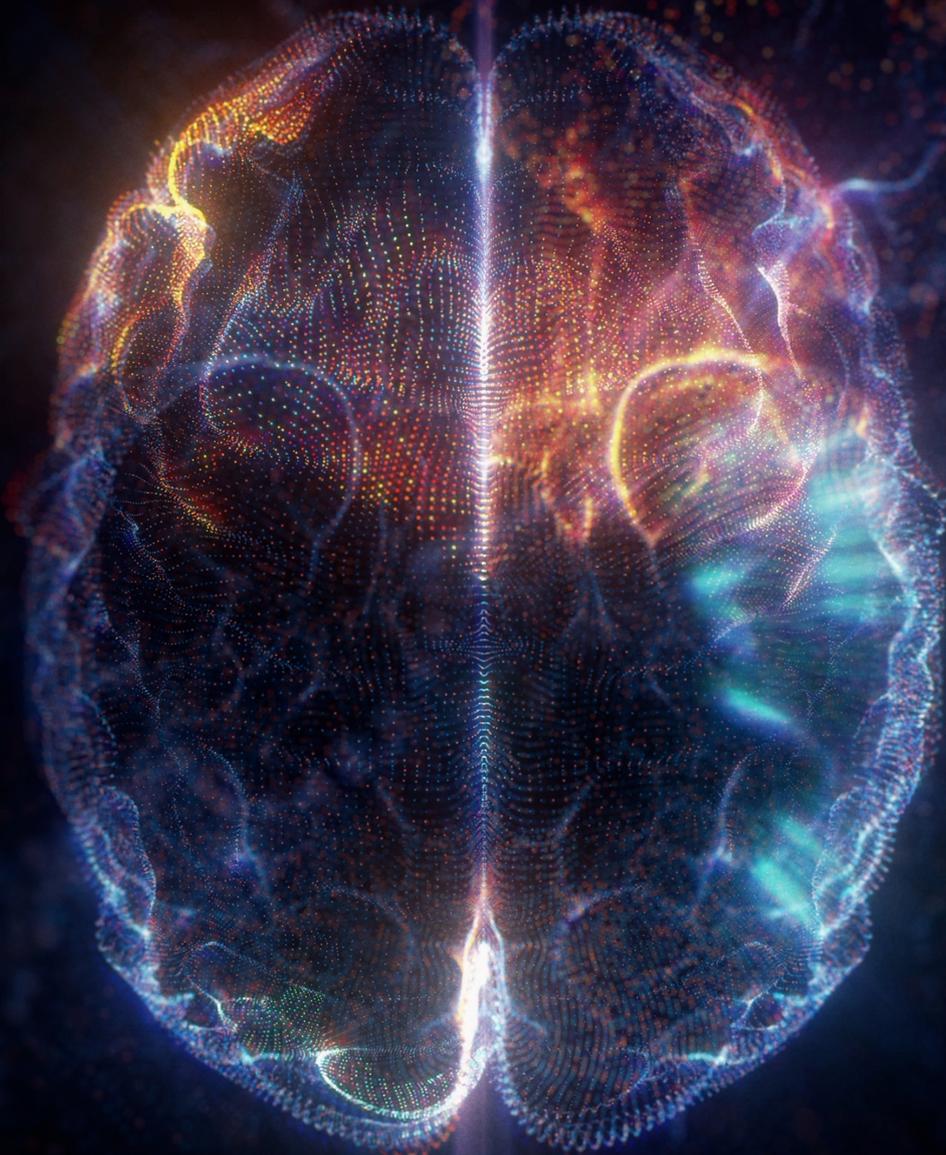


Supporting Neurodiversity Across the Talent Cycle



Neurodiversity is a term that is used to describe a wide range of human brain function and associated behaviors. It is used to refer to conditions that aren't neurotypical, such as autism, asperger's syndrome, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).



Approximately 18% of the population are currently considered to be neurodivergent*.

Whilst prevalent, it is not widely recognized that Neurodiversity is an extremely broad area and represents a wide spectrum of needs/differences. It is important that organizations understand these unique differences and how they can provide equal employment opportunities. This includes inclusivity across hiring talent, building talent and leading talent.

Here are our top tips for supporting neurodiversity through the talent cycle.

Hiring Talent

Neurodiverse individuals are an “untapped talent pool”. However, it has been estimated that as many as 30-40% of neurodivergent individuals are unemployed. This is eight times more than the average for individuals without a disability. Why then do organizations appear not to be actively recruiting these individuals with unique and incredible strengths? Published research, including a 2017 study reported in the Harvard Business Review, suggests that neurodiverse employees can be as much as 30% to 40% more productive than “neurotypical” workers when performing tasks such as data analysis, software testing, and compliance, provided that they are supported properly.

The more diverse the participants, the broader the viewpoints and perspectives. The more creative the problem-solving. The more thinking out of the box. The more innovation.

Diversity of Thought
thriveglobal.com

We need to admit that there is no standard brain

Thomas Armstrong,
The Power of Neurodiversity

Be inclusive in your job descriptions

The competencies identified during job analysis, and therefore included in the job description, will form the basis of what all candidates are assessed against. We often see job descriptions containing general skill requirements, such as ‘excellent communication skills’ or ‘ability to work in a team’. Descriptions like these can create a barrier for neurodivergent individuals who may bring a different skillset to the role.

- Do you regularly review your job descriptions?
- How important are the skills you list as required for the role?
- Is your job description clear on the responsibilities of this role?

Take the time to review your job descriptions to ensure the competencies highlighted are specific and relevant to the role. Reach out to neurodivergent employees within your organization and involve them (where appropriate) in the job analysis process. Monitor all responses and/or questions to ensure that your job description is encouraging diversity in applications.

Use your career page and job adverts to attract neurodiversity

When it comes to your careers page and job adverts, it’s critical to be as inclusive as possible. The information included at this stage ultimately impacts whether you attract neurodiverse applicants into your selection process or not.

*Neurodiversity: maximising talent in the workplace | TrainingZone

- Where do you currently post your job adverts?
Do these locations allow equal opportunities for neurodiverse individuals to apply?
- Are your job adverts clear and concise?
- Do your job adverts reflect your organizational values?

Review your careers page and job adverts to ensure that they highlight your inclusive workplace culture. Look to include an example of a successful neurodiverse employee's career path on your website. Make sure that your values and website reflect your organization's pledge towards neurodiversity and DE&I (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) as whole. Use your careers page and job adverts to be clear about what each role will look like on a daily/weekly basis. Explore partnership opportunities with charitable organizations that work specifically with neurodiverse individuals, as this can provide a rewarding way to tap into neurodiverse talent.

Ensure clarity in all forms of communication

Clear communication is critical in any workplace, but particularly in organizations that are actively seeking to recruit neurodivergent talent. Communication starts at the very first point of contact, on a careers page or job advert, and continues throughout the whole recruitment process.

For some individuals with autism, 'taking things literally' can have an impact on whether they decide to apply for the role based on the information communicated in the job advert. When communicating with a person with autism, it's important to ensure that you are clear about the requirements of the role, as opposed to stating general requirements such as 'excellent communication skills'. These more general requirements can potentially discourage some neurodivergent individuals from applying if they believe that they have 'good' but perhaps not 'excellent' communication skills. Watch out for spoken phrases which could be taken literally, such as 'let's jump to it' which can result in misunderstandings.

- Do you regularly review all of your communications for accessibility?
- Do you share information on the process and timelines with candidates?
- Do you avoid acronyms or corporate terminology?

Regularly review your communications and have other team members read through to get a fresh perspective. Look at the balance of written versus verbal or face-to-face methods of communication. This may mean finding alternative ways to communicate information. For example, consider incorporating short subtitled video clips of a team member describing 'a day in the life' into the recruitment process. This may help neurodiverse candidates better understand if they could perform in that role. Mixing methods of communication can also

help ensure that neurodiverse candidates are focused and engaged throughout the process.

As some neurodivergent conditions can affect understanding, it is helpful to always include the full meaning of any acronyms used. Communicating in a clear way allows everyone to have a fair and equal opportunity at understanding the role and its requirements.

Be aware of accessibility and the availability of accommodations

When designing a selection pathway, it's important to be aware of what accessibility and accommodation needs neurodiverse candidates may have. For example, an individual with dyslexia may require additional time on an assessment where written information is used. Candidates with ADHD may require a scribe or a moderator to help them maintain focus. Throughout the recruitment process, the best person to explain what accommodations are needed is often the individual themselves.

- Are you aware of what accessibility and accommodations may be required by neurodiverse candidates?
- Do you provide candidates with an opportunity to practice?
- Are you asking your candidates how you can best accommodate them with any adjustments in the process?

Be aware of the relevant disability laws in your jurisdiction. In the UK, neurodiverse candidates have the legal right to request reasonable adjustments under disability law. Regularly check and update your understanding of disability law. Make it clear that candidates can request accommodations if required.

Take some time to get to know the accommodations available for your chosen assessments. For example, Saville Assessment can support dyslexic candidates through timing adjustments on aptitude assessments. We offer practice opportunities to allow candidates to familiarize themselves with the style of questions. We also regularly work on updating our screen reader functionality across our assessments.



Equality



Equity

Support differences

Certain measures, such as interviews, may disadvantage neurodivergent candidates and provide limited opportunity for them to present their unique strengths. Conversely, aptitude tests (with appropriate timing adjustments) can put all candidates on a level playing field. Behavioral assessments, such as the Wave questionnaires, can help to uncover points of individuality and uniqueness.

- Does your assessment process provide the opportunity for all types of candidates to display their unique strengths?

Ask your assessment provider if they are utilizing approaches to reduce issues that are likely to impact on minority group differences, with particular relevance to neurodiverse candidates. For example, in the development of our [Situational Judgment Tests](#) we designed question items and responses in such a way as to reduce extraneous cognitive load. We also avoid forced-choice questions which can be difficult and frustrating for all candidates, but in particular neurodiverse candidates.

There may be times when certain psychometrics are less likely to be suitable. In these cases, we recommend reviewing the available accommodations or looking for an alternative means of assessing the candidate. This may mean dropping the use of a specific assessment tool completely for that candidate. In these cases, an alternative can be used later in the process to allow the candidate to show off their unique strengths.

However, it is important to give consideration to ensuring that removing one assessment does not then place a heavier reliance on an assessment method which is less fair and less valid. Research the validity of any tests or questionnaires you are using to ensure that they accurately forecast the behaviors or abilities required for the job role.

Some neurodiverse candidates can benefit from more structured forms of interview. Ensure that questions are clear, concise and not open to interpretation. Using targeted and direct questions that focus on the candidate's actual experiences and tangible processes will provide benefit as opposed to open-ended or vague questions. Try to focus on skills rather than abstract concepts throughout the interview.



Building Talent

When we consider neurodivergence and aspects of organizational development, it is important to think about formal development programs and how neurodivergent individuals can be supported through onboarding and more general development.

Creating a culture of equal growth, building inclusivity through allyship, encouraging a real understanding of individual differences, and utilizing objective assessment is fundamental for positively supporting neurodiversity through your build activity.

Foster a neuroinclusive culture

Organizational culture plays a huge part in retention, turnover rates, and employee engagement. Research in April 2022, found that 72% of people listed DE&I as a major decision factor in remaining at their company.

- Do you champion your neurodiverse employees (e.g. showcase success stories)?
- Do you create fair opportunities for neurodiverse employees to grow and develop?

Try to create a psychologically-safe workplace, where all employees feel that they have a voice that will be heard when they share their thoughts and feelings. This culture and environment enables all employees to bring their whole, true-selves to work, without a fear of backlash.

Look at implementing neurodiversity awareness training for all employees. These training programs can help employees understand various neurodivergent conditions. It can also provide the building blocks for a neuroinclusive workplace and gives employees the opportunity to explore why neurodiversity matters, for example to understand the unique strengths neurodiversity creates and the related individual and organizational benefits that brings.

Establishing a workplace policy on neurodiversity can provide a helpful guide for managers and other employees to ensure they know and understand differences and can look for ways to help create an inclusive workplace.

Onboard in an inclusive way

Getting those first few days/weeks right is essential for all new employees. However, onboarding the way individuals are inducted into a new role can be particularly difficult for neurodiverse individuals. Standard onboarding activities tend to involve 'forced social interaction/ice-breaker activities'.

Neurodivergent individuals may prefer to communicate through stories, whilst others may prefer not to feel under pressure to sit still or make eye contact. Some may need to know that they can take breaks from the situation before continuing the conversation.

- Is there room for flexibility to accommodate the needs of your neurodiverse employees?
- Do you have an onboarding process to welcome neurodiverse employees into the organization?

For candidates who have identified as neurodiverse, reach out to them to find out how you can support them during their first few weeks. Find ways to get to know the individual on a one-to-one basis by exploring their preferred method of communication and more broadly how you can support them.

Try to create a more structured onboarding process to support your neurodiverse employees through this transition period into your organization. We provide Onboarding Reports, which can support new hires with their individual development plans whilst also supporting them with their individual strength areas. These reports transition onboarding from a transactional process to an interactive and personalized experience, meaning that neurodiverse employees can use the reports in a way that suits them, without feeling overwhelmed with information.

Structure work on an individual basis

Traditionally, jobs have been structured around the needs of the organization. For example, the timings of the day and the working environment. Recently, there has been a shift to focus more on how the organization can accommodate individual needs. This type of positive psychology approach results in numerous benefits, particularly to neurodiverse employees, from structuring the job to the needs of the individual.

The social model of disability says that neurodivergent people are considered disabled because society and workplaces are organized for the benefit of neurotypical people. Under this model, employers should change their environments, policies and cultures to remove barriers faced by neurodivergent workers. For example, individuals with ADHD may get distracted when working in a noisy open-plan office environment, and individuals with autism may prefer a more structured approach in managing their tasks and workload.

- Do you structure work on an individual basis?
- Do individuals have the opportunity to input on their preferred ways of working?
- Are there ways to better fit the job role to individual needs?

Work with individuals at the onboarding stage to ascertain what sort of flexible working approach may optimize their performance. Listen to what your neurodiverse employees are saying, and together establish how you can action it. Look to provide a focus and understanding around the impact and output that their specific strengths can bring to the role. Utilize reports such as our [Wave Expert Reports](#) which provide deep dives into nuances on behavior. These can help open up conversations with individuals to explore their motivation and talent in certain areas.

Help everyone better understand themselves and others

Regardless of neurodiversity, we all have our own unique ways of working. For example, different styles of communication can mean that not all voices are equally heard or that some team members may not understand why a colleague likes to work in a certain way.

- Do you allow a judgment-free environment for employees to share information like this?
- Does your team have an awareness of the needs of others?

All individuals can get to know themselves and others better by participating in team development sessions such as a [Work Roles](#) session. These workshops can explore everyone's preferred ways of working and support the ways we work with each other. For neurodiverse individuals, this provides a great way to highlight their own needs without feeling that they are the only one who works in a unique or different way.

Position neurodiverse employees for success

There are many ways neurodiverse individuals can be positioned for success. Employees often like to see role models being successful in the positions they aspire to work in, and this is also true for neurodiverse individuals.

- Are you creating a neuroinclusive path for success?
- Do you offer support for individuals looking to develop within your organization?

Look for ways to set up neurodiverse employees for success by offering things such as job coaching opportunities, manager training, flexibility in the performance management process and clear pathways to change roles based on strengths and interests. Sharing successful neurodiverse career stories within your organization can also provide a clear recognition of support for neurodiversity. This can also create a role model effect, allowing neurodiverse employees to feel comfortable talking to members of the team who may have had similar experiences.

Leading Talent

When it comes to supporting neurodiverse individuals into and within leadership positions, many of the points we raised above and in our previous article around DE&I in Leadership are relevant, because these practices should be consistent for all.

Clear and open pathways

Being transparent is critical when it comes to the career progression pathways within your organization. This allows you to alleviate biases in how your employees progress through your organization.

- How clear are the requirements for progression in your organization?
- Is this information widely available to all?
- Is there a range of diverse mentors/coaches available to help guide and support minorities and neurodiverse individuals through progression?

Champion neurodiversity in leadership

There should be no barriers in place when it comes to being able to be successful in leadership. There are many high-profile leaders who identify as being neurodiverse. For example, Richard Branson, founder of Virgin, has dyslexia and ADHD, and Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, had dyslexia.

- Do you regularly highlight what neurodiverse individuals can achieve?
- Do you celebrate the work of neurodiverse leaders in your organization, or even globally?

Take time to champion and highlight to all employees just what neurodiverse individuals can achieve. Share success stories regularly, focusing on the reasons why their neurodiversity was not a barrier, strategies that could help others achieve the same and any relative strengths that were important to their success.

Support Neurodiversity across the talent cycle

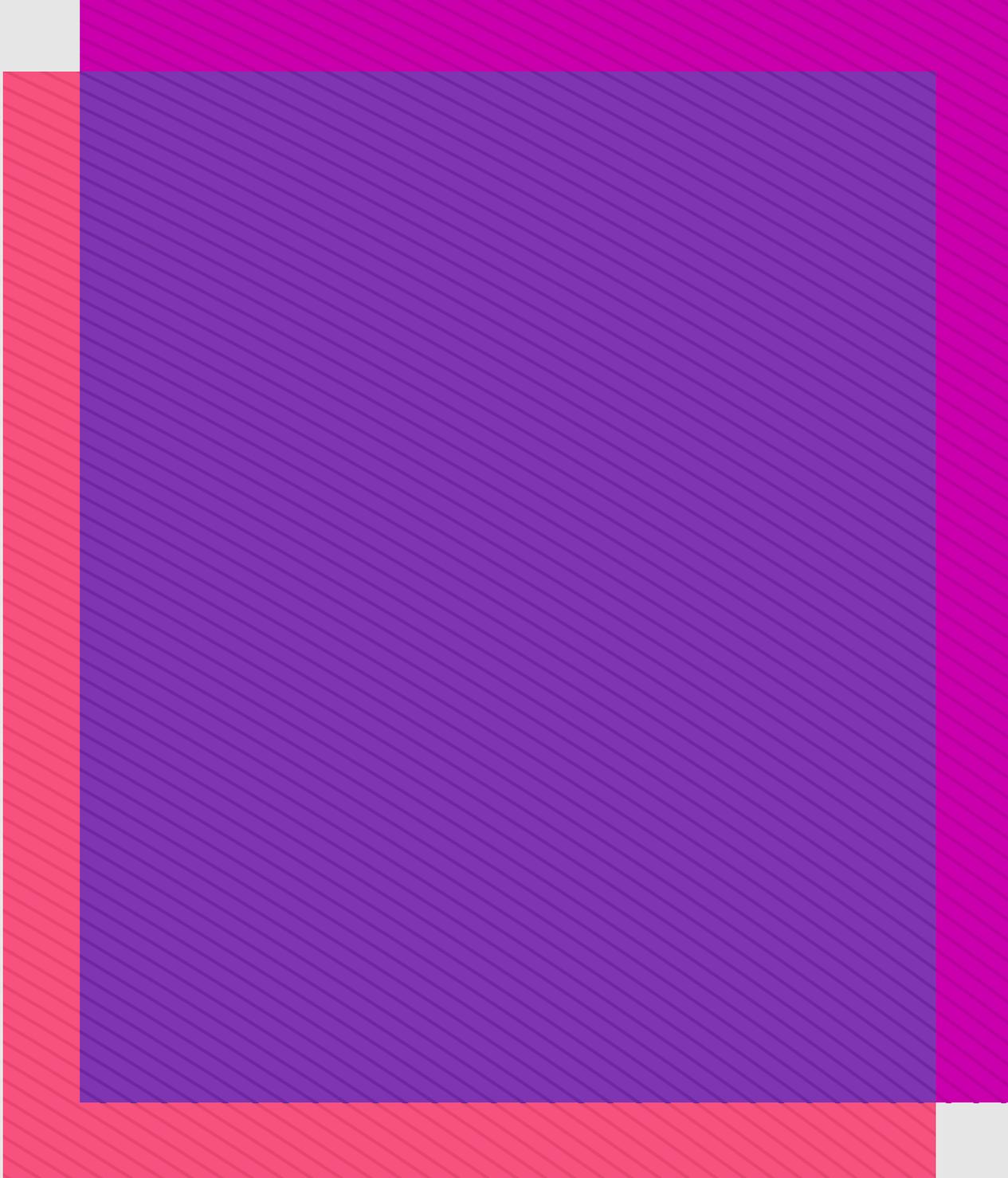
Creating a safe and supportive culture from the first moment a neurodiverse individual discovers your company, through selection, onboarding and their subsequent career journey will enable neurodiversity to thrive at work.

For more information on how to support neurodiversity, contact us at

info@savilleassessment.com.

See our previous article ([Supporting Better DE&I Outcomes Through Lead Activity - Saville Assessment](#))* for some useful tips around being transparent and creating clear and open pathways.

*<https://www.savilleassessment.com/supporting-better-dei-through-leadership/>



About Saville Assessment, A WTW Company

Our integrated approach to talent solutions helps organizations achieve their business objectives. We decrease risks and increase good opportunities associated with talent assessment and development. Representatives in over 80 countries equip us to support projects all over the world. Whether early-careers recruitment or leadership development, local authority or multinational corporation, we help all our clients unlock potential and achieve results. Learn more at www.savilleassessment.com