**Ditch Conformity and Hire Divergent Thinkers**

## **Neurodivergence: an Underrated Asset in the Workplace**

Have you ever wondered why distinct cultures seem to approach situations differently?

If you have ever been frustrated while trying to register at an overseas hotel or navigate through an unfamiliar terminal at the airport, you know what I’m talking about.

[People from different cultures think differently](https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FJ01916X%2F2).

Through a combination of upbringing, socialization, education, and maybe even DNA, people from around the world do not see things quite as we do here in the United States.

Most of us are familiar with “cultural differences” and US employers have learned to adjust to these differences when they hire foreign talent. A lot of times, it is often those “differences” that make multicultural talent so attractive.

While a lot of progress has been made in the U.S. towards a multicultural workplace, there are still people with very distinct types of differences left out of the modern movement towards inclusion in the workplace. Many businesses simply don’t hire divergent thinkers.

## **Neurodivergence: an Underrated Asset in the Workplace**

Neurodivergence, and divergent thinkers, are still largely misunderstood in society at large.

Neurodivergence is how we describe the differences in neurological function in how the brain works. Neurodivergent, or ‘divergent,’ is the term used for people whose brain processes, learns, or behaves differently from what is considered “typical”. Once considered problematic, abnormal, and something to be cured, scientists have now come to understand that neurodivergence offers a different way of thinking that may have many benefits.

In the workplace, neurodiversity is an asset, not an impediment to growth.

Neurodivergence is a spectrum. At one end, there are people who are near-normal (or know how to mask their differences to appear neuro-typical.) At the far end are those who are highly misunderstood.

For example, do you remember pop artist Andy Warhol? He was a genius who moved the visual arts forward. But did you know that he had a neurological disorder? As a child, Warhol suffered from Sydenham chorea, a disorder commonly known as St. Vitus’ dance, characterized by involuntary movements.

Just as Andy Warhol had a genius within, there is genius in each one of us.

For some of us, our genius falls along the lines of best-practice thinking and draws from what we know has worked in the past. But for others, genius lies in thinking in ways that defy convention and sometimes seem outright crazy. I can only imagine that many of our famous inventors, scientists, and innovators heard all too often that their ideas were implausible.

The reality is that corporations can benefit from people who refuse to regard company conventions as cast in stone. The people who dare to think differently often bring the greatest problem-solving, innovation, and efficiency to the workplace.

Sadly, however, divergent thinkers are often dismissed as wasteful of time, nonconformist, and problematic.

## **Divergent Thinkers and the Problem of Conformity**

Fears of controversy, parental objection, and lawsuits have moved our schools and colleges away from teaching students to think critically or to question the status quo.

For the past two decades, the goal of the educational system has been the standardization of thought, achievement, and tests. While this movement is seen as a way to increase the quality of education, it has actually reduced education to 12 years of learning only what is required to pass a test. Sadly, many students never learn to think beyond what is required to achieve the certificate that allows them to go on to the next chapter in their lives.

As can be imagined, neurodivergent students often struggle to rise to this level of conformity. They try to fit into a mold that runs contrary to their natural way of being in the world, but it is glaringly obvious to the student that they don’t fit in. They think differently than everybody else and often feel like they were born on the wrong planet.

It’s a lonely way to be in the world.

As a result of this push towards conformity, many divergent thinkers find escape in alternative activities like video games, music, or art… or negative addictions. Sometimes they self-medicate. The tragic loss is that the divergent thinking of these neurodivergent students often holds the solutions the world desperately needs.

For divergent thinkers, our different way of being in the world is not the product of our upbringing, education, and culture. It develops when neurological variance exists in our thought paths starting from conception or as a result of life experiences. That’s why we have people that specialists label as dyslexic, autistic, obsessive-compulsive, dyspraxic, etc.

If society could ditch their expectations of conformity, divergent thinkers’ ability to see the world differently would be recognized as invaluable when they are in the right roles solving the right problems.

Despite some neurodivergent individuals being better suited to entrepreneurship than becoming model employees, many have climbed the workplace ladder of excellence despite their questioning, nonconformist attitudes. Were this not the case, the world would surely be worse off.

Of course, not everybody (neurotypical or neurodivergent) can reach those heights of excellence or success. However, our contributions at work, and to society, can still be significant.

## **Neurodivergent Superpowers**

When you hire divergent thinkers, you are bringing individuals on board who boast a whole slew of superpowers.

Dyslexic people experience difficulty reading, writing, and spelling. Their real strengths are seeing the big picture. Their spatial intelligence makes them excellent graphic designers. They often excel in careers that require them to take action. They are often the movers and shakers in the workplace. Unfortunately, if they learned from an early age to believe that their dyslexia makes them stupid, their gifts may never be fully realized.

Autistic adults think, learn, and problem-solve differently. Their ability to function independently varies depending on comorbid conditions and level of social interest. They tend to make great accountants, programmers, or financial analysts and love working with defined milestones. Often detail-oriented, they sometimes display a bit of obsessive-compulsive disorder. For big picture people, working with someone who has these strengths is a godsend.

Obsessive-compulsive folks have fixations about checking things, cleaning things, and arranging things in a particular order. Their power to concentrate and maintain standards holds them in good stead where there is no margin for error. The fields of accounting, web design, clinical proofreading, and transcription benefit from these neurodivergent employees.

Employees with dyspraxia may be short of physical coordination skills like balancing, doing athletics, and driving automobiles. However, this has no impact whatsoever on their intelligence, dedication, and hard work. They make outstanding employees in administrative roles.

## **Skip Recruiting AI, Ditch Conformity, and Hire a Divergent Thinker.**

Why hire neurodivergent candidates?

Aside from a tendency to be dedicated and loyal employees, Harvard Business Review reports a number of prominent companies are now actively accessing neurodivergent talent with notable success. The latest research on neurodivergence and autism in the workplace reports productivity gains, quality improvement, a boost of innovation capabilities, and broad increases in employee engagement.

In a world that is only beginning to appreciate the skills of divergent thinkers, employers are starting to discover real benefits that go beyond the simple boost in their reputation that comes with exploring a diverse talent pool.

The tide is gradually turning in the divergent thinker’s favor.

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## **Definitions as Referenced in this Article:**

The following definitions were created by Nick Walker, of neurocosmopolitanism.com.

**Neurodiversity** is the diversity of human minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species.

**Neurodivergent**, sometimes abbreviated as **ND**, means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of “normal.”

**Neurotypical**, often abbreviated as **NT**, means having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of “normal.”

[**Neurominority**, any group, such as people with autism\*, which differs from the majority of a population in terms of behavioral traits and brain function](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/neurominority)

\*preferred language … such as autistic people, which…

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