

Neurodiversity

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How to embrace neurodiversity within
your organisation



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This document includes interactive text based images. For accessibility, we have included plain text tables within the appendices.



This is the second 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 'how' in relation to neurodiversity. To learn more about what is neurodiversity, how prevalent it is and what steps employers are taking to embrace neurodivergent employees within their organisations read our paper titled *Neurodiversity: Why employers that embrace neurodiversity gain a competitive advantage.*

01 / Where can you start?

When it comes to embracing neurodiversity we believe employers should seek to tackle four key areas.

1

Solving for equality of opportunity, experience and pay.

2

Building an inclusive and robust benefit offering.

3

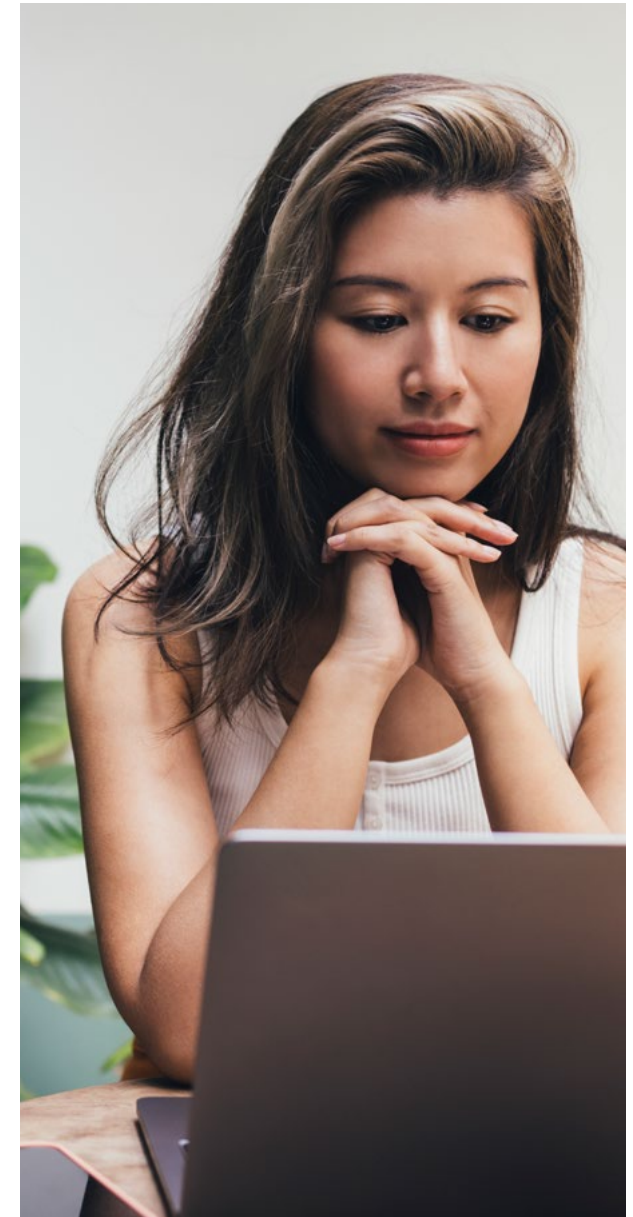
Enabling your culture with the right programmes, policies and processes.

4

Gathering data to measure your success.

To succeed in this, the first priority must be upskilling managers and recruitment teams to ask all individuals "what do you need to succeed?"

Taking this approach will be beneficial at all levels of the organisation, leveraging the talents of all employees through greater sensitivity to individual needs, whilst also benefitting anyone with neurodivergent traits.



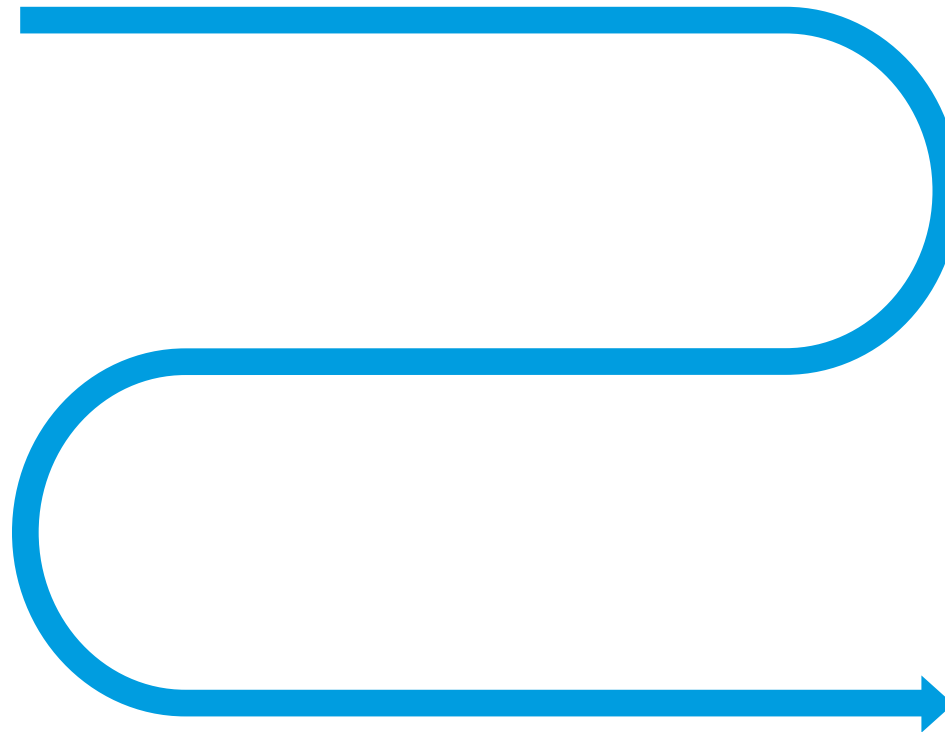
Here are some examples of further steps employers may wish to consider (See appendix 1 for a more accessible table). Hover over each item for more information:

While neurodiversity is not a mental health condition, neurodivergent individuals are more likely to suffer from mental health issues such as stress and anxiety, which may be triggered by a lack of support and understanding from their employer. Bullying and social exclusion is also a significant concern and shows why employers must prioritise education and training for all employees.

Employers may also wish to consider support beyond their direct employees. Employees may have children or family members with neurodivergent traits, and family friendly policies can be a critical source of support.

In summary, employers must tackle awareness in the workplace, positively leverage neurodiversity and make sure that health and benefits programmes provide sufficient mental health support.

Integrating support for neurodivergent individuals into the employee experience



02 / Taking a holistic approach

Insurance solutions that help employers protect neurodivergent employees are still in their early stages, although some strides are being made in this area. Where programmes do exist, they are often focused on initial assessment and diagnosis, rather than outcomes and ongoing support.

Whilst some specialist companies are approaching employers to offer their diagnostic services, often there is no cover available once diagnosis is confirmed, because this falls under behavioural exclusions. Mercer is continuing to work with insurers to expand this support.

Diagnostics, insurance and claims processes have a role to play, but in isolation they do not provide the breadth of long-term support needed to transform a business and ensure that neurodivergent individuals are given an environment in which they can flourish, adding value and bringing competitive advantage.

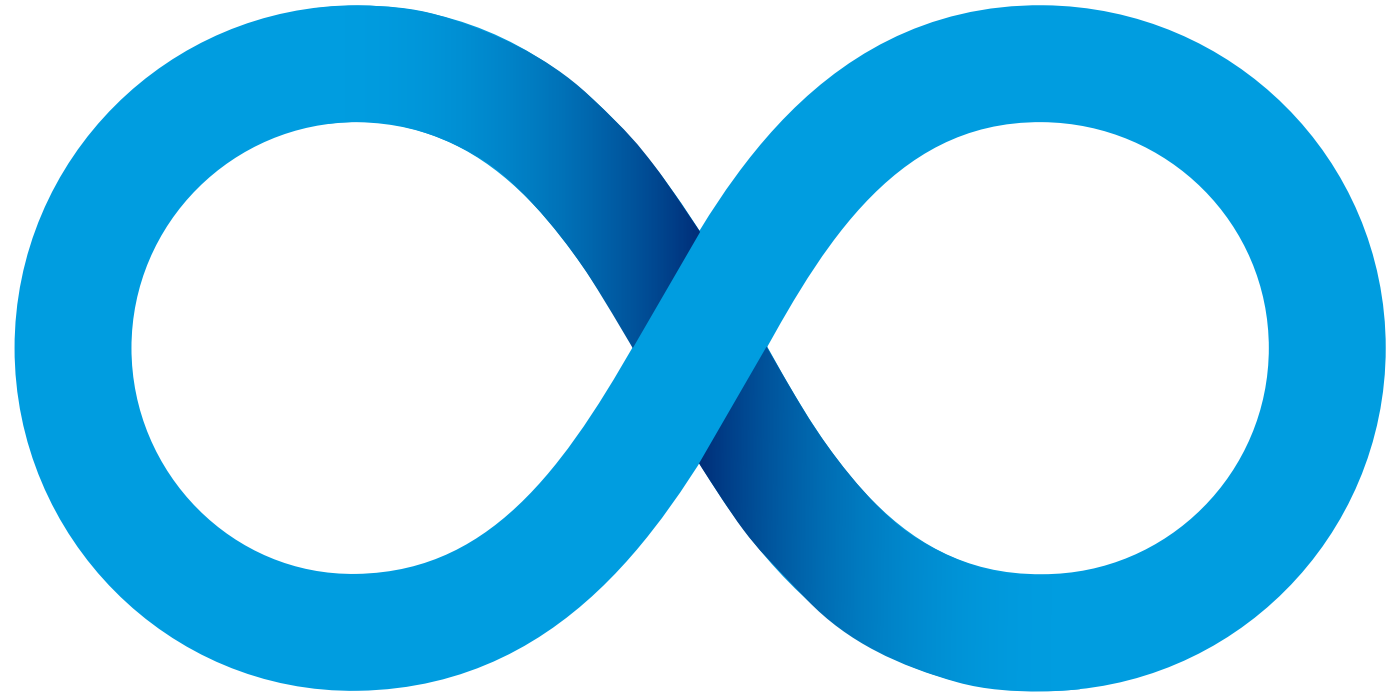


Here are some examples of further steps employers may wish to consider (See appendix 2 for a more accessible table). Hover over each item for more information:

At Mercer, we are looking at the market and are sourcing a range of providers who we believe can provide services to support you and your employees throughout their employment cycle as well as also supporting neurodivergent family members.

Mercer offers a range of consulting solutions to support employers who are striving for more diverse, more productive, higher performing and better motivated workforces.

If you are looking for support, contact us to set up a consultation to discuss how you can help your neurodivergent employees to thrive. Contact details on back page.



03 / Appendix 1: Integrating support for neurodivergent individuals into the employee experience



Recruitment

Neurodivergent individuals may find conventional interview approaches challenging, particularly if they struggle with social interactions.

Things to consider:

- Make sure interview questions are clear and unambiguous rather than open-ended.
- Upskill recruitment teams, and hiring managers.
- Accept a range of documents beyond traditional CVs. Consider blind CVs too to take away any other forms of bias such as attribution bias.
- Proactively ask all potential employees whether they need adjustments rather than waiting for neurodivergent individuals to ask.
- Consider the full recruitment process, for example, assessment centre group activities may need to be reconsidered.



Onboarding

Neurodivergent individuals may struggle with changes to routine. Starting a new job will result in a lot of changes so making this as straightforward as possible is key.

Things to consider:

- Provide the option of an office tour ahead of the individual's start date so that they can familiarise themselves with the workplace and ideally their team.
- Include education and awareness around neurodiversity for all new starters in the induction process.
- Clearly signpost any important policies or processes so that they are easy to find.



Talent management

Often feedback and review systems can be difficult for people who struggle with social cues.

Things to consider:

- Offer specialist training for line managers to ensure that they can provide feedback that is constructive for neurodivergent individuals.
- Provide a clear agenda ahead of review meetings and an indication of tone of the meeting.
- Put processes in place so managers have regular one-to-one catch ups with employees.
- Assess for bias within the talent management process.



Sense of belonging

Lack of understanding, empathy and sympathy can negatively affect neurodivergent individuals and even lead to workplace bullying.

Things to consider:

- Build awareness and education throughout the workplace, recognising that everyone with neurodivergent traits will have different needs.
- Signpost employee resource groups to easily find a network of supportive individuals.
- Encourage the use of focus time via "Do not disturb" signs (physically or virtually) to avoid unwelcomed disturbances and encourage colleagues to respect these.



Accessible workplace

Some people may find it hard to focus in open plan office areas. Some may be sensitive to light and/or noise, or other sensory experiences.

Things to consider:

- Providing noise cancelling headphones, adjustable lighting, or quiet low-lit areas where people can work.
- Consider working spaces beyond the norm – are there quiet rooms; different spaces for different occasions; set desks for those who want it (no hot-desking).
- Make sure desk assessments are carried out and ensure people have any tools they need, such as screen overlays, organisers and planners.

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Hybrid working

Many workplaces have switched to a hybrid model since the COVID-19 pandemic. This has thrown up new challenges and some employees may have struggled with the reliance with online working.

Things to consider:

- Provide technology solutions such as speech to text software or management applications to support video conferencing.
- Support individuals with reducing their digital notifications if these are felt to be overstimulating.
- Some individuals may prefer to call, some may prefer to email or instant message, so try to work within these preferences where feasible.



Flexibility

Neurodivergent individuals may benefit from a more flexible approach to suit their strengths.

Things to consider:

- Promote flexibility in the workplace, not just around how work is done, but also when, where and who does it. (Read more [here](#) on Mercer's Adaptive Working model).
- Be flexible around uniforms where fabrics or styles are felt to be overstimulating.
- Understand that some individuals may struggle with last minute meetings or events, and try to enable them to have advance notice where possible.
- Make sure the work allocation is well suited to each individual to make the most of their strengths.



Role models

There are typically very few neurodivergent role models for individuals to learn from and be inspired by within the organisation.

Things to consider:

- Link in with your employee resource groups to take an intersectional approach to neurodiversity in order to have a broader reach.
- Bring in external speakers where necessary to spotlight successful neurodivergent leaders as inspiration.
- Empower leaders to showcase inclusive behaviours.



Planning for retirement

Planning for the future and thinking about retirement is difficult for almost everyone, and this is often especially true for neurodivergent people. Indeed, making decisions about something as far away as retirement can be overwhelming.

Things to consider:

- Providing access to affordable financial planning services can encourage greater financial wellbeing, in particular for parents of neurodivergent children with high support needs that may need access to long term specialist care.

04 / Appendix 2: Holistic solutions



Benefits

- Helping you to support individuals who may access treatment on a self-pay basis, by guiding them to appropriate consultants and therapists
- Designing benefits as part of a holistic approach to neurodiversity
- Providing referrals to specialists such as occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, physical therapy, mental health specialists
- Offering self-assessment tools and health and lifestyle app



Workplace adjustments

- Facilitating assessments to determine the most appropriate support and workplace adjustments
- Review of your real estate facilities to ensure accessibility for all



Education and awareness

- Providing webinars to educate all employees on neurodiversity
- Integrating strong communications to continuously activate and embed learnings and inclusive behaviours
- Providing toolkits to empower employees, managers and recruitment teams



Diversity, equity and inclusion strategy

- Co-creating an evidence based, multi-year approach to fostering an inclusive culture – read more [here](#) on Mercer's approach to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Embedding inclusivity and cultural competencies into performance measures
- Setting clear organisation targets around DEI and updating DEI policies
- Updating people processes such a recruitment, talent management and more



Upskilling managers

- Providing manager specific training to support neurodivergent individuals
- Take your leaders on our Inclusive Leadership journey
- Upskilling managers and employees to reduce biases formed from hybrid working such as proximity bias



Flexibility

- Make work work for each individual – read more [here](#) on Mercer's Adapative Working model

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

Mercer believes in building brighter futures by redefining the world of work, reshaping retirement and investment outcomes, and unlocking real health and well-being. Mercer's more than 25,000 employees are based in 44 countries and the firm operates in over 130 countries. Mercer is a business of Marsh & McLennan (NYSE: MMC), the world's leading professional services firm in the areas of risk, strategy and people, with 75,000 colleagues and annualized revenue approaching \$17 billion. Through its market-leading businesses, including Marsh, Guy Carpenter and Oliver Wyman, Marsh & McLennan helps clients navigate an increasingly dynamic and complex environment.

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