

Understanding Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the natural variations in human brain function and the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways. "No two individuals think alike."

Neurotypical refers to individuals who process information in a way that aligns with what's considered typical in society.

Neurodivergent describes individuals who think, learn, or process information in ways that differ from what's considered typical (neurotypical) and includes diagnoses such as:

- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
- ADHD
- Dyslexia and other learning differences
- Auditory processing differences
- Tourette's Syndrome
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Highly Sensitive Person (HSP)

Neuroinclusion refers to creating an inclusive environment that values and supports individuals with diverse neurocognitive abilities - with the belief that a neurodiverse workforce is essential to organizational success.

Neurodivergence and Mental Health

Neurodivergence is not considered a medical or mental health diagnosis, but it can increase risk for mental health issues due to challenges with sensory overload, understanding social cues, fear of judgment, lack of accommodation, and isolation/loneliness. Neurodivergent individuals commonly experience co-occurring anxiety, depression and mood disorders.

Research shows that individuals who identify as neurodivergent are more likely to hold other marginalized identities, putting them at greater risk for mental health issues. As such, neurodivergence can be understood better through an intersectional lens.

WHAT DOES NEUROINCLUSION LOOK LIKE?

Accommodations, accessibility and inclusive strategies for neurodivergent employees benefit everyone.

If a noisy open office is a problem, headphones or working from home could **accommodate** employees for whom the environment causes sensory overwhelm or migraines.

Accessibility can be supported by a remodel, and/or by switching to hybrid work to reduce crowding.

Inclusion can be built by modeling social norms that respect the need for focused work.

Source: [Forbes](#)



1 in 5 US adults is neurodivergent (65.6 million workers)

Source: [Forbes.com](#)

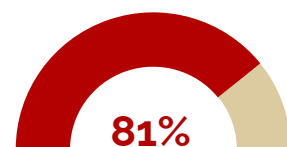
Four most common forms of neurodivergence

ADHD

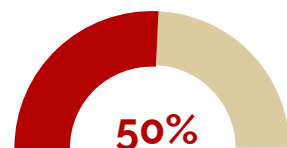
Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Dyslexia



81%
of adults with ASD have a co-occurring mental health condition



50%
of adults with ADHD have an anxiety disorder

Source: [CHADD](#)

30% - 40%

of neurodivergent adults in the U.S. are **unemployed**

Neurodivergent workers have been found to have **higher productivity and retention rates**

Source: [Deloitte](#)

Neurodivergence in the Workplace

Neurodiversity is not well-understood in the workplace - in fact, according to a [2024 Eagle Hill Consulting report](#), a majority (68%) of US employees say they are unfamiliar with the term “neurodiversity” and only 22% are aware of working with a neurodivergent colleague.

But the number of neurodivergent job candidates is growing. For example, approximately [700,000 to 1 million ASD youth will be entering the workforce](#) by 2030, nearly the double the rate expected.

Neurodivergent adults face higher unemployment and wage gaps relative to neurotypical adults. According to the American Enterprise Institute, the [unemployment rate for neurodivergent adults is 30-40%](#) - roughly eight times the rate for individuals without disabilities - and up to 85% for adults with ASD.

Yet neurodivergent workers represent an untapped talent pool of highly educated individuals with unique capabilities. According to Harvard Business Review, research shows that teams with neurodivergent workers can be [30% more productive](#) than their neurotypical counterparts.

Challenges for Neurodivergent Employees

- Different approaches to prioritizing/planning
- Literal interpretations
- Direct communication style, sometimes perceived as inflexible
- Heightened sensory sensitivity
- Differences in social interaction styles
- Emotional exhaustion from masking or navigating neurotypical expectations

Strengths of Neurodivergent Employees

- Ability to hyperfocus on tasks, remember large amounts of information
- Identifying trends, rules, patterns in data
- Rapidly processing visual information
- Good problem-solving skills
- Out-of-the-box, big picture and critical thinking ability
- High level of empathy and integrity

“The unique perspectives, skills, and experiences of neurodivergent persons are often undervalued in our society and in many of our workplaces. Employers who leverage this talent pool frequently enjoy higher productivity, better decision-making, higher employee satisfaction and retention, and more innovation in products, services, and solutions.”

*Alan Kriss, CEO, Specialisterne USA/Canada
Source: Deloitte*

Enablers of Neurodivergent Professionals' Success in the Workplace

Revisit the hiring process:

- Cast a wider net
- Evaluate screening criteria and process
- Reinvent the interview
- Expand roles available

Create a conducive work environment:

- Respect individual differences
- Provide a mentor (and a buddy)
- Create a culture that offers/accepts both flexibility and inflexibility

Offer tools and supports:

- Well-defined expectations for performance and workplace etiquette
- Consistent daily routines, advance notice of changes
- Task management tools
- Flexible work spaces
- Accommodations for sensory needs

Provide tailored career journeys:

- Frame organizational policies to support neurodiversity
- Do not predefine what success/growth should look like
- Offer opportunities to mentor and coach

Sources: [Deloitte](#), [Spring Health](#)

Corporate Examples

- JP Morgan Autism at Work
- Neuroinclusion at SAP
- Microsoft Neurodiversity Hiring Program
- EY Neurodiversity Centers of Excellence
- Pfizer Disability and Neurodiversity Hub

Useful Resources

- Neurodiversity at Work Playbook: Employee Engagement and Growth Series (Disability:IN)
- The Manager's Quick Guide to Neuroinclusion (Disability:IN)
- Embracing Neurodiversity at Work (American Enterprise Institute 2024)
- Neurodiversity At Work: Neuroinclusion > Accessibility > Accommodations (Forbes 2024)
- What People with Autism Wish Their Employers Knew