typical for this industry. This creates discomfort and stress within neurodivergent employees, impacting their performance, communication and focus, contributing to fatigue and burnout. Besides, there is also the issue of irregular work schedules, which with their unpredictability present an obstacle for those who rely on routine and structure.

Communication and interactions: hospitality is based on interactions and social exchange, which can be challenging for neurodivergent employees. Barriers include reading body language, interpreting tone of voice or unspoken social rules that may be demanding for such individuals and cause anxiety or unnecessary misunderstandings. When it comes to communication between staff and their superiors, it is frequently based on vague instructions or casual shortcuts, which are difficult to fully understand and process. For those struggling with speech differences, communicating their needs in this fast-paced, customer-oriented environment might pose an even harder obstacle. Such difficulties can be accidentally perceived as lack of interest or poor service, while the real problem is the communication style discrepancy.

Information processing: hospitality environments offer a wide range of choices, including amenities, meal selection, or processing check-in check-out procedures. This vast extent of options may prove to be overwhelming for neurodivergent employees, causing confusion, discomfort or difficulties in formulating decisions and making routine tasks too complex.

9.1.3 Consulting

Consulting is a fast-paced, client-facing profession that thrives on polished interpersonal interactions, adaptability and relationship-building. Neurodivergent individuals who might have distinct communication styles or other cognitive differences may find such expectations particularly wearing. This high-pressure environment and the continuous need to “perform” socially can lead to burnout and stress. Most common challenges in this industry include:

Social norms and expectations: high-pressure consulting environments run on unspoken social norms and expectations, which require subtle communication, adaptability to various scenarios and interpersonal flexibility. These areas may be difficult to navigate for neurodivergent employees, causing feelings of exclusion and misunderstandings. Such barriers emphasize struggles that neurodivergent individuals encounter in collaborative and client-oriented settings.

Sensory overload: most offices operate in an open-space layout, which may overwhelm neurodivergent individuals with its bright lighting, lack of privacy and background noise. Such working conditions might lead to decreased productivity and focus, making it seem like the employee is not competent enough, when in reality they are just overstimulated.

Unstructured personal demands: consulting roles usually include client meetings, collaboration and networking, which may cause various obstacles to arise, as in such circumstances neurodivergent professionals need to interpret social cues, engage in conversations and adjust their communication style. This can cause stress, burnout and poor performance. Therefore, it is essential to provide structure, clear agendas, written instructions and alternative participation options.

Limited career opportunities: usually, to climb a career ladder in consulting, one must rely on networking, relationship-building and strong presence. Neurodivergent employees can face difficulties in these domains, which can lead to lack of acknowledgement of their skills and career slowdown. Highly competent professionals may be overlooked for promotions or ambitious initiatives when left without suitable support and accommodations.

9.1.4 IT

This industry is known for its rapid pace, innovation and unique opportunities for neurodivergent individuals possessing outstanding analytical skills and problem-solving abilities. Despite that, there are still some challenges that may restrain their success and well-being:

Unclear recruitment processes: traditional recruiting styles in IT include high-pressure interviews and bombarding the candidate with complex questions, which demand rapid thinking and universal problem-solving skills, that may not align with neurodivergent individual's competences. Such procedures can hide one's true

potential and lead to the rejection of candidates, who may thrive in slower, structured settings.

Workplace satisfaction gap: in this field, neurodivergent employees often declare lower levels of job satisfaction compared to their neurotypical colleagues. A major factor that stands behind this phenomenon is the inability to "be themselves" at their workplace, which contributes to feelings of marginalisation and isolation.

Rigid rules and high workload: strict regulations and inflexible work schedules can negatively affect neurodivergent individual's productivity, as these rules may not be compatible with one's unique working methods. Some employees can complete their tasks quickly when in a deep focus state, which may be perceived as low effort, when productivity is evaluated based on long hours and continuous presence. These deep focus states may also occur outside the typical working schedule. Such circumstances can create friction and unneeded misunderstandings, as perception of productivity can vary between neurodivergent professionals and their superiors, often leading to frustration and stress.

Complex technology and cognitive overstimulation: technological landscapes and complex tools used in the IT industry may be too overwhelming and distracting for neurodivergent employees. Moreover, when presented with poorly designed digital settings and outdated mechanisms, such individuals can face difficulties related to focus and efficiency. Personalised tools and clearly built systems might help in bringing out their full potential.

9.1.5 Education

This sector presents both opportunities and barriers for neurodivergent employees. Education values creativity, problem-solving skills and fresh perspectives. However, the specific structure and culture of such institutions pose obstacles for neurodivergent professionals. What matters is understanding challenges they are

facing and adjusting the setting to build a supportive and inclusive environment where everyone can flourish.

Most common, sector-specific difficulties are:

Overstimulating environment: laboratories and educational workspaces are often characterised by bright fluorescent lighting, background noises, overcrowding and disorganisation. These conditions and poor design do not fit neurodivergent needs and can lead to overstimulation, difficulties to focus, stress and burnout. Sensory overload can significantly diminish productivity and negatively impact the overall well-being.

Rigid structures: educational roles, such as teaching, run on tight and strict schedules and fixed routines - classes programme and grading deadlines are just some of the examples. When a neurodivergent professional thrives on flexibility and direct structure, it may be difficult for them to operate efficiently in such a setting, causing discomfort, exhaustion and poor performance.

Burnout risks: besides the physical space, one can encounter other disruptions in the working environment, such as erratic interruptions or unnecessary social expectations, which can lead to burnout. Neurodivergent employees often need flexible schedules, time to relax and decompress, as well as adjustable work arrangements to foster their skills and mental well-being.

Across all sectors, neurodivergent professionals provide valuable insights and skills to their workplace. However, their experiences are often formed by rules and practices that are not suitable to their needs. Each industry has its own challenges and barriers, from rigid schedules to overstimulation, which hamper the development of neurodivergent individuals and impact their well-being. Therefore, it is important to recognise such obstacles and implement adjustments not only to reduce these challenges, but also to unlock the potential and innovation that neurodivergent individuals bring to the workforce.

9.2 Legal, safety, and productivity considerations by country.

These standards vary considerably across each country, shaping their methods of support and accommodations for neurodivergent employees. National policies, cultural norms and regulations all influence the way in which inclusive practices are implemented. Studying these differences helps to uncover the barriers and opportunities that await neurodivergent professionals.

Poland: The country faces significant barriers in healthcare, where long waiting times for neurology and psychiatry often lead families to seek costly private alternatives. While the private sector (accommodation, gastronomy, IT) offers potential, there are gaps in vocational training. Innovative initiatives like the Lena Grochowska Foundation and Ergo Sum are creating inclusive roles in cafes, providing valuable training. Government efforts include a 2021 WHO resolution endorsement and proposed incentives like tax breaks and subsidies for workplace adaptations to encourage inclusive hiring.

Finland: Finnish workplaces prioritize flexibility and accessibility, frequently integrating remote work, ergonomic design, and flexible hours. Legislation supports workplace accessibility, and companies invest heavily in training to raise neurodiversity awareness and foster an empathetic culture.

Italy: The landscape is characterized by significant regional diversity in service access. Legislation plays a foundational role, with Law 104/1992 and Law 68/1999 mandating support and equal opportunities, while Law 134/2015 established a National Plan for Autism. The Third Sector (NGOs, cooperatives) is essential, filling gaps left by public services through advocacy and job placement programs.

Spain: Despite a general decline in unemployment, individuals with neurodivergent conditions face persistent stigma and systemic support gaps. Programs led by organizations like Fundación Orange and Asociación Asperger España provide social enterprise models for employment. Employers are increasingly focusing on practical training, awareness, and mentoring to improve systemic inclusivity.

Cyprus: The country has seen a shift toward recognizing neurodiversity value, with partnerships between NGOs and businesses driving progress. Initiatives emphasize tailoring environments through quiet spaces, flexible scheduling, and clearly defined tasks to support autistic individuals and those with ADHD.

9.3 How sectors tailor roles for neurodivergent individuals.

Different industries start to recognize that neurodivergent employees' strengths and competences are unique and valuable, and one-size-fits-all roles often overlook it. Introducing alternative recruitment methods, changing workplace design and implementing adjusted development pathways are just a few adaptations that not only support inclusion, but also amplify innovation, performance and loyalty.

9.3.1 Security

This sector operates in fast-paced settings, which are unpredictable and put high pressure on neurodivergent employees. Tailoring roles for them includes balancing safety requirements with one's strengths, adjusting communication methods and providing proper support, thanks to which neurodivergent individuals can both thrive and meet industry's demands. Such modifications in security include:

Inclusive hiring practices: changing the recruitment process is crucial in order to attract valuable neurodivergent talents. Practices like structured interview or trial shifts help such candidates showcase their skills in a fairer way.

Workplace adjustments: the security sector's environment is often too overstimulating for neurodivergent employees, causing discomfort and anxiety. Simple modifications can make a job more accessible and comfortable, helping these individuals to flourish. Such modifications may include:

- providing flexible break schedules,
- supplying with noise-cancelling headphones, if the role includes working in loud environments,

- adjusting lighting to make it softer and reduce sensory overload,
- introducing structured routines, as well as written instructions.

9.3.2 Hospitality

Hospitality is a fast-paced and service-driven sector, whose environment often overlooks neurodivergent needs. Fostering inclusion begins with valuing diverse advantages and adapting roles to suit better one's unique strengths.

Sensory support: roles in hospitality are associated with chaos, noise and rush. It is important to provide neurodivergent employees with supportive tools in order to help them decompress and recharge. Designing quiet zones, away from the kitchen or other sources of noise might help them do that. Other adjustments include providing noise-cancelling headphones or written instructions and clear visual guides.

Flexible schedules: providing flexible working time based on an individual's needs can benefit their overall performance, as well as well-being. For instance, a chef with ADHD may shine during rush hours, but struggle with preparation time in the morning. On the contrary, when a neurodivergent staff member thrives in slower shifts, let them pick quiet hours.

9.3.3 Consulting

In this sector, companies are focused on problem-solving and client-oriented approaches that usually include social fluency. Tailoring roles for neurodivergent professionals means introducing changes in recruitment processes, providing mentorship and adapting career pathways to address all diverse strengths they possess.

Redesign recruitment procedures: this involves using skill-based assessments and structured, clear instructions in place of intense interviews. For instance, Deloitte, as a participant of Autism@Work movement, instead of conducting traditional methods of recruitment, has introduced a workshop and assessment period for candidates[2]. This way, neurodivergent individuals can show off their skills and acquire useful experience.

Consulting services: beside adjusting their own workplaces, consulting companies like Genius Within or Burch Price & Associates, offer training services in order to transform organizations and help them introduce neuroinclusive practices, such as accessible recruitment or ongoing coaching.

Provide mentorship: coaching and employee resource groups can be useful tools for neurodivergent individuals that help them to build connections within the company and gain recognition. Neurodiversity-focused groups provide comfortable space to share ideas, concerns and discuss challenges in order to boost inclusion.

9.3.4 IT

The IT sector is rapidly recognizing the input and skills that neurodivergent employees can provide, offering unique strengths like deep focus, pattern identification and attention to detail. To obtain these talents, companies adjust their recruitment processes, environment and support methods.

Change hiring practices: besides structured interviews and skill-based assessments, companies introduce solutions such as mentorship and flexible onboarding to improve retention and performance.

Flexible work formats: hybrid and remote work in the IT sector may be a huge help for neurodivergent professionals to manage sensory overload and social pressure. Allowing control over their environment and schedules reduces stress and helps them to focus, which amplifies productivity and satisfaction. Implementing such flexibility reinforces long-term retention and overall job contentment.

Workplace accommodations: these practices aim to address difficulties related to sensory overload in order to provide comfort and conditions to focus. Such adjustments include:

- Regulating lighting, noise and seating,

- Applying adequate deadlines,
- Designing quiet zones,
- Splitting complex tasks into smaller parts, structuring them and providing suitable tools to manage them.

9.3.5 Education

Education is an area that thrives on structured routines and specific culture. Some of the traditional roles within this industry may limit neurodivergent individual's talents and potential. Therefore, introducing changes and suitable practices can not only increase inclusion, but also benefit the entire educational community.

Flexibility, autonomy and breaks: these are crucial for supporting neurodivergent educators, as it allows them to regulate stress and increase productivity. Employers can allow personnel to adjust prep time, lunch periods and breaks in accordance with their individual needs. If not possible, neurodivergent employees should be able to use their non-instructional time as required, for instance to rest, stretch or complete other tasks.

Mitigate overstimulation: employers can support their neurodivergent staff by creating quiet zones or transferring them into less noisy settings, for example a less crowded classroom. This will allow employees to recharge, decompress and catch a breath, as well as maintain their productivity. It does not need to be a specially designed area - even an empty classroom or unused office can make a notable difference.

Professional development: rather than just implementing accommodations, employers should focus on neurodivergent employee's professional development that emphasises organization, practical skills and executive functioning. Walking meetings, doodling in conferences and encouraging comfortable seating can help staff to focus and diminish overstimulation. When it comes to managing workload, tools such as workshops, AI for planning, and peer-led sessions might prove to be effective in this

area. Employers should directly discuss with neurodivergent educators their needs, choices and professional development pathways in order to enhance engagement and usefulness.

Many sectors are beginning to understand and support unique strengths and needs of neurodivergent professionals by introducing accommodations, adjusting roles, workplaces and professional development. Incorporated practices include flexible schedules, sensory overload management, structured hiring and skill-focused training, which enables employees to thrive and truly develop. Such changes not only enhance inclusion, but also improve performance, loyalty and engagement. It is important to participate in open conversations about individual needs in order to make this support truly effective.

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Illustration: Sectoral insights across various industries.

CHAPTER 10: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

10.1 Introduction

Creating an inclusive workplace requires more than policies; it demands translating commitments into actionable strategies that support young workers with disabilities, including autism and epilepsy. While laws and regulations establish the baseline for accessibility and accommodations, practical implementation ensures that neurodivergent employees can thrive professionally. Employers must combine structured tools, flexible work practices, and mentorship programs to address the diverse needs of early-career staff. Financial incentives and well-designed HR policies provide additional support, making inclusion feasible and sustainable across organizations of all sizes. Training programs play a pivotal role in equipping managers, HR personnel, and colleagues with the knowledge and skills to foster understanding, empathy, and collaboration. By integrating policy, practice, and training, organizations can create environments where young neurodivergent employees feel valued and empowered. This chapter explores scalable strategies, legal frameworks, inclusive HR policies, and training modules that together bridge the gap between policy intent and workplace reality. The aim is to provide employers with a comprehensive roadmap for supporting neurodiverse talent. Ultimately, inclusion is not only an ethical responsibility but a strategic advantage, enhancing productivity, retention, and innovation.

10.2 A Toolkit of Practical, Scalable Strategies

Translating inclusive policies into effective workplace practices requires a structured approach that empowers employers to support young workers with disabilities, including autism and epilepsy. A practical toolkit encompasses strategies that are both scalable and adaptable to organizations of different sizes and sectors. Employers can

implement flexible work arrangements, such as modified schedules or remote work options, which accommodate medical needs or sensory sensitivities. Implementing inclusive practices for neurodivergent employees, particularly young workers with autism or epilepsy, requires a comprehensive toolkit that encompasses both practical strategies and scalable solutions. Creating a truly inclusive workplace for young workers with disabilities, including those with autism or epilepsy, requires more than formal policies; it requires the implementation of practical, scalable strategies that are integrated into the organization's daily operations and culture. While many employers may have diversity statements or general inclusion policies, translating these into meaningful workplace practices is often challenging. A toolkit of strategies provides actionable steps that organizations can adapt to their size, sector, and resources, ensuring that inclusivity is operationalized rather than remaining aspirational.

A fundamental component of such a toolkit is flexibility in work arrangements. Young workers with epilepsy, for example, may experience seizures or fatigue at unpredictable times, making standard schedules problematic. Similarly, autistic employees often thrive in predictable routines but may require adjustments to manage sensory sensitivities. By offering flexible scheduling, remote work options, or the possibility of breaking tasks into manageable segments, employers can accommodate these needs while maintaining productivity. Flexibility extends beyond hours to include task assignment and workload management. Employers who allow employees to prioritize or sequence tasks according to their individual strengths create an environment that maximizes contribution while minimizing stress.

Communication clarity is another critical element of an effective toolkit. Young neurodivergent employees may encounter challenges with interpreting informal cues, navigating ambiguous instructions, or understanding implicit workplace expectations. Employers can address these challenges by providing explicit written instructions, establishing structured feedback mechanisms, and maintaining transparent communication about roles and responsibilities. For instance, rather than relying solely on verbal briefings or informal meetings, managers can provide detailed task outlines,

regular check-ins, and clear deadlines. This approach not only reduces misunderstandings but also empowers employees to work independently and confidently, fostering both competence and trust. Beyond structural adjustments, a supportive culture requires mentorship and peer support systems. Young workers entering the workforce often face uncertainty and social pressure, and these challenges can be magnified for neurodivergent individuals. Formal mentorship programs connect new employees with experienced colleagues who provide guidance, feedback, and emotional support. Peer networks offer a sense of belonging and an opportunity to share coping strategies, tips for navigating workplace norms, and encouragement. Such programs also help to normalize accommodations, demonstrating to all staff that adjustments are not exceptions but part of a broader inclusive culture.

A fully developed toolkit must also address environmental adaptations. For autistic employees, factors such as lighting, noise levels, and office layout can significantly impact comfort and performance. Open-plan offices, while popular in many industries, may create overwhelming sensory input for some neurodivergent individuals. Employers can mitigate these challenges by providing quiet spaces, adjustable lighting, noise-cancelling headphones, or designated low stimulation areas. Employees with epilepsy may require similar accommodations, including seizure-safe workstations, accessible first-aid protocols, and clear pathways for emergency evacuation. Thoughtful environmental design signals respect and inclusion, allowing young workers to focus on their contributions rather than on navigating physical or sensory barriers.

Technology and assistive tools also form an essential part of a practical toolkit. Project management software, scheduling apps, speech-to-text tools, and screen readers can support neurodivergent employees in performing tasks efficiently. For instance, an autistic employee who struggles with memory or multi step processes may benefit from task tracking applications that provide reminders and visual cues. Employers who integrate assistive technologies into standard workflows not only enhance accessibility

but also promote equity, ensuring that all employees can perform to their potential. Another significant component is structured onboarding and training. Young neurodivergent employees may require longer or differently structured onboarding processes compared to neurotypical peers. Organizations can provide detailed orientation materials, step-by-step guides for workplace procedures, and incremental exposure to complex tasks or social networks. This approach allows employees to acclimate gradually, reducing anxiety and building confidence in their role. Managers trained to recognize learning styles and pace preferences can adjust their expectations and provide targeted support without compromising overall team performance. Equally important is continuous feedback and performance evaluation that accommodates individual differences. Traditional performance metrics often emphasize speed or conformity over quality and creativity, which can disadvantage neurodivergent employees. Employers can implement alternative evaluation methods that consider task accuracy, problem-solving approaches, and collaboration skills. Regular check-ins and constructive feedback, provided in a clear and supportive manner, help young workers understand expectations and progress while reinforcing their sense of value within the organization.

Health and wellness initiatives should also be integrated into the toolkit. For employees with epilepsy, workplace stress and fatigue can exacerbate symptoms. Programs that promote mental health, stress management, and physical wellness contribute to an environment where neurodivergent employees can sustain their performance and well-being. Providing access to counselling, wellness resources, and periodic breaks supports employees holistically, recognizing that inclusion is not solely about tasks but also about overall health and quality of life. Furthermore, cultivating organizational awareness and culture change is critical. A toolkit is most effective when embedded in an organizational culture that values diversity genuinely, rather than as a compliance obligation. Leadership plays a pivotal role in modeling inclusive behaviors, normalizing accommodations, and promoting a culture of respect and understanding. Training programs, awareness campaigns, and recognition of inclusive

practices reinforce this culture, creating a sustainable environment in which young neurodivergent employees can thrive. Finally, scalability ensures that inclusive strategies are accessible to organizations of all sizes. While large corporations may have dedicated HR teams and resources, small and medium enterprises can implement scaled-down versions, such as flexible scheduling, structured communication, and mentorship, without extensive financial investment. The adaptability of strategies ensures that inclusivity is not restricted to a subset of organizations but becomes a standard across industries. A comprehensive toolkit for employers integrates flexible work arrangements, clear communication, mentorship programs, environmental adaptations, assistive technologies, structured onboarding, inclusive evaluation methods, health initiatives, and cultural awareness. When thoughtfully implemented and consistently reinforced, these strategies bridge the gap between policy and practice, providing young workers with disabilities the support, resources, and environment they need to succeed. Beyond compliance or corporate responsibility, a practical toolkit represents an investment in talent, productivity, and long-term organizational success, demonstrating that inclusion is both achievable and beneficial at all levels of employment.

10.3 Legal Frameworks, Financial Incentives, and Inclusive HR Policies

For employers aiming to create truly inclusive workplaces for young workers with disabilities, including autism and epilepsy, a comprehensive understanding of legal frameworks, financial incentives, and inclusive HR policies is essential. Legal regulations provide not only a compliance baseline but also a roadmap for designing workplaces that accommodate diverse needs and ensure equitable opportunities. Financial incentives and structured HR policies further support employers in operationalizing inclusion, transforming it from abstract commitment into tangible practice.

Legal frameworks: across Europe and many other jurisdictions, legislation establishes the rights of employees with disabilities and mandates employer responsibilities. The EU Disability Strategy 2021-2030 emphasizes accessibility, reasonable accommodation, and full participation in the labour market. National laws often complement this framework, requiring employers to provide adjustments for neurodivergent employees, including modifications to schedules, physical workspaces, or equipment. Understanding these regulations is critical, particularly for young employees entering the workforce, who may be less familiar with their rights or hesitant to request accommodations. In addition to compliance, legal awareness enables employers to proactively design inclusive workplaces. For example, companies that implement structured accommodation procedures and accessible policies demonstrate both legal adherence and commitment to equity. Furthermore, knowledge of rights and obligations reduces the risk of discrimination claims, promotes transparency, and fosters trust between employees and management. Employers who neglect these frameworks may inadvertently create environments where neurodivergent young workers face misunderstanding, exclusion, or stress, undermining retention and productivity.

Financial incentives: legal compliance alone, however, is not sufficient to guarantee meaningful inclusion. Financial incentives can encourage employers to invest in accessible infrastructure, inclusive practices, and staff development. Governments often offer tax credits, grants, or subsidies to companies hiring individuals with disabilities or implementing accommodations. For example, European countries such as the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands provide programs supporting workplace adaptation costs, training, and mentoring initiatives. For companies, these incentives are particularly valuable. Limited budgets and resources may otherwise prevent the adoption of inclusive practices, despite a genuine desire to support neurodivergent employees. By leveraging financial incentives, employers can create accessible workspaces, provide assistive technologies, and fund staff training, ensuring that young workers with autism or epilepsy can perform optimally. Furthermore, strategic

use of incentives signals organizational commitment to inclusion, strengthening the company's reputation and attracting diverse talent.

Inclusive HR policies and organizational implementation: human resources policies are a critical mechanism through which inclusion becomes operationalized. Effective HR policies address multiple dimensions of the employee lifecycle, from recruitment to performance evaluation and career development. Inclusive recruitment practices, for instance, may involve structured interviews, clear role descriptions, and accommodations for testing or assessment processes. Such measures ensure that young neurodivergent candidates are evaluated fairly, highlighting skills and potential rather than penalizing differences in social or cognitive processing. Equally important are HR procedures for requesting and implementing accommodations. Clear guidelines help employees navigate the process without fear of stigma or bias. Employers should formalize steps for requesting adjustments, including timelines, responsible contacts, and documentation requirements. Providing a structured and transparent process allows young workers to communicate their needs confidently, enhancing engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Performance management is another area where inclusive HR policies play a vital role. Traditional metrics, often emphasizing speed, conformity, or interpersonal skills, may disadvantage neurodivergent employees. Policies that allow for alternative assessment methods, considering task accuracy, problem-solving, and creativity, enable fair evaluation. Regular feedback, provided in clear and supportive formats, ensures that employees understand expectations and receive recognition for their contributions. Career progression and professional development are also influenced by inclusive HR policies. Training programs, mentorship opportunities, and leadership development initiatives tailored to the needs of neurodivergent employees equip them with skills and confidence for advancement. Policies should ensure equitable access to promotions, skill-building opportunities, and networking events, mitigating barriers that may arise from traditional informal systems. The integration of legal knowledge, financial incentives, and HR policies is essential for creating workplaces where inclusion is both systematic

and sustainable. Employers must recognize that compliance alone does not equate to genuine inclusion; the combination of legal frameworks, economic support, and operational policies creates the conditions for meaningful participation. Organizations that successfully integrate these elements demonstrate that inclusion is a strategic priority, benefiting both employees and overall business performance.

Practical implementation requires leadership engagement and organizational commitment. Senior management must champion inclusive practices, allocating resources and monitoring outcomes. HR teams should collaborate with line managers to ensure policies are applied consistently, while legal advisors provide guidance to ensure compliance with evolving regulations. Feedback mechanisms, such as employee surveys or focus groups, help identify gaps between policy and practice, enabling continuous improvement. For young neurodivergent employees, this integrated approach translates into concrete benefits. Clear procedures, accessible workspaces, structured feedback, and financial support for accommodations reduce stress, enhance performance, and foster a sense of belonging. The organization, in turn, gains from increased retention, innovation, and engagement, illustrating that inclusive policies are not just ethically necessary but also strategically advantageous.

Several European companies exemplify the successful application of legal, financial, and HR frameworks. For instance, organizations that implement neurodiversity hiring programs often provide tailored onboarding, mentorship, and continuous support for young employees with autism. These programs demonstrate how policy, financial investment, and HR practices converge to create an environment conducive to success. Similarly, companies leveraging government incentives for accessibility improvements report increased employee satisfaction and retention, particularly among neurodivergent staff. Legal frameworks, financial incentives, and inclusive HR policies form a triad essential for operationalizing inclusion for young workers with disabilities. Employers who understand their obligations, utilize available support, and implement structured HR practices create environments where neurodivergent employees can thrive. This approach transforms inclusion from a theoretical ideal into tangible

practice, ensuring that young workers with autism or epilepsy not only enter the workforce but succeed and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals.

10.3.1 Summary of Training Needs and Modules

Effective training is one of the most critical elements in transforming inclusive policies into practical, day-to-day workplace practices. For young workers with disabilities, including autism and epilepsy, training ensures that managers, peers, and HR personnel possess the knowledge and skills required to support neurodivergent employees effectively. While policies and accommodations set the foundation for inclusion, training programs operationalize these policies by creating awareness, building competence, and fostering empathy across the organization.

The first step in building an inclusive workplace is general awareness training for all staff members. Such training educates employees about neurodiversity, including the challenges and strengths associated with conditions like autism and epilepsy. Understanding sensory sensitivities, social communication differences, and episodic health needs equips colleagues to interact respectfully and effectively with neurodivergent coworkers. Awareness training also addresses common misconceptions, reducing stigma and fostering a workplace culture of understanding and support. By helping all employees recognize the value of diversity, organizations create a foundation of respect and collaboration that benefits everyone, not just neurodivergent staff. Managers play a pivotal role in translating policies into practice. Managerial training modules focus on skills such as effective communication, reasonable accommodations, performance evaluation adjustments, and conflict resolution. Managers are trained to provide structured, clear instructions and feedback, ensuring that neurodivergent employees understand expectations and can navigate tasks successfully. For example, a manager learning to break down complex tasks into manageable steps can empower an autistic employee to perform independently without unnecessary stress. Similarly, understanding triggers for fatigue or sensory overload enables managers to adjust workloads or schedules proactively,

particularly for employees with epilepsy. Training also emphasizes empathetic leadership, reinforcing the importance of patience, active listening, and problem-solving in fostering inclusion.

HR personnel require specialized training to ensure that organizational practices are inclusive from recruitment through career development. Inclusive recruitment training teaches staff how to design job postings, conduct structured interviews, and accommodate neurodivergent candidates during assessment processes. By implementing these strategies, organizations can attract a diverse pool of applicants and provide equitable opportunities for young workers entering the labor market. HR training also covers the design and implementation of accommodation procedures, ensuring that requests are handled consistently, confidentially, and efficiently. Furthermore, HR staff are trained to monitor compliance with legal obligations and to evaluate the effectiveness of workplace accommodations over time.

A significant component of inclusion involves training employees on the use of assistive technologies and tools. These may include project management software, task-tracking applications, speech-to-text tools, screen readers, and sensory-modulating devices. For neurodivergent employees, these tools can mitigate barriers to productivity, enhance independence, and reduce anxiety. Training ensures that both employees and managers understand how to implement these tools effectively, integrating them seamlessly into daily workflows. For instance, an autistic employee may benefit from visual task trackers that outline step by step procedures, while an employee with epilepsy may use scheduling software to manage energy levels and health related appointments. Beyond operational training, leadership development modules are vital for cultivating career progression among young neurodivergent employees. These programs focus on building confidence, communication skills, decision-making, and strategic thinking. For young workers, structured leadership training provides opportunities to develop competencies that may otherwise be overlooked due to traditional promotion pathways. By supporting neurodivergent employees in leadership development, organizations not only enhance career

prospects but also diversify the pool of future leaders, ensuring a sustainable culture of inclusion. In addition to individual training, team-based modules enhance collaboration and mutual support within workgroups. These sessions foster understanding of diverse work styles, communication preferences, and coping strategies. Teams learn how to recognize and accommodate sensory sensitivities, provide constructive feedback, and offer peer support for problem solving. For young workers with autism or epilepsy, positive team interactions can significantly reduce social anxiety and improve engagement. Peer training encourages inclusive behaviors to become part of the everyday culture, rather than a compliance-driven requirement. Training is most effective when it is ongoing rather than one time. Continuous learning modules allow employees to update their skills, adapt to evolving organizational needs, and respond to the specific requirements of neurodivergent staff. Feedback mechanisms, including surveys, focus groups, and performance assessments, help identify gaps in knowledge or practice, guiding the development of future training content. Continuous learning ensures that training remains relevant and effective, reinforcing the organization's commitment to inclusion over time.

Organizations must implement evaluation mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of training programs. Metrics may include employee satisfaction, retention rates of neurodivergent staff, performance outcomes, and feedback from managers and peers. Impact assessment allows organizations to refine training content, adjust delivery methods, and ensure alignment with legal requirements and organizational goals. For young employees, evaluation ensures that training translates into tangible workplace improvements, supporting both professional development and overall well-being. A holistic approach involves embedding training into the organization's strategic objectives. Training programs should align with broader diversity and inclusion initiatives, ensuring consistency across departments and functions. Leadership endorsement, resource allocation, and cultural reinforcement are critical for sustaining training efforts. For young neurodivergent employees, an integrated approach ensures that learning translates into practice, creating a workplace where they feel valued,

supported, and empowered to succeed. A comprehensive training strategy for young workers with autism or epilepsy must address awareness, managerial skills, HR practices, assistive technologies, leadership development, team collaboration, continuous learning, and impact assessment. By designing and implementing these modules thoughtfully, employers can bridge the gap between policy and practice, equipping all employees to contribute to an inclusive, supportive, and high-performing workplace. Effective training ensures that young neurodivergent employees are not only accommodated but are empowered to develop their skills, advance professionally, and thrive within the organization.

10.4 Conclusions

Employers who successfully implement inclusive strategies, grounded in legal frameworks and supported by financial incentives, create workplaces where young workers with autism or epilepsy can flourish. Scalable toolkits, flexible arrangements, and clear communication structures translate policy into tangible benefits for neurodivergent employees. Inclusive HR policies ensure equitable recruitment, performance evaluation, and career development, reinforcing fairness and opportunity. Training programs equip staff at all levels to recognize, accommodate, and leverage neurodiverse strengths, fostering collaboration and reducing stigma. Mentorship and peer support further enhance engagement and confidence among early-career employees. Environmental adaptations and assistive technologies address practical challenges while promoting independence. Regular evaluation of inclusion initiatives ensures continuous improvement and alignment with organizational goals. By embedding these practices into the corporate culture, employers demonstrate a commitment that extends beyond compliance. Inclusive workplaces not only empower employees but also drive innovation, productivity, and retention. Ultimately, translating policy into practice benefits both neurodivergent workers and the organization, creating a more equitable and higher performing workforce.

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Illustration: Moving from policy to practice with a practical toolkit.

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of students and graduates with neurological disorders and trauma into the workforce is not merely a social obligation; it is an economic imperative and a profound opportunity for innovation. As demonstrated throughout this guide, when employers shift their perspective from a "medical model" of disability to a "social model" of inclusion, they unlock a wealth of untapped talent.

The COHESION project's dual approach highlights that successful integration requires effort from both sides. Work-based organizations must actively redesign their environments, recruitment processes, and communication strategies to reduce barriers. Simultaneously, vulnerable students must be provided with the targeted training and mentorship necessary to build confidence, self-advocate, and apply their extraordinary skills in professional settings.

The findings and methodologies presented in this guide—from sensory-friendly workplace adaptations to structured peer support and inclusive leadership—provide a scalable blueprint for organizations across Europe. By implementing these evidence-based practices, companies can reduce the clutter and visual distractions that hinder performance, foster emotional safety, and build cohesive teams that thrive on cognitive diversity.

Ultimately, the success of neuro-inclusion initiatives depends on the continued collaboration between Higher Education Institutions, the private sector, NGOs, and the neurodivergent community itself—upholding the essential dictum: "Nothing About Us Without Us." As we move forward, it is our hope that the tools and insights provided here will inspire organizations to move beyond tokenism, embracing authentic inclusion that benefits all employees and strengthens the fabric of our society.

ABOUT THE PROJECT PARTNERS

The COHESION project represents a collaborative effort between six esteemed organizations across five European countries, combining academic rigor with practical business expertise.

V-Systems sp. z o.o. (Poland) – Project Coordinator

V-Systems is an educational institution and employment agency with over 13 years of experience in vocational education, entrepreneurship, and international project management. With a dedicated team of professionals, V-Systems specializes in creating human-centered design products and implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies, particularly focusing on neurodiversity.

Międzynarodowa Akademia Nauk Stosowanych w Łomży (MANS) (Poland)

The International Academy of Applied Science in Łomża is a leading private higher education institution in Poland. MANS has a rich history of supporting vulnerable students and creating cohesive educational pathways. The university actively participates in the creation of new didactic solutions and vocational training programs in cooperation with the economic sector across the EU.

LUISS Guido Carli University (Italy)

LUISS is one of the top Italian universities in the field of Social Sciences. With a strong affiliation to Confindustria (the Confederation of Italian Industry), LUISS bridges the gap between academia and the corporate sector. The university brings deep expertise in human resources management, inclusive ecosystems, and supporting students with autism spectrum disorders.

University of Vaasa (VAMK) & MUOVA (Finland)

VAMK provides education in technology, economics, and social services. Its Western Finland Design Centre (MUOVA) specializes in user-centered design, creativity, and applied research. VAMK utilizes design thinking to develop educational solutions, soft skills training, and entrepreneurship programs tailored to vulnerable groups.

EDITC Limited (Cyprus)

Established in 1996, EDITC provides quality learning solutions and vocational training to professionals and adults. With expertise in ICT training, soft skills development, and e-learning platforms, EDITC focuses on delivering courses that target unemployed and marginalized groups, ensuring high standards of quality assurance.

Innopares Consultores y Formadores S.L. (Spain)

Innopares is a startup dedicated to the management of human-centered innovation projects. Their team brings over 50 years of collective experience in digital learning, social innovation, and mentoring. Innopares specializes in co-creation and coaching techniques to support social empowerment and capacity building for public and third-sector organizations.

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