



How to take a strength-based approach to Neurodiversity in the workplace



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1 Innovation

The ability to compete based on innovation is crucial for many companies. How we work is fundamentally changing. Increased automation is creating a shift in the types of jobs and competencies organisations need. Innovation requires different minds. How can we include colleagues who perceive things, process information, and focus in different ways? Should the board room, the workplace, the decision-making table always be full of people who think and view the world from the same direction?

2 The right person, in the right role

In a competitive market, can we afford to overlook qualified, capable individuals who can get lost in the recruitment and interview process? In 2021, just 22% of autistic adults were in paid employment in the UK. Companies who have developed recruitment and interview processes that proactively include neurodiverse applicants can be assured that they are recruiting from a wide pool of potential and not missing the right person for that job! Cognitive profiling and personalised performance management protocols can ensure recruitment and retention is optimised.

3 The value of recognising and respecting difference

Neurodiverse employees have been prevented from thriving, or completely overlooked, due to rigid ideas about what makes a good employee and strictly standardised work processes. Promoting an understanding of neurodiversity is not just about tapping into skills but also about supporting and developing colleagues. Talking about neurodiversity within your organisation can help all colleagues to identify and accept signs of cognitive differences. This can lead to fewer instances of misunderstandings, better workplace performance and a happier working environment for all.

4 Harnessing specific skills and talents

There is much discussion about “neurodiverse talents” – but what are they? A short list includes: lateral thinking (‘thinking outside of the box’); exceptional deep focus; problem-solving abilities; meticulous attention to detail; highly analytical thinking; creativity; intense expertise; and innovation. By enabling neurodiverse colleagues to play to their strengths, these skills and talents can come to the fore for the benefit of your company, your profitability, and your customers.

5 Retention

The recruitment and retention of top talent is a strategic priority for all companies. In 2019, an Australian survey into 'Neurodiversity in the Workplace' found that 20% of their respondents had lost a job because they were autistic. Employee dissatisfaction and turnover have serious cost implications. According to Gallup's 2021 'State of the Global Workplace' report, the highest quit rates are found among actively disengaged employees. It is estimated that the direct cost of replacing an individual employee is 50% to 200% of the employee's annual salary. High staff turnover can have major indirect costs in lost customer relationships, lost institutional knowledge and decreased team morale. Harvard Business Review stated in their report, 'Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage', that neurodiverse people overall were 30% more productive at work. These high levels of productivity derive from colleagues who feel understood, respected and enabled to make a meaningful contribution to the workforce and, in turn, be valued by their colleagues.

6 Context matters

When we talk about ability, context matters. What is required to enable access to the workplace for individuals with 'invisible' abilities and disabilities is not always obvious. Inclusion is not an onerous HR responsibility. Creating a context where your employees thrive, and therefore add value to your company, is simply good business sense. So, invest in training, peer support and employee-driven initiatives.

Building neurodiverse teams can allow employers to unlock better business outcomes. Companies have already reported marked gains in productivity, efficiency, and work quality because of their neurodiversity initiatives. JP Morgan have reported that employees participating in their 'Autism at Work' program were 48% faster and 92% more productive compared to their peers in certain roles.

Employers increasingly recognise that a considerable number of the neurodivergent population demonstrate skills and natural aptitudes in high demand roles and industries, such as cybersecurity, STEM, analytics and systems design. Employers are also now recognising that neurotypes, such as Dyslexia and ADHD, often demonstrate good interpersonal and customer facing skills. You will find an abundance of people with ADHD in sales forces, including city traders who thrive in a fast-paced environment.

7

One size does not fit all

No single person in the workforce is good at everything. Different functions in every company require different competencies; excelling in one role does not mean the employee will be as successful in another. Play to the strengths of the individual - ask them what they need to develop new competencies to add further value to your company. Employees who know they are valued are always more productive and enjoy coming to work.

Relationships with colleagues are a key component of employee satisfaction and wellbeing. When you have an entire workforce that understands neurodiversity, they will communicate more effectively, recognising that people think differently, so we all need to ensure that we are understood.

8

Take time to celebrate the differences

Consider engaging in local or national initiatives, projects and schemes that celebrate neurodiversity. Everyone knows someone who has Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Autism, ADHD, or Dyscalculia, whether in our families, friendship groups, hobbies and interest groups, or colleagues in the workplace. That is the universal design. We talk not only of equality, diversity, and inclusion: we also talk about belonging. Employee schemes that unite everyone in a common cause build communities and strengthen workplace collaboration. The intersectionality of neurodiversity means that whatever your age, race, religion, class, role, sexual orientation, everyone knows someone who 'thinks differently'.



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