**What is Neurodiversity in the Workplace - and Why Do I Need to Know?**

Big tech companies have faced a skills gap for years, and the demand for talent in this industry has never stopped growing. So, tech was the perfect ground in which a new movement took hold over the past decade: promoting neurodiversity in the workplace.

Neurodiverse hiring practices can benefit any company of any size. The investment has yielded greater patenting, innovation, process improvement, efficiency, and creativity not only in technology industries, but also in industries that include investment banking, insurance, and mortgage banking.

What can employees with dyslexia, autism, dyspraxia or who are differently abled bring to a company? People whose brains process information differently than the majority of us (the neurotypical humans) are considered neurodivergent. Adding divergent thinkers to teams in the workplace may be the best investment a company can make to increase their competitive advantage.

**Why Hire Neurodivergent Thinkers?**

Neurodivergent employees think in ways that bring a different level of talent and skill to the problem-solving process. For example, a person with dyslexia can be an advantage to a company that needs someone skilled in pattern recognition.

“Many people with these disorders have higher-than-average abilities; research shows that some conditions, including autism and dyslexia, can bestow special skills in pattern recognition, memory, or mathematics. Yet those affected often struggle to fit the profiles sought by prospective employers,” said Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano in a [Harvard Business (HBR) Review article](https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage%22%20%5Cl%20%22_blank).

I don’t feel comfortable with calling people whose brilliant minds process information differently as having disorders. Just because their cognition is different from neurotypical cognition does not mean they are less smart or that they are disordered. They are different. They think differently, they learn differently, and they communicate differently. Instead of measuring divergent thinkers’ value with a deficit model, focus on their gifts. Instead of a deficit mindset, consider a gifts mindset™ instead.

Neurodivergent team members challenge groupthink and the status quo. That can help a company because they bring a new perspective to process improvement, problem solving, and innovation. They can see value and opportunity in areas that may be otherwise overlooked or put aside.

Unfortunately, unemployment among neurodivergent individuals at all levels of ability runs as high as 80 percent (and that was pre-pandemic). According to the Austin and Pisano report, those who manage to find employment are often underemployed, not fully using their talents. What a loss for companies that would benefit from neurodiverse teams.

**Companies Are Leveraging Divergent Thinkers’ Powerful Skill Sets**

At companies like SAP — one of the first companies to develop a neurodiversity program — as well as Google, Microsoft, IBM, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Ford and others, divergent thinkers have helped to drive innovation and find radical solutions to tough problems.

Accommodating the preferences of neurodiverse teams can drive positive changes across the workforce. In fact, “… paying attention to the comfort of your diverse employees, especially neurodiverse ones, will make your working environment better for your staff.” writes Celia Daniels in a [Daivergent post](https://daivergent.com/blog/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace%22%20%5Cl%20%22_blank).

At SAP, including divergent thinkers on teams had an immediate effect. “SAP teams who have colleagues with autism report a rise in patent applications, innovations in products, and an increase in management skills and empathy,” said its Chief Executive Christian Klein, according to a report in [The Conversation](https://theconversation.com/neurodiversity-at-work-benefits-everyone-why-companies-are-hiring-autistic-people-146788%22%20%5Cl%20%22_blank).

**Adjust Recruitment, Interview, and Selection Policies**

It’s easy to see that customary hiring practices will almost always miss neurodivergent talent. Trying to change this by hunting for more variety in candidates has been shown not to work. HBR said, “Many have taken that approach: Their managers still work top down from strategies to capabilities needed, translating those into organizational roles, job descriptions, and recruiting checklists. But two big problems cause them to miss neurodiverse talent.”

Those two problems are traditional interviewing approaches and a desire for conformity. These are trouble spots especially for those on the autism spectrum.

Many people on the autism spectrum do not interview well. They may have trouble making eye contact or take the conversation off on a tangent. Worse, their confidence may be low due to poor interview experiences in their past. The traditional interview is not a good way to assess their capabilities. Companies recruiting neurodivergent talent are adjusting their interview and selection process to be more inclusive.

**Where You Can Learn More About Neurodiversity in the Workplace**

The push to get more people on the autism spectrum into meaningful jobs really took off in 2008 with the establishment of the [Specialisterne Foundation](https://specialisterneusa.com/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_blank). This nonprofit organization spearheaded the Autism@Work movement in the U.S.. They are committed to working with companies that want to start or improve neurodiversity recruitment programs. [Their website](https://specialisterneusa.com/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_blank) is a good starting point.

And it’s no coincidence that SAP has one of the most successful neurodiversity programs out there. They have a [dedicated site](https://www.sap.com/idea-place/autisminclusionpledge.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_blank) that details their commitment to hiring people on the autism spectrum.

Every one of us has unique talents that we bring to our work and our teams. Sometimes, the best solutions evolve out of the divergent thinking fostered by neurodiversity in the workplace.

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International speaker and author, Susan Fitzell,M.Ed., CSP, works with educators, organization leaders, and employees to discover their personal learning preferences. She works to establish cultures of learning that keep organizations competitive and increase the ROI of their people investments. This helps organizations reduce costs while increasing profits and retention. She helps leaders understand the motivation drivers that engage their employees and provides unique solutions that transform performance by teaching people how they learn .Susan provides unique solutions that transform performance by teaching people how they learn.

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