



VinciWorks

NEURODIVERSITY AT WORK

A STRAIGHTFORWARD GUIDE



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What is Neurodiversity?

"Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will be best at any given moment?"

Harvey Blume

The Atlantic, 1998 (the first recorded use of neurodiversity in print)

"Neurodiversity is the idea that there is naturally occurring variation in the way humans think. In the same way there is biodiversity across the planet, there is neurodiversity in the way humans think."

Dr Nancy Doyle

Co-director, Centre for Neurodiversity at Work, Birkbeck, University of London

"Neurodiversity is a powerful concept that is reframing a traditional thinking about neurodevelopmental disorders and conditions to focus on the strengths and celebrate the differences among neurodivergent people."

Dr Punit Shah

Director of the GW4 Neurodevelopmental Neurodiversity Network

Neurodiversity is the term that describes the idea that there is naturally occurring variation in the human brain, which can impact a series of brain functions such as how we interact with one another and how we process information.

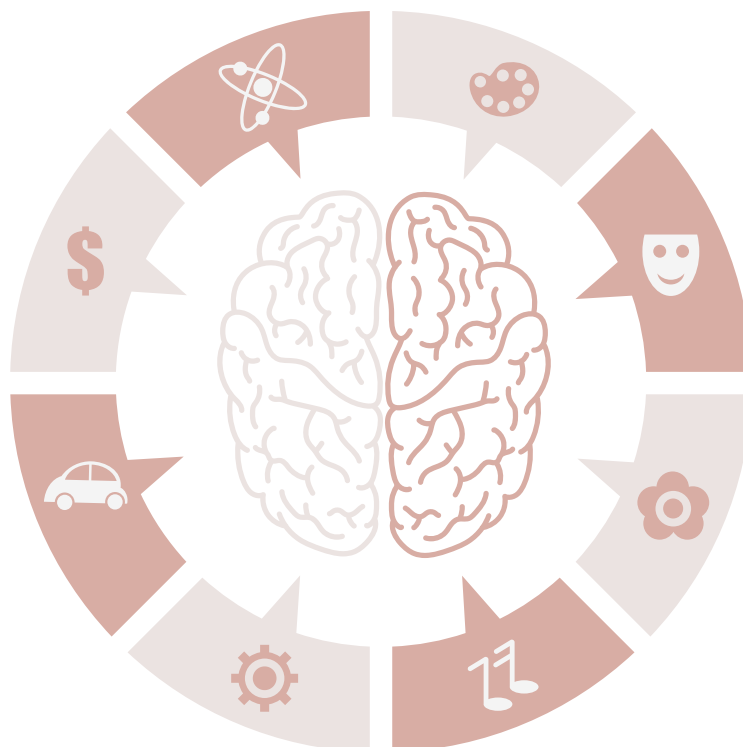
The word neurodiversity is short for neurological diversity. Neurological or neurology is a word that describes the biological functioning of the nervous system, and in particular the brain. Neuro- is a prefix that can be applied to other words to discuss things relating to the nervous system or brain.

The term neurodiversity was first used in the 1990s by an autism activist and academic Judy Singer. It was adopted by the autistic community, who rejected the medical model, like many disabled people, preferring to be seen as a valuable part of human diversity instead of a problem needing to be 'cured.'

The neurodiversity approach asserts that no one type of mind or brain is 'right' or 'wrong,' and rejects the culturally entrenched notion that thinking differently is somehow negative. Embracing neurodiversity can reduce stigma and encourage a better and more inclusive workplace and world for everyone.

Researchers have also considered that the social dynamics around neurodiversity are similar to the dynamics that manifest around other forms of human diversity.

The concept of neurodiversity has been adopted by many neurodivergent thinkers and groups, who see the term as a way to encourage people to see the benefit of neurological differences.



Prevalence of Neurodivergence

Although the term neurodiversity also includes neurotypical thinkers, it is commonly associated with a series of conditions or differences such as a dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, (ADHD), dyspraxia, dyscalculia, autism (ASD) Tourette's and other neuro differences. These differences often overlap, making them difficult to diagnose.

In the UK, it is estimated of the general population that:

- ✓ 10% are dyslexic
- ✓ 5% have ADHD
- ✓ 5% have dyspraxia
- ✓ 1-2% are autistic
- ✓ 1% have Tourette's

Attention Deficit Disorders (ADD)

A group of conditions involving differences in attention span, activity levels, concentration and/or impulsivity.

Dyslexia

A neurology which impacts on how people process information, and it can also lead to difficulties with reading, writing and spelling, and may also include differences in concentration and planning. It is also associated with certain strengths, particularly in spatial reasoning.

Autism

A spectrum condition characterised by differences in communication, cognitive processing, sensory sensitivities, and with literal thinking and intense special interests

Dyspraxia

A condition associated with difficulties in movement and coordination, but also with strong strategic thinking.

Dyscalculia

A condition associated with difficulty in understanding number related concepts, symbols or functions needed for mathematics.

Dysgraphia

A condition in which a person has difficulties with fine motor skills such as handwriting, spelling and finger sequencing, which may affect typing.



Is Neurodiversity a Disability?

"Some people do see their neurodivergence as a disability. Disability might mean something about society that is the disabling factor."

Dr Punit Shah

Associate Professor of Psychology,
Director of the GW4
Neurodevelopmental Neurodiversity
Network

"The differences are not always disabling. Some of them are objectively disabling differences and people will be hindered by the level of overwhelm they experience in their senses just trying to go about normal day-to-day activities. Other people will only be overwhelmed in their senses in certain scenarios."

Dr Nancy Doyle

Co-director, Centre for Neurodiversity
at Work, Birkbeck, University of London

"For me, I call it disability. Some people call it a learning difference. Some people call it a learning style. For me it is a complete disability. It is a barrier to work, it is a barrier to information for me. It's a barrier to communication."

Elizabeth Takyi

Founder and CEO, A2i Dyslexia

The question of whether neurodivergent thinkers are disabled or not is a complex one. In some people, neuro differences can be debilitating and, in extreme cases, some people may even struggle to look after themselves - but in other people it is environmental factors, such as noise, lighting, spaces and smells that are often the debilitating factors. In other words, in certain situations some neurodivergent individuals can be disabled, yet in other situations they are not disabled at all.

Neurodiversity is covered under the protected characteristic of disability in the UK Equality Act 2010. This means that neurodivergent individuals are protected by law, from any kind of discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the basis of their neurodiversity.

This does not necessarily mean that neurodivergent individuals consider themselves disabled or would use the word 'disability' to describe their neurodivergence. The Equality Act also requires employers to put in place reasonable adjustments to enable a neurodivergent individual to perform their role. Workplace adjustments can take a number of forms, from physical equipment and software to a change in working pattern, hours or duties.

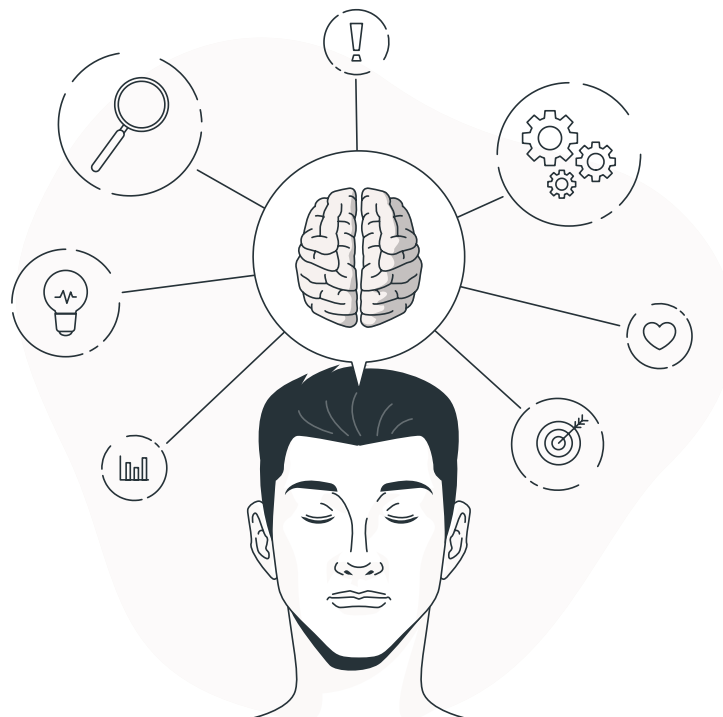


The Language of Neurodiversity

The language around neurodiversity is fast evolving, and sometimes the individuals affected may prefer terms that are different from the ones that people are used to. The language of the medical establishment and institutions can also differ from everyday use or how people prefer to think about neurodiversity.

When talking to neurodivergent individuals, pay attention to the language that people use about themselves and try to mirror it wherever possible. If in doubt, the best thing to do is ask what terms people use and which they prefer to avoid.

Definitions relating to neurodiversity are contentious and not uniform.



Neurodiversity and Mental Health

There is often a relationship between neuro differences and mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, though it is not always clear whether that is for medical reasons, or more the result of exclusion and prejudice that neurodivergent thinkers have experienced in society. However, being neurodivergent does not mean someone has a mental health condition.

Bipolar disorder, depression, schizophrenia, anxiety and other mental health issues are sometimes included under the umbrella of neurodivergence – and/or the umbrella of mental health – and are important to consider in the context of creating an inclusive, effective working environment for employees.



How to Manage Neurodivergence in The Workplace

Workplaces are typically built for neurotypical conformity and are often ill-equipped for neurodivergence. This means that many work environments and practices often do not support neurodivergent employees.

For decades, if not centuries, workplaces have been constructed in a particular way, for a particular style of thinking. But as our understanding of neurodiversity increases, so do the ways that workplaces can change and adapt to be more inclusive. Open plan offices for example are particularly difficult working environments because many neurodivergent thinkers have heightened sensory sensitivity.



Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments need to be personal and individual, but there are standard reasonable adjustments that most people find helpful, such as flexible hours and certain types of software.

In order to support individuals with neuro differences to perform at their best, reasonable adjustments might have to be put in place in the way that they are for disabled colleagues.

A reasonable adjustment plan or passport (RAP) should be tailored to the individual – a discussion about an individual's particular circumstances and challenges with their manager will be required. Consider the demands of the job, the working environment, and the individual's skills to arrive at a series of strategies.



Tips For Creating a Neuro-Inclusive Workplace

All employers have a duty of care to ensure that employees are treated fairly and to provide a safe working environment.

Initiatives that support neurodivergence can help to create a more neuro minority inclusive culture in which existing neurodivergent staff feel more comfortable in being open about their differences and seeking reasonable adjustments to help them thrive in their work.

Some people prefer not to disclose their differences at all for fear of prejudice and marginalisation. No one should feel pressured to disclose their neuro difference under any circumstances.

Benefits can go beyond the team and work environment. Given the prevalence of neurodivergence, it's a good idea to ensure customer-facing staff have sufficient awareness to take a 'moment of pause' to consider neurodiversity across all potential customer interfaces. What this awareness looks like might vary significantly by industry, but key principles will apply in all circumstances: even greater clarity of communication, providing information in multiple formats, and making clear that your organisation welcomes neurodivergent customers are all likely to boost customer engagement and customer trust. This has the potential to broaden your potential customer base as well as solidify customer relationships and the loyalty of existing clients.



The Benefits of Neurodivergent Thinkers in The Workforce

Organisations that have a diverse workforce are more effective at facing challenges, and perform better financially than more homogenous ones.

Neurodiversity is the same.

Encouraging and supporting a neurodiverse workplace can have a significant benefit to an organisation.

With the business case for diversity as a whole now accepted, organisations aiming to be truly inclusive employers cannot exclude such a significant demographic as the neuro minority community. To continue doing so risks missing out on talent, and compromising on productivity and customer trust.

Having a neurodivergent workforce can bring perspective and skills that may not be achieved from neurotypical employees alone. It is the very fact of having people on the team who think differently that is the strength that neurodivergent thinkers bring.

Talents often seen in neurodiverse workplaces include:

- ✓ Creativity and innovation
- ✓ Lateral thinking
- ✓ Strategic analysis
- ✓ Bringing a fresh perspective
- ✓ Spatial reasoning capabilities
- ✓ Consistency and sustained attention to detail

"JPMorgan Chase's Autism at Work programme employs 175 people in eight countries in 40 different job roles, including two personal bankers. Anthony Pacilio, head of the programme, says they are in general "90 to 140 per cent more productive" than "neurotypical" employees and make fewer errors. "They are doing two people's work," he says."

P&G makes some accommodations for the neurodiverse team, like noise-cancelling headphones (because autistic people can struggle in noisy environments), and placing desks near windows (some struggle with artificial lighting). JPMorgan gave its employees fixed seats because those on the spectrum generally prefer structure.



How Can Neurodivergent Staff Be Supported?

- ♥ My manager listens to me and asks me what I need in order to be my best at work.
- ♥ If I feel a bit anxious, I can go outside for a breather, a walk and fresh air.
- ♥ Knowing I can speak to my manager privately if something is bothering me.
- ♥ People explain things in a way that works for me, and they are always happy to check any work I've done.
- ♥ I can remove myself from a situation that is overwhelming.
- ♥ I can control my work environment so it works for me.
- ♥ My team understand that I need to fidget or doodle or be doing something with my hands.
- ♥ We split up the work in the team to utilise everyone's skills, so I can start something and get it 90% of the way.
- ♥ I have quiet areas to work, working from home or using noise cancelling headphones or music.
- ♥ I can use technology to support me, such as calculators, online searches and keyboard shortcuts.
- ♥ I have templates to work from instead of having to start things from scratch.
- ♥ I'm asked what support I need to do my job better.



What Not To Do: Common Pitfalls To Avoid At Work

- ✗ Don't focus on neurodivergent people's 'superpowers', as this puts people on a pedestal without support.
- ✗ Don't put undue emotional labour on neurodivergent people to be the consultant or expert on all things neurodivergent.
- ✗ Do not expect neurodivergent staff to contribute their expertise for free.
- ✗ Don't assume all external organisations and consultants are supportive of neurodivergent people.
- ✗ Do not focus on 'cures' or 'fixes' for neurodivergent people.
- ✗ Don't use language that is un-inclusive of neurodivergence.



Caring For Someone With a Neurodivergent Condition

Caring for someone with a neurodiverse condition can be extremely demanding – getting a diagnosis and support is often a lengthy and time consuming process in itself. As a result the responsibilities of the carer can often conflict with their work commitments. Allowing flexibility for the individual in terms of their working schedule is often the starting point when considering how to best support them, but a more comprehensive package of reasonable adjustments may be required in certain instances.



What To Do Next?

Skill Boosters' new neurodiversity course acts as an introduction to neurodiversity with an emphasis on how it can impact people in the workplace. It looks at the strengths that neurodivergent thinkers can bring to organisations, the challenges they face, and what those challenges reveal about the workplace itself. It explores strategies and inclusive practices in order to create the best possible conditions for neurodivergent thinkers to thrive in the workplace.

The course will give a better understanding of:

- ✓ The meaning of the term 'neurodiversity', the various ways that it can impact on people, and an overview of the main associated conditions or differences
- ✓ Whether neurodivergence is a disability and the role that external factors play
- ✓ The importance of creating reasonable adjustment plans and management performance strategies for neurodivergent thinkers
- ✓ The need to support carers of neurodivergent thinkers in the workplace.

TRY NOW



About VinciWorks

We are a creative and driven team working hard each day to reinvent the impact that compliance tools and training can make.

Too many businesses are using boring, tedious and cumbersome processes to train their staff and maintain compliance. We know you can do better, and to prove it, we have been developing the training, tools and resources to help any organisation of any size to change the status quo.

About Skill Boosters

Founded by Bryan De'Ath, an accomplished filmmaker with over 30 years of experience, Skill Boosters brings film and television production values to the world of e-learning. Its cinematic courses embed learners in relatable workplace situations with commentary from industry experts. The acquisition also allows VinciWorks to benefit from the expertise of Skill Boosters' Senior Account Director Peter Thorpe, who has over 20 years' experience in the Learning & Development industry.

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