

Neurodiversity in the Workplace



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NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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THINKING DIFFERENTLY

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

- Term used to describe **natural variations** in the human brain.
- Most people are neurotypical (80% globally), meaning their brain functions in the way that **society expects**.
- Research indicates 1 in 5 people (20%) are neurodivergent, meaning their brain functions differently in one or more ways than is considered standard or typical.
- Neurodiverse conditions or differences are used to characterise diverse ways of thinking, learning, processing and behaving.
- A non-exhaustive list might include;
 - ❖Autism
 - ❖Dyslexia
 - ❖Dyspraxia
 - ❖Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)



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NEURODIVERSITY IN THE ENERGY INDUSTRY?

Specific statistics on the prevalence of neurodivergent individuals within the energy industry are limited.

- Engineering and Technology Sector: A 2022 survey by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) found that 19% of respondents identified as definitely or possibly neurodivergent.

While these figures provide a general understanding, they highlight the need for more targeted research within the energy industry to accurately assess neurodiversity representation.



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THE NEURODIVERSE BRAIN – BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Brain Structure and Connectivity

Structural Differences: Studies show certain neurodivergent conditions (autism & ADHD) often involve variations in brain structure, such as differences in grey & white matter (Harvard University, 2021).

Connectivity Variations: Neurodiverse brains may exhibit unique patterns of connectivity. For an autistic person there may be areas of hyper-connectivity (too much connectivity) & hypo-connectivity (less connectivity) between certain brain regions, affecting social processing & sensory integration.

Impact on Mental Health

Increased Sensory Sensitivity & Overwhelm causing stress, anxiety & fatigue, especially in environments not sensory-friendly, increasing likelihood of mental health challenges over time.



THE NEURODIVERSE BRAIN – BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

brain regions, affecting social processing & sensory integration.

Neurotransmitters and Chemical Activity

Dopamine Differences: In ADHD, dopamine regulation is often atypical, affecting attention, motivation, & executive functions (National Institute of Mental Health).

Serotonin and Oxytocin: Studies in autism research suggest differences in serotonin & oxytocin processing, which can influence mood regulation & social behaviours.



Impact on Mental Health

Difficulty with Social Processing & Communication, which can lead to feelings of isolation, rejection, or misunderstanding, contributing to social anxiety, depression & lower self-esteem



NEURODIVERSE BRAIN DIFFERENCES IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH



Executive Functioning Challenges

- Differences in areas of the brain associated with executive functions (e.g., planning, time management, impulse control) can make everyday tasks feel overwhelming & unmanageable.
- Struggling with organisation, deadlines, or impulse control can cause feelings of frustration, inadequacy & stress, leading to anxiety, low self-worth &, in some cases, depression.

Heightened Vulnerability to Stress

- Differences in the limbic system, responsible for emotional processing, can mean neurodivergent individuals experience stress more intensely.
- High stress sensitivity can make it challenging to cope with pressures, leading to chronic stress, anxiety disorders & an increased risk of mental health crises.

Neurodiversity



X6 Transgender and nonbinary people are up to six times more likely to be autistic

15-20% of the population is Neurodivergent

The neurodiversity movement includes:

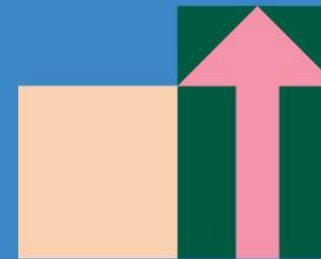
ADHD,
Autism,
Dyslexia,
Dyspraxia,
Dyscalculia,
Dysgraphia
& Tourette syndrome



70%

of Neurodivergent employees experience mental health issues

Neurodiverse teams are at least **30% more productive**



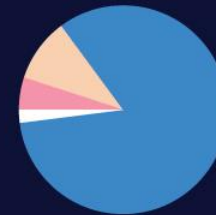
80%

of Autistic women remain undiagnosed at age 18



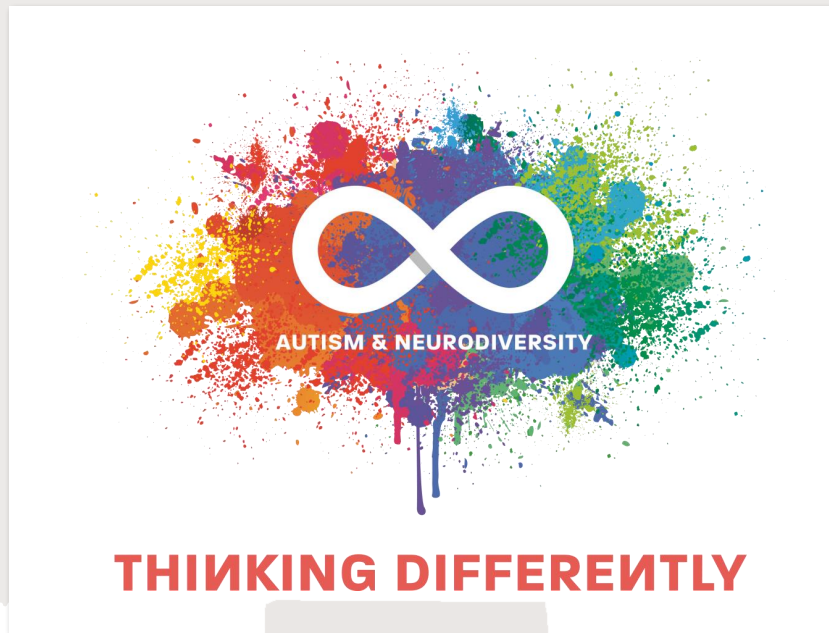
Unemployment rate for college educated Autistic adults is **85%**

85%



WORLD WIDE:
10% are Dyslexic,
5% have ADHD,
2% are Autistic

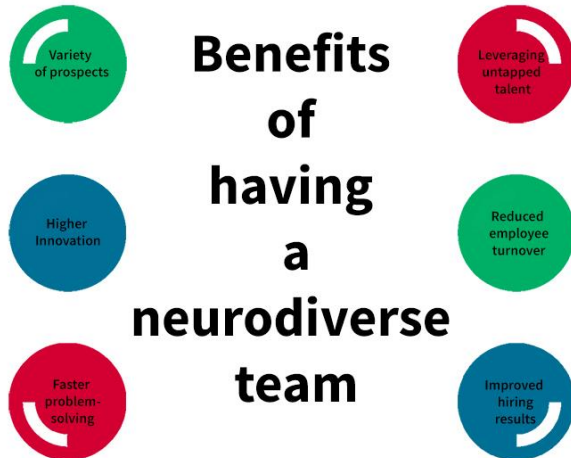
REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FOR NEURODIVERGENT EMPLOYEES



- Flexible Working Hours: Adjust start/finish times for energy levels or commuting.
- Quiet Workspaces: Provide noise-cancelling headphones or a quiet room.
- Clear, Written Instructions: Offer step-by-step instructions in written form.
- Visual or Verbal Reminders: Use task lists, whiteboards, or notifications.
- Regular Check-ins: Frequent, short one-on-one meetings for feedback and support.
- Sensory Accommodations: Modify lighting or temperature for comfort.
- Allowing Work from Home: Remote or hybrid work to reduce sensory input.
- Use of Assistive Technology: Provide software tools to aid productivity.



IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT DOING THE RIGHT THING...



- Creating Neurodiverse supportive environments benefits us all!
- The more diverse & inclusive a workplace, the better & faster problems are solved. Innovation occurs at a greater rate.
- Data suggests that **neurodivergent employees increase the productivity of a company by nearly as much as 50%** (HSBC, Siemens, Virgin) - resulting in increased staff satisfaction, customer satisfaction & therefore increased profits.



PRACTICAL STEPS TO CONSIDER

- Offer more than classic interviews – eye contact
- Think about what the specific job requirements are – do you need a big personality & great eye contact?
- Scribes
- Audio books, podcasts & inputs
- Flexible working times
- Brain food
- Open discussions – role modeling
- Allow for movement – within meetings, working day & training
- Promote and encourage brain health (omega 3 & 6)
- Understand each individuals learning profile – success factors
- Coaching & mentoring
- Support emotional budgeting – top up the cup!