

Neurodiversity

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Why employers that embrace neurodiversity
gain competitive advantage



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This is the first of two articles which have been drafted to provide you with an understanding of neurodiversity and the actions you can take to ensure your organisation is as inclusive as possible.

This article focuses on the 'why' related to neurodiversity. To learn more about the 'how' read our article titled "How to embrace neurodiversity within your organisation."

01 / What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is the diversity of human brains and minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species.

Dr Nick Walker,
Associate Professor at the California
Institute of Integral Studies

If someone is neurodivergent, it means that the brain may function, learn and process information in different ways from the majority of the human population.

Globally, it is estimated that one in seven people are neurodivergent. In the UK, this figure rises slightly to over 15%. For employers, it is likely that at least some of your workforce will have neurodiverse traits.

While awareness of neurodiversity is growing, many employers still consider it as a set of conditions to be managed. At Mercer, we challenge this view, and instead believe that neurodiversity can be a positive differentiator within workforces.

Attracting and empowering neurodivergent individuals can bring significant competitive advantages at every level of an organisation.

Common advantages to employing and nurturing the strengths of neurodivergent colleagues include:



Attention to detail and spotting trends



Creative thinking and innovation



Data analysis and quick processing



Avoidance of groupthink and spotting new opportunities and risks



Consistency and productivity

02 / Change is required

To realise these advantages, employers must revolutionise the way they think about neurodiversity. This means moving away from clinical diagnosis and labelling, and instead creating an environment where neurodivergent individuals can thrive.

The traditional approach misunderstands the nature of neurodiversity. While neurodiversity can refer to several conditions including (but not limited to) attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum condition (ASC), dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia, dysgraphia and Tourette's syndrome, the reality is that many of these conditions exist with varying degrees of severity, and often overlap.

It is important to note that not every employee with neurodivergent traits will have, or want, a diagnosis, whilst others may experience a sense of relief when getting one. Some employees may feel they need a formal diagnosis to access support. Some employees may have several diagnoses for a variety of conditions.

There is no single clinical pathway to follow, so employers should focus on making a range of practical solutions readily available to ensure that all employees have the right tools to add value. It's important to make sure that everyone is supported, regardless of whether they have a formal diagnosis or not.



03 / The impact of embracing neurodiversity

Employers that want to truly promote diversity, equity and inclusion must understand the challenges that neurodivergent individuals may face, but also the competitive advantage they can bring to the workplace when the right processes are in place.

For example, people with autism may have a greater need for routine, may face difficulties with social interactions or may have trouble communicating.

When JP Morgan Chase put an Autism at Work programme in place, they found that employees with autism worked 48% faster and were as much as 92% more productive than their 'neurotypical' colleagues.

48%

faster working

92%

more productive

This is just one example of how having the right approach and culture, together with appropriate technology and systems can ensure that neurodivergent individuals are set up to succeed and ultimately improve the business.

There are multiple factors that contribute to this, but the commonalities are strong visual acuity, attention to detail and a superior ability to concentrate.

James Mahoney,
Head of Global Technology Diversity,
Equity & Inclusion, JP Morgan Chase



Here at Mercer, we have partnered with Ambitious About Autism and our parent company Marsh McLennan to launch our 2022 Employ Autism pilot, hosting five autistic interns across our businesses for paid meaningful experiences of work. We will also be scaling up our workplace assessments at UK offices, reviewing our HR policies and offering training for People Managers to be more inclusive and autism confident.

Getting to this stage means transforming the employee journey right from the beginning. For instance, traditional interview and review processes are not always well designed for neurodivergent individuals who may struggle with social cues.

04 / How to move towards a more inclusive workforce

Acknowledging and recognising neurodiversity is the first step. It can help you to understand where existing procedures are not fit for purpose, and also identify specific strengths that can improve your business.

Remember, many people do not have a formal diagnosis, but still need support. There is no one size fits all and employers should avoid defining someone by their diagnosis, and instead think about reasonable adjustments that can be made at all levels of the organisation to promote diversity, equity and inclusion.

For more tangible actions that you could consider for your organisation take a look at our follow-on article titled “Neurodiversity: How to embrace neurodiversity within your organisation”.

Mercer offers a range of consulting services that support employers striving for a more diverse, more productive, higher performing and better motivated workforce.

If you are looking for support with ensuring your organisation is inclusive for neurodivergent individuals, get in touch to set up a consultation using the contact details overleaf.



05 / Contact us

If you would like to discuss any of the topics highlighted in this report, please get in touch with us.



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About Mercer

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