

Neurodiversity: How to Foster a Culture of Inclusivity and Disclosure in the Workplace



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Neurodiversity and Neurodivergence

Neurodivergent (ND) means an individual has a style of neurocognitive functioning that diverges significantly from prominent societal standards of 'normal' (Walker, 2014). This includes conditions such as ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. Proponents of 'Neurodiversity' advocate that such differences should be recognized and respected, considered in the same light as other social categories such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability status (Disabled World, 2020) and this is crucial in the workplace.

In the workplace, among the items and values that contribute to a 'good' environment and culture is to promote and support well-being and inclusivity (AchieveAbility, 2020, p.5). With a culture of silence and non-disclosure, this report aims to highlight the benefits of disclosure and the tools and reasonable adjustments that can be used to overcome the challenges that can face employers here.



What are the benefits of encouraging disclosure?

Creating a workplace that promotes inclusivity has a range of benefits. It is estimated that around 1 in 7 people, or more than 15% of the UK are neurodivergent (AchieveAbility, 2020). So, it is important for employers to be aware of the reasonable adjustments that can be made to remove or reduce the effect of an employee's disability so they can do their job, or a job applicant's disability when applying for a job. An inclusive workplace:

- Highlights the employer's commitment to diversity and inclusion
- Reduces the stigma around neurodivergence
- Makes staff feel safe and empowered to disclose a neurodivergence
- Makes it more likely that neurodivergent staff will be treated fairly by their managers and colleagues
- Opens the organisation up to a pool of talent that may otherwise have been overlooked
- Helps to retain skilled staff and reduce recruitment costs*

*The **Employment Accessibility Report** found that a top concern for young people when choosing an employer and applying for jobs online is whether diversity and inclusion is positively addressed (Access Generation, 2020, p. 6). Championing diversity and inclusion is not only beneficial to the recruitment process, but starts from within the workplace with employee engagement where a positive work culture can be embraced.

The recruitment process is thus an important step where several simple actions can make the process more inclusive and attract a wider pool of talent. These actions include:

- Identifying and focusing on the key duties of the role
- Avoiding ambiguous adverts
- Offering different ways to complete the application and providing example answers to clarify what is required
- Setting relevant tasks at interview stage that relate to the actual needs of the role
- Allowing candidates to know the questions before an interview (AchieveAbility, 2020, p. 7)

Improving the awareness and understanding of the workforce around neurodiversity, in turn improves the likelihood and ability of neurodivergent employees to disclose to their manager, meaning that the employer can provide more appropriate support and offer reasonable adjustments.







Over 4.1 million disabled people are in work, but are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people (ONS, 2020).

How can I encourage disclosure in the workplace?



Although employers often set out diversity and inclusion policies and make staff aware of need adjustments, applicants and employees are often reluctant to disclose a neurodivergent condition in case it prejudices their application or places them first in line for redundancy, for example. Raising awareness of neurodiversity prevents non-disclosure from potentially misconstruing an individual's condition as, for example, laziness, being difficult or not having the skills to do the job (ACAS, 2016).

TOP TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING DISCLOSURE

-  Highlighting the organisation's commitment to supporting neurodiversity alongside the actions being undertaken to improve the workplace. Raising awareness in this way prevents individuals
-  Updating work policies and guidance on disability to include the term neurodivergence to promote the inclusivity of these conditions
-  Encourage senior members of the team to disclose if they have a neurodivergence to create role models
-  Providing easily accessible, simple and useful information to staff on different forms of neurodivergence, highlighting the positives of these conditions
-  Offering diagnostic and workplace needs assessments
-  Offer additional opportunities to disclose neurodivergence further into employment if individuals did not feel confident to at the start of their employment



The Equality Act 2010

In addition to the benefits of encouraging disclosure, by law, under the 2010 Equality Act, an employer is required to consider making **reasonable adjustments** in a series of circumstances:

- When they know, or could be expected to know that an employee or job applicant has a disability
- When an employee or applicant with a disability requests adjustments
- When an employee with a disability struggles with any part of their job
- When an employee's absence record, sickness record or delay in returning to work is directly related or linked to their disability

Being neurodivergent often amounts to a disability under the Equality Act.

In sum, anything linked to an employee's disability means the employer must consider reasonable adjustments. For example, it would likely be discriminatory if an employer rejected a partially sighted employee's assistance dog into the workplace (ACAS, 2020).

What is meant by 'reasonable'?



Adjustments are only required if it's reasonable to do so and this depends on things like:

- The disability
- How practicable the changes are
- If the requested change would overcome the disadvantage facing the employee or job applicant
- The size of the organisation
- How much money and resources are available
- The cost of making the changes
- If any changes have already been made (Citizens Advice, 2019)

The Equality Act states that there is a duty to make reasonable adjustments if the employee or job applicant is placed at a substantial (more than minor or trivial) disadvantage because of their disability compared with non-disabled people or people who don't share the disability (Citizens Advice, 2019).

An overview of Neurodivergent conditions

An increased awareness of neurodiversity and the variety of forms of neurodivergence is fundamental to creating a more inclusive workplace, removing misconceptions and myths associated with some forms of neurodivergence that people in the workforce may hold (AchieveAbility, 2020, p. 7).



ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders)

It is estimated that about 4% of the UK population have ADHD. It affects the person's brain functioning in regard to their ability to control attention, impulses and concentration, and can cause inattention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. In work, this can be shown in difficulty with focussing and prioritising, starting new tasks before finishing old ones, impatience and problems handling stress. Some people have problems with attention but not the hyperactivity or impulsiveness. This is often referred to as ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder).

- People with ADHD can often be good at completing urgent, or physically demanding tasks, pushing on through set-backs and showing a passion for their work (ACAS, 2016)



Autism (which includes Asperger's Syndrome)

It is estimated that about 1-2% of the UK population are autistic. It impacts how a person perceives the world and interacts with others, making it difficult for them to pick up social cues and interpret them. Social interactions can be difficult as they can have difficulty 'reading' other people and expressing their own emotions. They can find change difficult and uncomfortable.

- People on the autistic spectrum are often very thorough in their work, punctual and rule observant
- Many autistic people develop special interests and can hold high levels of expertise in their given topic (ACAS, no date)



Dyslexia

It is estimated that 10% of the UK population are dyslexic. It is a language processing difficulty that can cause problems with aspects of reading, writing and spelling. They may have difficulties with processing information quickly, memory retention, organisation, sequencing, spoken language and motor skills.

- People with dyslexia can often be very good at creative thinking and problem solving, story-telling and verbal communication (ACAS, no date)



Dyspraxia (also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder)

It is estimated that up to 5% of the UK population are dyspraxic. It relates to issues with physical co-ordination, and for most, organisation of thought. People with dyspraxia may appear clumsy or have speech impediments and might have difficulties with tasks requiring sequencing, structure, organisation and timekeeping.

- People with dyspraxia often have good literacy skills and can be very good at creative, holistic, and strategic thinking (ACAS, no date)



Developmental Dyscalculia (DD)

This is a specific learning disorder that is characterised by impairments in learning and understanding basic arithmetic facts, processing numbers and executing accurate and fluent calculations (Exceptional Individuals, 2020). It is understood that around 25% of the UK have DD (British Dyslexia Association, no date).

- People with Dyscalculia are often creative, strategic in their thinking, have a love of words and show a great practical ability



Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a learning disability that affects written expression and can appear as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting and issues translating thoughts onto paper. It mainly affects writing, whereas dyslexia primarily affects reading. At work, dysgraphia can sometimes be shown in a difficulty to pick out the correct word from a list when using spell-check on a computer or trouble filling in routine forms by hand, particularly when they require fitting words into boxes (Exceptional Individuals, 2020).

- People with Dysgraphia have a strong ability to verbally express themselves



Tourette's Syndrome

It is estimated that around 300,000 people in the UK live with the condition and it is known as a Tic Disorder. Tourette's is an inherited, neurological condition, the key features of which are tics - an involuntary and uncontrollable movement or sound. Often, the Tourette's is misunderstood as a condition which makes people swear or make socially inappropriate comments (known as 'coprolalia'). Although coprolalia, the clinical term for involuntary swearing is often a symptom of Tourette's, it only affects a minority of people (Tourettes action, no date).



Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

This is a common mental health condition which causes a person to have obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours (Exceptional Individuals, 2020).

- People with OCD often have a super-active brain, leading to great amounts of creativity and attention to detail

The numerous positive attributes that are associated with neurodivergence such as creativity; persistence; loyalty; visual, spacial and lateral thinking and the ability to hyperfocus demonstrate a clear need for employers and colleagues to understand neurodiversity. Although not all neurodivergent people show signs of outstanding talent, all will have comparative strengths and a unique combination of attributes associated with their condition.



Examples of Reasonable Adjustments

Here are some examples of the simple ways in which the workplace can implement 'reasonable adjustments' to make it a more inclusive environment.

Reasonable adjustments could be to:



The recruitment process

When hiring, it is important to check that the law is followed on discrimination, meaning that a job applicant is not at a disadvantage due to 'protected characteristics' which includes disability. This means asking questions to find out if reasonable adjustments need to be made to facilitate a candidate.

In the recruitment process neurodivergent candidates often face a lack of confidence in the employer. They want employers to:

- Recognise their talent first, rather than see them as a 'problem'
- Assess their skills fairly and without bias

- Understand that with the right support disabled candidates can and do want to work (Access Generation, 2020, p. 28)



Arranging for an interview to be held on the ground floor for a job applicant using a wheelchair



Providing verbal as well as written instructions



Offering candidates a computer to complete a written test

A reasonable adjustment would not mean, for example, converting a full-time vacancy into a part-time job for an applicant.



The workplace

The workplace is often full of distractions and obstacles that can affect the performance of neurodivergent employees. For example, those with ADHD or autism can be particularly sensitive to sensory inputs such as sounds and sights (ACAS).



Providing an accessible car parking space near the office entrance



Putting up dividers in appropriate areas to reduce distractions and block noise



Displaying visible instructions next to office equipment and machinery



Allowing staff to book meeting rooms for tasks that may require a lot of concentration



Assistance and support

Neurodivergent staff are able to perform their best knowing that the employer will be supportive upon disclosure when seeking accommodations. Additional support and assistance can go a long way (ACAS).



Employing skilled managers who can demonstrate key skills such as good communication and empathy



Establishing support networks for neurodivergent employees



Offering mentors or a buddy when training an employee on a new task



Regularly highlighting what support is available inside and outside the organisation

These recommendations provide:

- A safe and open space for staff to discuss the issues they are facing
- The chance for staff to meet and build relationships with other employees facing similar challenges
- A method for sharing coping strategies and workplace adjustments
- Assistance to management in solving issues and making the workplace more inclusive

Further resources

- **ADHD Foundation** - [Adults section](#)
- **British Dyslexic Association** - [Employer section](#)
- **Dyspraxia Foundation** - [Adults section](#)
- **National Autistic Society** - [Autism at work programme](#)
- **Tourettes Action** - [Employers section](#)
- **Business Disability Forum** - [Become a Member](#)
- **Department for Work and Pensions** - [Improving Lives: the Future of Work, Health and Disability](#)
- **Department for Work and Pensions** - [Disability Confident employer scheme](#)
- **Access Generation** - [Employment Accessibility Report](#)
- **Citizens Advice** - [Reasonable Adjustments](#)
- **Westfield Health** - [HR Mental Health First Aid](#)
- **Able Futures** - [Support for Employers](#)
- **Mental Health First Aid England** - [The Workplace](#)

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