

Supporting neurodivergent talent



The key to unlocking the full potential of neurodivergent employees is creating conditions that allow individuals to thrive.

Most employers don't set out to build a "neurodiverse workforce," yet almost every workplace already is one.

Around one in seven people in the UK are neurodivergent, including those with dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). That means your team is likely to include individuals who think, communicate and solve problems differently.

Harnessed effectively, these differences can create competitive advantage. Some employers even seek to proactively employ neurodiverse talent, because of strengths ranging from deep focus and analytical thinking to enhanced creativity and innovation.

Without the right support, however, neurodiverse individuals may struggle with typical work environments, processes and procedures.

The key to unlocking the full potential of neurodivergent employees is understanding what neurodivergence is, recognising where it exists within your organisation and creating the conditions that allow individuals to thrive.

Identifying neurodiverse talent

Neurodivergence isn't always visible, and not everyone will be aware they are neurodivergent, have a formal diagnosis or feel safe disclosing it. It's important to be aware of underlying neurodivergent traits and how these can be impacted in the workplace.

Someone with ADHD, may be restless or fidgety and find long-term projects challenging or get bored quickly, but be very good under pressure and highly adaptable.

Dyslexic individuals may make more mistakes in written communications and have challenges with their working memory but often have excellent people skills and out-of-the-box entrepreneurial thinking.

Autistic employees can be very literal in the way they communicate and sometimes struggle to understand things from someone else's point of view, which can come across as inflexible or even rude if the context for this isn't understood. Yet they often excel at following processes, logical thinking and holding lots of information.

Dyspraxic individuals may experience difficulties with balance, coordination and organisation, but can also be highly creative, resilient and strong at problem solving.

Playing to neurodivergent strengths

Although it can be tempting, and sometimes beneficial, to job-craft roles around individual strengths, you can also put low-cost or no-cost adjustments in place to support neurodiverse employees.

If you have a dyslexic individual in an administrative role, who can't help spelling mistakes in emails to clients, they could benefit from the technology already built into solutions like Microsoft, using AI to proof documents, or using template emails. Once they're set up to succeed, they can perform very effectively in their role.

Similarly, ADHD individuals can benefit from support with prioritising and scheduling their work, setting deadlines and breaking down tasks into smaller goals. If they struggle to sit still all day, regular movement breaks or a sit-standing desk can be really useful.

If you perceive that someone might be experiencing neurodivergent challenges, talk to them in confidence and reassure them you won't share any information with others that they don't want you to share. A supportive conversation might be:

"I've noticed over the past couple of months that you seem to be struggling with X, Y or Z. Is this something you've always found challenging? Have you received support in the past? What can we do to help?"

Many employees already know they could do the tasks at hand, if they just had an adjustment, such as a quieter desk or help to prioritise their work but may be reluctant to ask. Or they might be trying to cope with their neurodivergence, using personal coping strategies that have worked in the past but are no longer sufficient for a new role.

Your legal responsibilities

In addition to the business benefits of supporting neurodivergent employees, there's a legal imperative. Many neurodivergent conditions are recognised as disabilities, meaning employers must put in place reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, no matter how small the organisation.

Even if someone has never been formally diagnosed, they are still entitled to support in the workplace. Failing to support a neurodivergent employee can result in costly tribunal claims, so it's important to consider what your organisation can reasonably provide.

This might involve small changes to their working hours, working environment or the introduction of assistive technology.

Creating a neuroinclusive culture

When deciding how best to support the neurodivergent employees you almost certainly already have, it's also important to think about making them feel safe asking for support. Awareness training, such as a short workshop, can educate employees and managers about neurodivergent traits to create more acceptance and understanding.

If you already have openly neurodiverse individuals, they might be happy to have a short success story written up about how you're supporting them and what's worked well. This can encourage others to seek support without fear and show that your business values neurodivergence.

This matters, because employees who mask their natural behaviour traits, for fear of consequence, experience greater stress, anxiety, mental fatigue and burnout. This can reduce productivity, increase sickness absence, impact negatively on colleagues and create management challenges.

The sooner individuals with dyslexia, ADHD or autism are supported with what can be low-cost, or even no-cost adjustments, the less likely they are to struggle and the more you can harness their unique strengths. When extra support is needed, such as assistive software, company-wide licenses can reduce costs and help attract and retain talent.

*This article was written by Rebecca Wones,
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Further support

[Acas](#) - Understanding neurodiversity.

[CIPD](#) - Neuroinclusion at work.

[ADHD UK](#) - Resources and information.

[National Autistic Society](#) - Resources and information.