### Five Tips for Embracing Neurodiversity in Your Company

Corporate conversations about diversity in the workplace often spotlight gender and race. The variations in thought processes that define neurodivergent people are left behind in the shadows. Now that progress has been made in the mainstreamed areas of inclusivity; it is time to prioritize the less-discussed facets of humanity, like neurodiversity.

Neurodiversity is a term that is related to all of human existence. It refers to the diversity of the human mind and its endless variations in brain functioning. Unlike a social identity, neurodiversity is a biological fact that describes the different processes through which we receive, understand, and relay information. In short, it directly refers to the incredible diversity that exists in the spectrum of neurocognitive functioning.

#### Neurodiversity in the Workplace

Although neurodiversity is a biological fact, social interactions and societal standards set the stage for how neurodivergent people are treated in society. Hurtful and inaccurate labels, stigma, and blatant discrimination further create obstacles for including neurodivergent people in the workplace.

A company promoting inclusion in its workforce must create equal opportunities for all its employees. This is why it must take into consideration neurocognitive function. Even though many organizations, such as Universal Music, JPMorgan, Google, and SAP, have incorporated neurodiversity into their diversity initiatives, a gap remains in inclusivity for neurodivergent thinkers in the workforce at large.

Auticon is the first European IT enterprise to employ autistic consultants exclusively. In 2019, the CEO of Auticon, Ray Coyle, explained the diversity issue that employable neurodivergent adults face. “We have 700,000 autistic people in the UK and only 16% in full-time employment — compared with about 78% for the population as a whole and 48% for disabled people,” he said. “Even among the disabled community, autistic people find it very difficult to access work.”

At the foundational level, neurodiversity in the workplace means acknowledging, understanding, and incorporating both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals in the workforce. An organization cannot be genuinely neurodiverse if its workforce is not comprised of employees representing neurocognitive differences. This means a neurodiverse workplace will have both neurotypical and neurodivergent members.

#### Tips for Embracing Neurodiversity in Your Workforce

Often, neurotypical people associate a non-conforming neurocognitive process with the existence of a disability. Neurodivergent people, however, are frequently not disabled in any way. Most divergent thinkers are, simply put, differently-abled.

So, while some neurodivergent’ s social skills may not be textbook “appropriate” when it comes to things like maintaining eye contact or actively engaging in conversation, they can, and frequently do, develop specialized skills in other areas.

Neurodivergent people, with their untapped talents, have more to offer than most employers assume.

Addressing these differences, Kelly Grier, EY’s U.S. Chair and Americas Managing Partner, told Reuters, “We have a real appreciation for their skills because people on the spectrum tend to have strong attention to detail and excel at things like coding and the use of technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) programming. Those kinds of capabilities are in exceedingly high demand right now.”

Therefore, recognizing these capacities is the first step toward embracing neurodiversity in your workforce. Other tips that can help ease your administration and staff into the development of a neurodiverse environment at work include:

#### 1. Create awareness.

Before setting up any significant administrative changes, awareness should be central to every inclusion initiative in the workplace. Educating all staff members and executives about neurodiversity and equality for neurodivergent people is the first step toward creating awareness. There may be divergent thinkers on your staff who haven’t revealed a neurodivergent diagnosis out of fear of labeling or stigmatization. When you create awareness and embrace neurodiversity in the workplace, you can support the neurodivergent staff you already have and provide a supportive environment for whatever accommodations they require.

#### 2. Adjust interview routines.

Next is the critical step of establishing criteria for interviewing and employing neurodivergent individuals with the correct skillset and capacity for your organization.

Due to their neurodivergence, some individuals may not fit the bill for standard interview procedures. Maintaining eye contact, providing immediate responses, and other neurotypical standards for interviews (which sometimes stretch across several stages) may prove difficult for neurodivergent professionals.

To get a jump start on embracing neurodiversity, you can simplify the interview process and adjust hiring routines to allow neurodivergent candidates to show the best of their abilities.

#### 3. Organize workshops and training.

Human Resources (HR), People and Culture, and other related professionals in your workforce must receive adequate training to balance professional interactions in a neurodiverse environment. The staff at every level must represent the company’s values and approach toward neurodiversity. This can be done through comprehensive workshops and specialized training for the distinct sections of the organization. I’d recommend avoiding pre-recorded webinars unless there is a live Q&A directly afterward. People often multitask through webinars. This information is too important to be missed because of the human tendency to multitask during a webinar.

#### 4. Communicate effectively.

Through creating awareness and the appropriate training of your HR professionals, you make the right conditions for effective communication for both old and new neurodivergent members of your workforce. Encouraging neurodivergent employees to be open about their needs and the possible accommodations they may need determines the effectiveness of any diversity initiative. Make sure there are measures in place to prevent labeling and stigmatization. Create opportunities such as town-hall-style meetings for all employees to ensure effective communication and promote joyous inclusivity throughout your entire workforce. In companies like Ultranauts, for example, new employees are provided with a BioDeck — a 28-point guide that details the preferred channels of communication available for employees.

#### 5. Be ready to accommodate.

Inclusion plans that include flexibility for accommodations are essential for embracing neurodiversity in any workforce. Consider those neurodivergent workers and potential employees sensitive to light and noise. Individuals with dyslexia may need larger font or text-to-speech apps to listen to the content instead of reading the information. There are many potential accommodations that divergent thinkers may need in a neurodiverse workplace.

Creating accommodations for individuals with any form of neurodivergence is essential, but more important is communicating with them before making any changes on their behalf. It would help if you were ready to reduce noise and lighting levels, get equipment, provide headphones, and get assistive technology like speech-to-text software. These not only benefit neurodivergent members of your workforce, but they also benefit everyone. It’s just that neurodivergents need these accommodations to allow them to work to their fullest capacity.

#### Embracing Neurodiversity = True Inclusivity

Including neurodiversity in the workplace is a fundamental part of the holistic movement toward inclusivity. From specially designed training, revised hiring practices, and a willingness to creatively accommodate divergent thinkers, there are several ways to approach inclusivity and neurodiversity. For example, incorporating neurodiversity initiatives into your organization’s operational guidelines will set your company on the same ethical frontier as Google and JPMorgan, among others. It gives you a competitive edge.

#### References and Recommended Reading

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