

[Home](#) › [Mental Health](#) › [Articles](#) › **Exploring Neurodiversity At The Workplace**

Exploring Neurodiversity at the Workplace

by Sukanya Hazarika*, Saranya Mishra**, Ananya Bhardwaj*** and Udit Bhatt****

Published on October 28, 2024 - By Bhumika Indulia



What is neurodiversity?

You must have surely heard the term neurodiverse by now, for discourse on there being more differences than similarities between people's brains has become far more mainstream. But what do these terms mean?

Before we explore the terms neurodiverse and neurodivergent, it is crucial to understand neurotypicality — the term is used to describe people whose brain functions, ways of processing information and behaviours are seen to be standard. However, it has been argued to be a dubious construct on the basis that there is no such standard for human brain.



And this is where the following terms come in:

Term	Coined by	Definition	Outlook	
Neuro	— diverse	Judy Singer ¹	Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many ways; there is no one “right” way of thinking, learning and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits. ²	Neurodiversity is meant to be a term of inclusion, which refers to equality of all possible mental states. It has also been mooted to be a matter of competence. ³
	— divergence	Kassiane Asasumasu ⁴	Neurodivergence is defined as the neurological development and state which diverges from established cognitive norms. Recognised types of neurodivergence, include autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, dyscalculia, epilepsy, hyperlexia, dyspraxia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and Tourette Syndrome (TS).⁵	Although the terms “neurodiversity” and “neurodivergence” are sometimes used interchangeably, neurodivergence has a higher threshold. To make the difference clear, that everyone can be said to be neurodiverse, but it is almost impossible for everyone to be neurodivergent. It is also important to note that “neurodivergence” is an outcome of current scientific



EN

				sociocultural and political processes and not because they are objective benchmarks for neurological functioning. ⁶
--	--	--	--	--

The terms neuroatypical, neurodivergent, and neurodiversity are relatively new. It is only within the past few decades that scholars within the realms of various academic domains (e.g., educational psychology, sociology, disability studies) have started using these terms. Previously, neuroatypical individuals would have been described as having a neurological disorder, or an intellectual/developmental disability.

The rationale behind the neurodiversity paradigm, therefore, is that differences in neurology should be recognised and respected as a social category, like ethnicity or sexual orientation, rather than neurological diseases that need to be “cured”.

What does neurodivergence encompass?

Neurodivergence includes a broad spectrum of neurological and developmental conditions, and even certain chronic mental health conditions (such as OCD, bipolar disorder, etc.). Some of the most conditions are:

- (a) *ADHD*: A developmental condition affecting communication, social interaction, and behavioural patterns, often paired with exceptional focus or attention to detail.
- (b) *ASD*: A developmental condition affecting communication, social interaction, and behavioural patterns, often paired with exceptional focus or attention to detail.
- (c) *Dyslexia*: A learning difference that affects reading, spelling, and writing skills, often accompanied by strong visual thinking and problem-solving abilities.
- (d) *Dyspraxia*: A motor coordination disorder impacting movement and coordination, often coexisting with strengths in creativity, empathy, and strategic thinking.
- (e) *Dyscalculia*: A difficulty with mathematical concepts and number processes, often with potential strengths in language, creativity, and abstract reasoning.



EN

(f) *TS*: A neurological condition characterised by involuntary movements and vocalisations (tics) often paired with heightened energy, creativity, and focus.

Why is neurodiversity important for a workplace?

Between 10% and 20% of the world's population is estimated to be neurodivergent. Unemployment for neurodivergent adults ranges at least as high as 30-40%, which is three times the rate for people with impairment, and eight times the rate for people without disabilities.⁷

This is largely owing to the ways in which our world is built around neurotypicals, often leading to difficulty in adapting or even meeting expected professional norms for neurodiverse people. In the context of the workplace, individuals disclosing that they are neurodivergent are likely to encounter questions regarding their ability to successfully integrate into and add value to the organisation,⁸ especially on account of neurotypical work norms and established medical history of treating neurodiverse traits as disorders/deficits.

What would be these neurotypical norms be? Some of the typical markers of a “good” employee are being punctual, following a set protocol of task fulfilment, being organised, etc. While these may come naturally to neurotypicals, to the neurodivergent brain, these tasks and social norms can be challenging as they have an intuitively different approach. For example, people with ADHD often struggle with executive functioning, which is the cognitive ability to plan, decide, follow steps, and execute tasks. As a result, they might have difficulty prioritising tasks on their own, juggling and keeping track of multiple things at once, etc.

If one were to base an impression of a neurodivergent employee based on the neurotypical markers, they could easily be dismissed as “unprofessional”, “difficult” or other such misguided perceptions. It is thus crucial to appreciate the arsenal of strengths that such an employee brings to the workplace if allowed to thrive in a supportive and accommodative environment.

There are plenty of strengths that are brought to the table by neurodivergent employees, including:

1. complex pattern recognition;
2. reliance on visual memory;
3. ability to focus on complex and repetitive tasks;
4. creative thinking; and

5. readiness to handle multiple deadlines and rapidly changing content.

Neurodiversity in the workplace rose to prominence when companies, especially in the tech space, sought new talent to fill in-demand technology roles and recognised the unique talents that neurodiverse individuals held for these roles. SAP, Hewlett Packard and Microsoft started neurodiversity hiring programs⁹ to tap into this underutilised talent pool.

Resultantly, companies such as SAP, Microsoft, Deloitte, IBM, JP Morgan Chase, and Hewlett Packard Enterprise, have launched significant initiatives to recruit and hire neurodivergent employees.¹⁰ Research supports the effectiveness of these programs, including enhanced organisational performance¹¹ and how teams with neurodivergent professionals in certain roles can be up to 30% more productive than those without.¹² However, to fully leverage the advantages of including neurodiverse individuals, most workplaces would need to adapt their current organisational systems and processes in order to accommodate neurodiverse talent.

Remedial/accommodative measures for neurodiverse employees

Recommendation #1: Recognise neurodivergence as diversity

As the adage goes, no two people are alike. This remains applicable to neurodivergence as well. How a particular neurodivergence plays out may vary from person to person. Suffice to say that each neurodivergent person is unique, and it is not possible to generalise their experience and/or their accommodations. Therefore, this variability in neurodiverse experiences should be accounted for while designing organisational framework(s)/policy(ies) for neuro-inclusion.

Recommendation #2: Foster and enable conversation on neurodivergence

It is important for workplaces to have and encourage open conversations around neurodiversity so that a more inclusive and supportive approach benefits the organisation and its employees together. Such conversations would make people aware and maybe even self-identify and/or self-diagnose as neurodivergent. Neurodiversity discourse would benefit greatly with a top-down approach, as senior leadership partaking in transparent conversation would lead the talk by example. While at it, it should be ensured that conversations around this subject are respectful and not derogatory or condescending in nature.



Recommendation #3: Accommodate neurodiversity

As a peer of a neurodivergent person, it is important to understand such person's preferred manner of accommodation, so that the accommodations can be tailored to the individual rather than be based on general assumptions and stereotypes. Accordingly, the first step towards accommodation is to understand and/or ask preference and be open to feedback.

For instance:

- (a) If a person is wearing headphones, refrain from supposing it to be insubordination or means of distraction/disengagement; the person may need it to prevent auditory overstimulation, to activate or maximally leverage their abilities.
- (b) If a person is avoiding eye contact or being fidgety, especially in an interview set up, refrain from being suspect and supposing it to be lack of confidence; the person may be anxious and exhibiting neurodivergent symptoms. Instead, it would be worthwhile to make the interview process neuro-inclusive by tweaking the interview format and laying down more effective communication guidelines moving away from the conservative approach of judging body language.

Basis such understanding, it is critical to act in an accommodative manner and ditch the unconscious bias. Embrace a flexible approach that values diverse cognitive styles and reinforces “diverse minds and diverse performance”.

Recommendation #4: Nothing about neurodivergence, without neurodivergent persons

For neurodiversity initiatives to be truly meaningful, there is a need to ensure that the accommodation preferences of neurodivergent persons are borne in mind. Accordingly, it should be ensured that neurodivergent employees are actively involved in shaping accommodations and policies that impact them. One way of ensuring this would be to not only source participation across the organisation but also individual and more personalised outreach to persons who openly identify as neurodivergent.

***Director, Corporate and Commercial, Khaitan & Co**

****Senior Associate, Khaitan & Co**

*****Senior Executive, Khaitan & Co.**

******Senior Executive, Khaitan & Co.**



1. Singer, Judy, *NeuroDiversity: The Birth of An Idea*, 2017.

2. Nicole Baumer, "What is Neurodiversity" (health.harvard.edu, 23-11-2021).
3. Disabled World, "What is: Neurodiversity, Neurodivergent, Neurotypical" (disabled-world.com, 29-9-2023); Mylène Legault, Jean-Nicolas Bourdon and Pierre Poirier, "From Neurodiversity to Neurodivergence: The Role of Epistemic and Cognitive Marginalization" (link.springer.com, 30-8-2021) and Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano, "Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage" (hbr.org, May-June 2017).
4. Walker N., "Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms and Definitions" (neurocosmopolitanism.com, 2020).
5. Disabled World, "What is: Neurodiversity, Neurodivergent, Neurotypical" (disabled-world.com, 29-9-2023)
6. Mylène Legault, Jean-Nicolas Bourdon and Pierre Poirier, "From Neurodiversity to Neurodivergence: The Role of Epistemic and Cognitive Marginalisation" (link.springer.com, 30-8-2021).
7. Sweta Akundi, "Do Indian Workplaces Need to be More Neurodiverse?" (thehindu.com, 16-3-2020).
8. Rose LeFevre Levy, Arturia Melson-Silimon, Rebecca Harmata and Nathan T. Carter, "Neurodiversity in the Workplace: Considering Neuroatypicality as a Form of Diversity" (researchgate.net, March 2023).
9. Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano, "Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage" (hbr.org, May-June 2017).
10. Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano, "Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage" (hbr.org, May-June 2017).
11. Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano, "Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage" (hbr.org, May-June 2017).
12. Monika Mahto, Brenna Sniderman and Susan K. Hogan, "A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats: Creating a Better Work Environment for All by Embracing Neurodiversity" (deloitte.com, 18-1-2022).

Tags : ADHD | Autism Awareness | Cognitive Diversity | Disability Inclusion | Employee Well-being | innovation | mental health | Neurodiversity | Neurodiversity at Workplace | Support Strategies | Team Dynamics | Workplace Inclusion

Case Briefs, Supreme Court
**Can candidates with
prior open/distance
mode degrees enrol
as advocates after
regular mode LLB?
Supreme Court
allows provisional
enrolment**

Case Briefs, High Courts
**Delhi High Court
rejects Bombay
Shaving Company's
amended Switch4
Advertisement in
Gillette
disparagement suit;
Earlier ad called an
"Outright Mockery"
of Court
Proceedings**

News Submissions

blog@scconline.com

Article Submissions

articles@scconline.com



Download SCC Online App for
Android Users/IOS Users



Disclaimer : The content of this Blog are for informational purposes only and for the reader's personal non-commercial use. The views expressed are not the personal views of EBC Publishing Pvt. Ltd. and do not constitute legal advice. The contents are intended, but not guaranteed, to be correct, complete, or up to date. EBC Publishing Pvt. Ltd. disclaims all liability to any person for any loss or damage caused by errors or omissions, whether arising from negligence, accident or any other cause.



EN