

Let's talk about ... Neurodiversity in the workplace

"You probably can't tell by looking at me, but my brain works very differently to yours. If you were to meet me, you'd probably notice that I'm tall and I have blonde hair. You might notice that I don't often make eye contact. But you won't see that I'm also extremely sensitive to bright lights and loud noises. I am hopeless at reading body language and I miss conversational cues. I love coding and enjoy solving problems. I struggle with changing environments, having to hot desk has a huge impact on me' I am not a neurotypical person, I am what is known as 'neurodivergent'"

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the different ways the brain can work and interpret information. It highlights that people naturally think about things differently. We have different interests and motivations, and are naturally better at some things and poorer at others.

Most people are neurotypical, meaning that the brain functions and processes information in the way society expects.

However, it is estimated that around 1 in 7 people (more than 15% of people in the UK) are **neurodivergent**, meaning that the brain functions, learns and processes information differently. Neurodivergence includes Attention Deficit Disorders, Autism, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. These bring strengths as well as difficulties.

What does Neurodiversity mean?

When we describe people as 'neurodivergent', then, we are talking about people who in one or several respects have a thinking style at the edges of one or more of these continuums, with – in the words of autistic author, speaker and educator Nick Walker – a brain 'that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal". We need to understand that there is no standard brain.

Neurodiversity is, ultimately, a biological fact of the infinite variety of human neurocognition. Now, the same term 'neurodiversity' is also being used to represent a fast-growing sub-category of organisational diversity and inclusion that seeks to embrace and maximise the talents of people who think differently. (CIPD 2018)

How can we embrace Neurodiversity in the workplace?

Neurodivergence is fairly common, so most workplaces are already neurodiverse. Yet, there is still a lack of understanding around most forms of neurodivergence, and misperceptions persist. It therefore makes sense for organisations to take steps that make their neurodivergent staff feel valued, part of the team and supported to contribute fully towards achieving the goals of the organisation.

Creating a more inclusive workplace can:

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

Further Support and Training can be found at:

- ADHD Foundation - Adults section
- British Dyslexic Association - Employer section
- Dyspraxia Foundation - Adults section
- National Autistic Society - Support for employers
- Tourettes Action - Employers section
- NHS website and search for the specific form of neurodivergence

References:

CIPD Guide Neurodiversity at work , Feb 2018

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace>



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