

WORKPLACE SUPPORT • ARTICLE 4

NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

A COMPASSIONATE EXPLORATION

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Every workplace is made up of people who think, learn and communicate differently. These differences are a natural part of human diversity. Neurodiversity is the concept that neurological differences such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and Tourette syndrome are natural variations of the human brain rather than deficits that need to be "fixed."

For many years, workplaces were designed around the idea that everyone should work in the same way. Employees were expected to communicate similarly, manage time in the same manner, work in busy open-plan offices and cope with constant interruptions. While this environment may suit some people, it can create significant barriers for neurodivergent individuals.

Creating a neuro-inclusive workplace is not about lowering standards. It is about recognising different ways of thinking and ensuring everyone has the opportunity to use their strengths.

What Is Neurodiversity?

The term neurodiversity describes the natural variation in how human brains develop and function.

Some common forms of neurodivergence include:

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)

Dyslexia

Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder)

Dyscalculia

Tourette Syndrome

Many people are also AuDHD, meaning they are both autistic and have ADHD.

Each condition affects people differently, and many individuals have more than one neurodevelopmental difference.

Neurodivergence is not a mental illness, although neurodivergent people may experience mental health difficulties due to stress, misunderstanding or long-term masking.

Moving Away from the Deficit Model

Historically, neurodivergence has often been viewed through a medical or deficit-based model, focusing on what people struggle with rather than what they contribute.

This approach can overlook the many strengths neurodivergent individuals bring to the workplace.

Many neurodivergent employees demonstrate:

Exceptional creativity
Strong problem-solving skills
Innovative thinking
High levels of honesty
Deep focus on areas of interest
Excellent pattern recognition
Attention to detail
Strong memory for facts
Persistence and determination
Unique perspectives

These strengths can be invaluable to organisations when supported appropriately.

Common Workplace Challenges

Although neurodivergent people possess many strengths, workplace environments can unintentionally create barriers.

ADHD

Employees with ADHD may experience:

Difficulty prioritising tasks
Forgetfulness
Time blindness
Executive functioning difficulties
Distractibility
Difficulty switching between tasks
Hyperfocus on areas of interest

Challenges with organisation

Importantly, ADHD is not a lack of attention - it is a difficulty regulating attention.

Autism

Autistic employees may experience:

Sensory overload

Difficulty with unexpected change

Social communication differences

Need for routine and predictability

Literal interpretation of language

Fatigue from masking

Difficulty processing multiple conversations simultaneously

Many autistic people are highly skilled, but workplace environments may require them to use significant energy simply managing sensory demands.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia affects far more than reading.

Employees may experience challenges with:

Spelling

Reading speed

Written communication

Working memory

Processing large amounts of written information

Many dyslexic individuals excel at verbal communication, creativity and big-picture thinking.

The Hidden Cost of Masking

Many neurodivergent adults spend years trying to hide their differences.

This is often referred to as masking.

Masking may involve:

Copying other people's behaviour.

Forcing eye contact.

Suppressing stimming.

Pretending to understand instructions.

Working excessive hours to compensate.

Hiding sensory difficulties.

Constantly monitoring social interactions.

While masking may help someone "fit in," it often comes at a significant emotional cost.

Long-term masking has been linked with:

Anxiety

Depression

Burnout

Exhaustion

Reduced self-esteem

Identity confusion

Supporting neurodivergent employees means creating environments where they feel less pressure to hide who they are.

Practical Workplace Adjustments

Many adjustments are simple, inexpensive and highly effective.

Examples include:

Flexible working hours

Hybrid or home working

Quiet workspaces

Noise-cancelling headphones

Written instructions alongside verbal discussions

Clear deadlines

Visual planners

Regular check-ins

Predictable routines

Advance notice of changes

Extra processing time

Assistive technology

Reduced sensory distractions

Not every adjustment will be appropriate for every employee.

The most effective support comes from asking the individual what helps them work at their best.

Communication Matters

Good communication is one of the most valuable workplace adjustments.

Managers can support neurodivergent employees by:

Giving clear instructions.
Avoiding vague language.
Explaining priorities.
Confirming understanding.
Providing written summaries after meetings.
Allowing questions without judgement.
Giving constructive feedback respectfully.
Clear communication reduces misunderstandings for everyone - not just neurodivergent staff.

Focusing on Strengths

Inclusive workplaces recognise what people do well rather than focusing solely on areas of difficulty.

For example:

Someone with ADHD may generate innovative ideas and thrive during problem-solving.

An autistic employee may identify patterns or errors others miss.

A dyslexic employee may excel at strategic thinking and verbal communication.

Recognising these strengths benefits both the individual and the organisation.

Creating a Neuro-Inclusive Culture

True inclusion goes beyond making adjustments.

It involves creating a culture where different ways of thinking are respected rather than merely tolerated.

Neuro-inclusive organisations often:

Educate staff about neurodiversity.

Challenge stereotypes.

Encourage open conversations.

Promote psychological safety.

Review recruitment practices.

Offer flexible ways of working.

Celebrate diverse strengths.

Encourage managers to develop inclusive leadership skills.

When people feel accepted, they are far more likely to contribute their ideas, creativity and expertise.

Final Thoughts

Neurodiversity reminds us that there is no single "correct" way to think, communicate or work.

By recognising strengths, removing unnecessary barriers and creating flexible workplaces, organisations unlock the full potential of neurodivergent employees.

The question is not, "How can we make this person fit our workplace?"

Instead, we should ask, "How can we create a workplace where everyone has the opportunity to thrive?"

When organisations embrace neurodiversity, they gain more than inclusion - they gain innovation, creativity, loyalty and a richer diversity of thought that benefits everyone.

A gentle reminder

This resource offers general information and reflection. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individual medical or therapeutic care. If you are worried about your safety or someone else's, seek urgent professional support.

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