



## WORKPLACE WELLBEING

### Chapter 6

# Helping Neurodivergent People Thrive at Work

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Helping Neurodivergent People Thrive at Work: Creating Strengths-Based, Inclusive and Sustainable Careers

**Thriving means more than simply coping**

When barriers are reduced and individual strengths are recognised, neurodivergent employees can build meaningful, sustainable careers while organisations benefit from diverse thinking, innovation and talent.

## SPACE TO BREATHE THERAPY



## Helping Neurodivergent People Thrive at Work

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For many years, conversations about neurodivergence in the workplace focused almost exclusively on challenges, limitations and the support people might need to "fit in." While acknowledging barriers remains important, there has been a significant shift towards recognising the value that neurodivergent employees bring to organisations. Increasingly, employers are moving away from asking, "How do we manage neurodivergent employees?" and instead asking, "How do we create workplaces where neurodivergent people can thrive?"

Thriving at work is about more than simply being employed. It means feeling valued, respected and able to contribute meaningfully while maintaining wellbeing. It involves having opportunities to develop professionally, progress in a career and work in environments where individual strengths are recognised rather than overshadowed by differences.

A strengths-based approach does not ignore the challenges that neurodivergent people may experience. Instead, it recognises that when unnecessary barriers are removed and appropriate support is available, many neurodivergent employees demonstrate exceptional creativity, innovation, focus, problem-solving and leadership.

Creating workplaces where people thrive benefits everyone. Organisations gain access to diverse perspectives, stronger innovation and more engaged teams, while employees experience greater confidence, job satisfaction and wellbeing.

## What Does It Mean to Thrive at Work?

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Thriving is more than simply coping. Employees who thrive often experience:

- A sense of purpose.
- Psychological safety.
- Opportunities to grow.
- Positive working relationships.
- Meaningful work.
- Confidence in their abilities.
- Recognition for their contributions.
- Good wellbeing.
- Sustainable workloads.

Thriving allows people to use their strengths while receiving appropriate support where needed.

## Moving from a Deficit Model to a Strengths-Based Approach

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Historically, neurodivergence has often been viewed through a deficit-based model. This approach tends to focus on:

- Difficulties.
- Limitations.
- Symptoms.
- Problems to solve.



A strengths-based approach asks different questions.

Instead of asking: "What can't this person do?" It asks:

- What are their strengths?
- What environments help them succeed?
- What support removes unnecessary barriers?
- How can these strengths benefit the organisation?

This shift changes workplace culture from accommodation alone to genuine inclusion.

## Recognising Individual Strengths

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Every neurodivergent person is unique. However, many individuals may demonstrate strengths such as:

- Creative thinking.
- Innovation.
- Attention to detail.
- Pattern recognition.
- Strong memory.
- Curiosity.
- Persistence.
- Honesty.
- Analytical thinking.
- Hyperfocus.
- Problem-solving.
- Original perspectives.

These strengths should never be assumed, but they should also never be overlooked.

Understanding each employee's individual talents allows organisations to make the best use of diverse abilities.

## Building Confidence

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Many neurodivergent adults have experienced years of misunderstanding, criticism or feeling different. This history can affect confidence at work.

Managers and colleagues can help by:

- Recognising achievements.
- Providing balanced feedback.
- Focusing on strengths.
- Encouraging professional development.
- Celebrating progress.
- Offering opportunities to succeed.

Confidence grows when people feel valued for who they are rather than judged against a single standard.

## Career Development

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Neurodivergent employees should have equal opportunities to:

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- Learn new skills.
  - Attend training.
  - Apply for promotion.
  - Lead projects.
  - Mentor others.
  - Progress into leadership roles.

Career development should be based on ability, not assumptions about diagnosis. Open conversations about aspirations help ensure employees are not overlooked.

## Leadership and Neurodiversity

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Leadership does not look the same for everyone. Some neurodivergent leaders may demonstrate strengths such as:

- Strategic thinking.
- Creativity.
- Integrity.
- Innovation.
- Deep expertise.
- Calm decision-making.
- Strong ethical values.
- Honest communication.

Traditional stereotypes about leadership can unintentionally exclude talented individuals. Broadening our understanding of effective leadership benefits organisations as a whole.

## Coaching and Mentoring

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Coaching and mentoring can play an important role in helping neurodivergent employees reach their potential. Benefits include:

- Building confidence.
- Developing self-awareness.
- Improving communication.
- Supporting career planning.
- Exploring strengths.
- Problem-solving workplace challenges.

The most effective coaching is collaborative and strengths-focused rather than aimed at making someone appear more neurotypical.

## Encouraging Self-Advocacy

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Self-advocacy involves understanding your own needs and communicating them effectively. Employees may advocate for:

- Reasonable adjustments.
- Flexible working.
- Communication preferences.
- Sensory needs.



- Professional development opportunities.

Employers should create environments where these conversations are welcomed rather than viewed as inconveniences.

## Measuring Success Differently

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Success is often measured using traditional indicators such as:

- Speaking confidently in meetings.
- Networking.
- Multitasking.
- Social interaction.

However, these measures may overlook valuable contributions made in different ways. Inclusive organisations also recognise:

- Quality of work.
- Creativity.
- Problem-solving.
- Reliability.
- Specialist knowledge.
- Innovation.
- Collaboration in different forms.
- Continuous improvement.

Success should reflect outcomes rather than one preferred style of working.

## Building Inclusive Teams

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Thriving is influenced by the culture of the team. Inclusive teams:

- Respect different communication styles.
- Encourage questions.
- Share information clearly.
- Value different perspectives.
- Challenge stereotypes.
- Support flexibility.
- Promote psychological safety.

When employees feel accepted, they are more likely to contribute fully.

## The Role of Managers

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Managers have one of the greatest influences on whether employees thrive. Effective managers:

- Build trusting relationships.
- Listen without judgement.
- Focus on strengths.
- Review adjustments regularly.
- Encourage development.
- Provide clear expectations.

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- Celebrate success.
  - Address barriers proactively.

Supportive leadership benefits every member of the team.

## The Future of Neuroinclusive Workplaces

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The future of work is increasingly recognising that innovation depends on diversity of thought. Forward-thinking organisations are:

- Reviewing recruitment practices.
- Increasing neurodiversity awareness.
- Designing more flexible workplaces.
- Investing in assistive technology.
- Improving accessibility.
- Encouraging inclusive leadership.
- Embedding neuroinclusion into organisational strategy.

These changes create workplaces that are more adaptable, creative and resilient.

## Practical Steps for Organisations

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To help neurodivergent employees thrive:

- Adopt strengths-based approaches.
- Encourage open conversations.
- Provide appropriate adjustments.
- Invest in manager training.
- Review workplace policies.
- Promote psychological safety.
- Offer coaching and mentoring.
- Celebrate different thinking styles.
- Regularly seek employee feedback.
- Continuously review inclusive practices.

Creating an inclusive culture is an ongoing process rather than a one-time initiative.

## Benefits of Helping People Thrive

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Organisations that actively support neurodivergent employees often experience:

- Higher staff retention.
- Improved innovation.
- Better problem-solving.
- Greater employee engagement.
- Stronger leadership.
- Improved morale.
- Increased productivity.
- More diverse perspectives.
- Better organisational reputation.

When employees thrive, organisations thrive too.



## Key Takeaways

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- Thriving at work means more than simply coping, it involves wellbeing, purpose, confidence and growth.
- A strengths-based approach focuses on abilities rather than limitations.
- Career development should be accessible to all employees.
- Inclusive leadership values different ways of thinking and working.
- Coaching, mentoring and self-advocacy support long-term success.
- Organisations benefit from recognising diverse definitions of success.
- Neuroinclusive workplaces create opportunities for everyone to contribute their best work.

## Final Thoughts

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Helping neurodivergent people thrive at work is about recognising potential rather than focusing solely on challenges. Every individual brings unique strengths, experiences and ways of thinking that can enrich teams, improve decision-making and drive innovation. When organisations move beyond deficit-based thinking and embrace a strengths-based approach, they create workplaces where differences are not simply accommodated, they are genuinely valued.

Thriving also requires a shared commitment. Employers, managers and colleagues all have a role to play in creating cultures that promote psychological safety, flexible working, clear communication and equal opportunities for development. Likewise, empowering neurodivergent employees to understand their strengths, advocate for their needs and pursue meaningful career goals supports both individual wellbeing and organisational success.

Ultimately, a neuroinclusive workplace is one where people do not have to hide who they are to succeed. It is a workplace that recognises diversity of thought as a strength, removes unnecessary barriers and creates the conditions for every employee to grow, contribute and build a fulfilling, sustainable career.