

NEURODIVERGENCE AT WORK

COMMUNICATION ACROSS THINKING STYLES

Building stronger teams through understanding

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Communication Across Thinking Styles

Building stronger teams through understanding

Communication is at the heart of every successful workplace. It influences how teams work together, how problems are solved, how relationships develop and how organisations achieve their goals. However, communication is not simply about the words we use. It also involves how we process information, interpret meaning, respond to others and express our ideas.

People communicate in different ways, and these differences become particularly important in neurodiverse workplaces. Neurodivergent employees—including autistic people, individuals with ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and other neurodevelopmental differences—may process information, interpret language and engage in conversations differently from their neurotypical colleagues.

These differences are not communication deficits; they are differences in communication styles. Problems often arise not because one person is communicating incorrectly, but because people have different expectations about how communication "should" happen.

Creating workplaces that value different communication styles improves collaboration, reduces misunderstandings and allows everyone to contribute their strengths. By developing greater awareness and flexibility, teams can build stronger relationships and create environments where every voice is heard and respected.

Communication Is More Than Talking

Effective communication includes:

- Listening.
- Speaking.
- Writing.
- Reading.
- Body language.
- Facial expressions.
- Tone of voice.
- Processing information.
- Asking questions.
- Giving feedback.

Every person brings their own communication preferences, influenced by personality, experience, culture and neurological differences.

Recognising this diversity helps prevent unnecessary misunderstandings.

Different Ways of Processing Information

People process information differently.

Some individuals:

- Prefer verbal explanations.

Need written information.

Learn visually.

Benefit from practical demonstrations.

Need additional processing time.

Think aloud while solving problems.

Prefer time to reflect before responding.

None of these approaches are better than another—they are simply different.

Providing information in multiple formats increases accessibility for everyone.

Direct and Indirect Communication

One of the most common differences in communication relates to how messages are expressed.

Some people communicate very directly.

Others communicate more indirectly, relying on context, tone or implied meaning.

For example:

- Indirect communication:

"It would be nice if this report could be finished soon."

Direct communication:

"Please complete the report by 3pm on Thursday."

Neither approach is inherently right or wrong.

However, clear and specific communication often reduces misunderstandings, particularly in neurodiverse workplaces.

Literal Language

Some neurodivergent individuals, particularly many autistic people, may interpret language more literally.

Expressions such as:

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

"Keep your eyes peeled."

"Can you jump on this?"

may create confusion if interpreted literally.

Using straightforward language improves clarity.

Giving Processing Time

Not everyone processes information at the same speed.

Some employees need additional time to:

- Understand questions.

Organise thoughts.

Make decisions.

Formulate responses.

Silence should not automatically be interpreted as uncertainty or lack of knowledge.

Allowing processing time often leads to more thoughtful and accurate contributions.

Active Listening

Communication is as much about listening as speaking.

Active listening involves:

- Giving full attention.

Avoiding interruptions.

Asking clarifying questions.

Checking understanding.

Showing genuine curiosity.

Listening to understand rather than simply waiting to respond creates stronger relationships.

Meetings That Include Everyone

Meetings can be challenging for many employees.

Factors such as:

- Rapid conversations.

Interruptions.

Background noise.

Unclear agendas.

Multiple speakers.

Unexpected questions.

may create barriers.

Inclusive meetings can be supported by:

- Sending agendas beforehand.

Defining objectives clearly.

Sharing relevant documents in advance.

Allowing contributions in writing.

Summarising key decisions.

Providing notes afterwards.

These practices improve participation across the whole team.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

Feedback is essential for professional development.

When working across different thinking styles:

- Feedback should be:

Clear.

Specific.

Respectful.

Behaviour-focused.

Balanced.

Actionable.

Avoid relying on vague statements such as:

"You need to communicate better."

Instead, explain:

- What happened.

Why it mattered.

What would be helpful next time.

Clarity reduces anxiety and supports improvement.

Managing Misunderstandings

Misunderstandings occur in every workplace.

Rather than assuming negative intent, consider:

- Did we interpret the conversation differently?

Was my message clear?

Have I checked my understanding?

Could this be a difference in communication style?

Curiosity is often far more productive than assumption.

Building Psychological Safety

People communicate more openly when they feel psychologically safe.

Psychological safety encourages employees to:

- Ask questions.

Admit mistakes.

Request clarification.

Share ideas.

Challenge respectfully.

Express uncertainty.

When employees fear judgement, communication becomes limited and collaboration suffers.

The Role of Managers

Managers influence communication culture every day.

Supportive managers:

- Communicate expectations clearly.

Encourage questions.

Adapt communication styles.

Check understanding.

Value different perspectives.

Listen actively.

Respond respectfully.

Flexibility demonstrates effective leadership.

Written Communication

Written communication can often reduce misunderstandings.

Helpful approaches include:

- Bullet points.

Clear deadlines.

Action lists.

Short paragraphs.

Simple language.

Written follow-up after meetings.

Providing written information supports memory, organisation and clarity.

Appreciating Different Thinking Styles

Neurodiverse teams often approach problems differently.

Some people naturally:

- Focus on details.

See patterns.

Generate ideas quickly.

Identify risks.

Think creatively.

Analyse systematically.

These differences strengthen decision-making when all perspectives are valued.

The goal is not to make everyone communicate identically but to help people understand one another more effectively.

Practical Communication Tips

Individuals can improve workplace communication by:

- Being clear and specific.

Avoiding assumptions.

Asking clarifying questions.

Confirming understanding.

Respecting processing time.

Following up important conversations in writing.

Remaining curious about different perspectives.

Being willing to adapt communication styles.

Small adjustments often have a significant impact.

Benefits of Inclusive Communication

Organisations that embrace diverse communication styles often experience:

- Better teamwork.

Reduced conflict.

Improved trust.

Stronger innovation.

Better decision-making.

Higher employee engagement.

Increased psychological safety.

Greater workplace inclusion.

Good communication creates stronger organisations.

Key Takeaways

People communicate and process information in different ways.

Neurodivergent communication styles are differences, not deficits.

Clear, direct communication reduces misunderstandings.

Providing written information and allowing processing time improves accessibility.

Inclusive meetings encourage wider participation.

Active listening strengthens relationships and collaboration.

Flexible communication benefits the entire workforce.

Final Thoughts

Communication is one of the most powerful tools for building inclusive workplaces. When organisations recognise that people process information, interpret language and express themselves differently, they create opportunities for stronger collaboration rather than unnecessary misunderstanding.

Rather than expecting everyone to communicate in the same way, neuroinclusive workplaces encourage flexibility, curiosity and mutual respect. Simple changes such as using clear language, allowing processing time, providing written information and actively listening can make a significant difference to both individual wellbeing and team performance.

Ultimately, effective communication is not about changing how people think—it is about creating environments where different thinking styles are understood, respected and valued. When every employee feels heard and understood, organisations become more innovative, compassionate and successful, benefiting both individuals and the wider workplace.