

Neurodiversity in the tech sector

Global research on accessibility, barriers
and how companies can do better

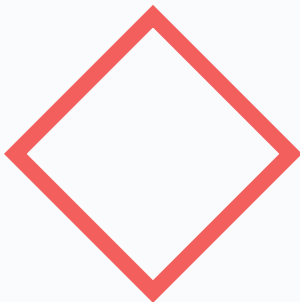


A report for the #ChangeTheFace Alliance / December 2023

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Neurodiversity in the Tech Sector is the largest global workplace study on neurodiversity to date for the industry. The #ChangeTheFace Alliance commissioned Inner Ambitions and the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations to undertake research on workplace accessibility for neurodivergent people in the tech sector. The research was supported by Alliance members, Colt, Nokia, Samsung, and Vodafone. This report presents the findings of this research, which are based on a global survey of over 2000 responses, a systematic literature review and focus groups with neurodivergent employees. The report focuses on workplace factors that challenge and affect neurodivergent employees, the effect these have and what can be done to help accommodate neurodivergent employees.



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Glossary of terms

This glossary, following Inclusive Employers¹ recommendations, aids in navigating language related to neurodiversity. It is not definitive due to evolving research. We also recognise that individual preferences shape self-expression and identity-based language.

ADHD: Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Individuals with ADHD may exhibit patterns of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity that can interfere with daily functioning, academic performance, work, and relationships.

Aphantasia: A condition characterised by difficulty generating mental images or visualisations.

Autism/Autism spectrum conditions (ASC)/Autism spectrum disorder (ASD): A complex neurodevelopmental condition that affects social communication, behaviour, and interaction. Autism encompasses a wide range of symptoms, skills, and levels of impairment that can vary greatly from person to person. Many in the autism community may prefer identity-first language and to be referred to as 'autistic' rather than using person-first and to be described as 'someone with autism'. This is because their autistic neurotype part of their being, not something separate. However, this is subject to individual preference. Whereas others may prefer 'ASD' or 'autism spectrum disorder' as it emphasises the diagnostic aspect and acknowledges the associated challenges.

Dyscalculia: A condition characterised by an individual's difficulty in understanding numbers and arithmetic.

Dyschronometria: A condition characterised by an individual's difficulty in estimating time or having an awareness of time passed.

Dysgraphia: A condition characterised by an individual's difficulty in writing by hand and translating what they want to say into written words. It may also be characterised by reduced spatial awareness. It does not affect reading comprehension.

Dyslexia: A condition characterised by an individual's difficulty with processing information, which can impact reading, writing, spelling and organisational skills.

Dyspraxia: A condition characterised by an individual's difficulty with coordination, and occasionally, speech.

Echolalia: A trait or symptom whereby the person repeats sounds and phrases from others.

Hyperacusis: A condition characterised by a sensitivity to noise which can cause discomfort and pain.

¹ Inclusive Employers (2023). Neurodiversity glossary of terms.
<https://www.inclusiveemployers.co.uk/blog/neurodiversity-glossary/>

Hyperlexia: Usually discovered in childhood, the ability to read much faster and at much more complex levels than the average child at the same age.

Hypersensitivity: Heightened awareness and discomfort caused by sensory, physical, or emotional inputs that others might not notice.

Hyposensitivity: A decreased awareness of sensory, physical, or emotional inputs.

Identity-first language: Language that emphasises a person's identity or condition as an inherent part of who they are, putting the descriptor before the person. It is often preferred by some individuals and communities as a way to affirm and embrace their identity without separating it from themselves.

Masking: When a neurodivergent person 'masks' their true feelings, personality, mood or opinions in order to be accepted socially and to 'fly under the radar' to not be outed/seen as neurodivergent. It is a coping mechanism, generally as a result of neurodivergent trauma from non-acceptance in society.

Misophonia: A condition characterised by an intolerance to everyday sounds. This intolerance can cause individuals to have a strong emotional response.

Neurodivergent/neuroatypical (ND): This term refers to individuals whose neurological development and functioning differ from the average neurotype, i.e., a neurotype which is not neurotypical and diverges from the average neurotype. It includes people with various neurodevelopmental/neurological conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, Tourette syndrome, and others.

Neurodiverse/neurodiversity/neurovariation: Neurodiversity is a concept that recognises neurological differences in individuals and that there is a wide range of neurotypes that exist in the world.

Neurologically typical/neurotypical (NT): Neurotypical people are those who have the average neurotype, i.e., possess a neurological development which aligns with what society perceives as typical functioning. In contrast to neurodivergent people, neurotypical people do not have neurodevelopmental differences or conditions.

Neurotype: Refers to an individual's unique neurological makeup or characteristics. It is used to describe the specific way in which an individual's brain functions, processes information, perceives the world, and interacts with others.

Person-first language: Prioritises the individual over their condition or disability, placing emphasis on the person rather than the diagnosis. Preference for person-first language varies across (and within) neurodivergent communities. Some neurodivergent people would prefer identity-first language.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD): A condition characterised by obsessive thoughts and repetitive or compulsive behaviours.

Rejection-sensitive Dysphoria (RSD): When a person experiences severe emotional pain or distress because of perceived rejection.

Savant: Where a neurodivergent person demonstrates expert skill or knowledge in a specific area.

Sensory overload/burnout: Many people who are neurodivergent have sensory issues or sensory processing disorders, which can make life overwhelming. This can be anything visually, physically, auditorily, and so on.

Sensory Processing Disorder: A condition characterised by a sensitivity to sensory stimuli and a difference in processing sensory stimuli.

Spectrum: The 'spectrum' refers to the wide-ranging traits and characteristics of autism and highlights how no one autistic person has the same experiences.

Synaesthesia: A condition characterised by an individual's experience of one sensory or cognitive pathway being stimulated and another, unrelated sense, being activated at the same time. E.g. people who can taste colours or see sounds.

Tourette Syndrome/Tourette's Syndrome: A neurological condition characterised by tics and involuntary sounds and movements.

Workplace accommodation: Refers to modifications made to help employees with disabilities or health conditions. It involves adjusting the workplace environment, job duties, or policies to enable employees to perform their roles effectively despite their disabilities or conditions. Unlike adjustments, accommodations are legally required in many countries to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the workplace.

Workplace adjustment: Refers to a broad range of modifications or accommodations made within a work environment. These are made to accommodate an employee's specific needs or requirements. It can encompass various alterations, not only related to disabilities, but also about preferences or circumstances that support an employee's performance or wellbeing. Workplace adjustments can include flexible working hours, equipment, or changes to work processes that benefit any employee, not just those with disabilities.

Executive summary

Neurodiversity is a concept that recognises and respects neurological differences in individuals. It celebrates the idea that neurological variations such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome, and Down syndrome, and others, are a natural part of human diversity. Between 15 and 20% of the global population is estimated to be neurodivergent.

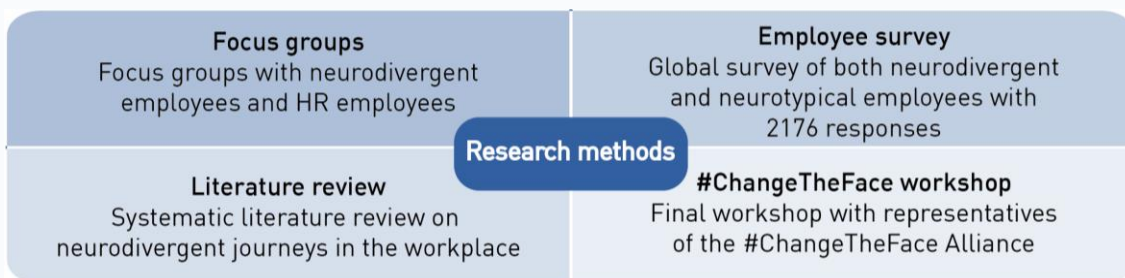
Neurodivergent individuals might process information, learn, and interact with the world in ways that differ from neurotypical individuals. Workplaces are often designed with only neurotypical employees in mind.

Creating inclusive work environments can harness neurodiversity as a competitive advantage. Companies gain benefits by adjusting their approaches to recruit, support, and integrate neurodivergent talent, gaining a range of diverse skills and perspectives. The advantages of inclusivity include enhanced employee retention. As well as this, programmes focused on neurodiversity raise morale and a sense of meaningful work among all employees, boosting overall employee engagement. Cultivating inclusive cultures acts as a magnet for diverse talent, making the company more appealing and attracting a broader range of individuals.

Neurodiversity can also enhance company performance. Diverse teams in inclusive companies yield improved financial results. Focusing on disability inclusion leads to higher profitability, value creation, and shareholder returns. These benefits are in part due to enhanced productivity and innovation since teams with neurodiverse members can be 30% more productive. Neurodiverse teams display higher levels of creative thinking, crucial in dynamic competitive settings, preventing conformity and fostering innovation.

The research

The research methodology consisted of four strands:



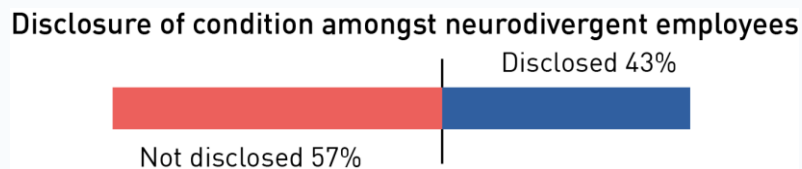
This research uncovers insights and strategies for advancing neurodiversity within the tech sector particularly identifying barriers to accessibility, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. It aims to identify pain points in the experiences of neurodivergent employees and identify company-specific obstacles to systemic change. The study also highlights the risks of underutilising neurodiverse talent. By examining recruitment and retention challenges, the research aims to find ways to support neurodivergent individuals in their career journeys while helping all employees and companies within the tech landscape.

Key findings

The study identified four main themes about the current state of the accessibility in the tech sector and specific needs of neurodivergent employees.

1. **Company culture and environment create barriers for neurodivergent people to disclose their conditions.** Even when they disclose, they are rarely encouraged to seek workplace adjustments.

Disclosure and requesting workplace adjustments are usually down to the relationship between employees and employers, but not disclosing neurodivergent conditions has a negative effect on both sides. Employees who choose not to disclose their neurodivergent condition may find themselves grappling with escalating levels of stress and frustration. And from the employer's standpoint, a lack of comfort in disclosure can translate to diminished engagement and productivity.



A supportive company culture facilitates disclosure. And at the moment, companies still have some distance to travel, with only 43% of neurodivergent employees choosing to disclose their condition. When they did, they more often confided in colleagues, instead of managers, Human Resources (HR), or Occupational Health (OH). The timing of disclosure varied, happening during recruitment, routine work, or high-pressure periods. Reasons for non-disclosure included lack of diagnosis (55%), that the potential outcomes of disclosure weren't worth the risk (53%), concerns about stigma (27%), and fear of career impact (24%).



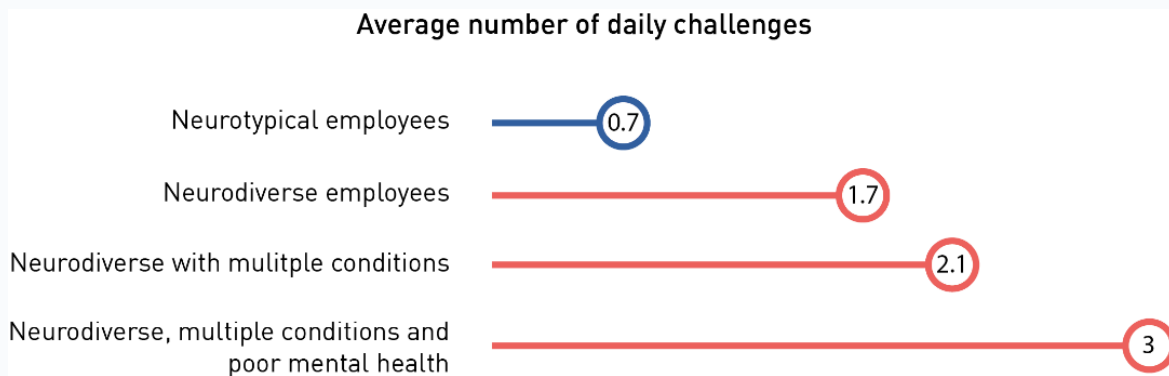
I do not disclose my condition for lack of understanding (generally) how this condition affects people, and fear of not progressing in my career if people find out.
- Neurodivergent employee

Only 9% of neurodivergent employees seek adjustments, with 61% believing they don't need accommodations. Concerns about perception (32%) and uncertainty about needed adjustments (29%) also discourage people from making requests. Of those who sought adjustments, 56% received what they asked for, while 29% received partial accommodations.

2. Company culture and systems can **create challenges** for neurodivergent individuals across their employee journey, from recruitment to daily work life.

It is crucial to create an environment where everyone can thrive. This starts with recruitment but covers all aspects of work from daily working life to job transitions.

Right now, various barriers still exist during the recruitment process, from completing applications to attending interviews. Of the listed challenges in our survey, neurodivergent employees encounter on average more than double the number of recruitment challenges compared to their neurotypical colleagues.



Similarly, there are more work-life barriers to performance for neurodivergent employees compared to neurotypical employees. One in two neurodivergent employees reported feeling overwhelmed by distractions in the office on a regular basis. Other neurodivergent employees expressed a preference for the office environment due to the stimulation it provides when working alongside colleagues, as opposed to working remotely from home. This highlights that not every neurodivergent person feels the same, everyone brings unique strengths and challenges and therefore encounters different work-related challenges.

Neurodivergent employees are over three times more likely to experience issues with adapting to changes in the workplace. It was notable that neurodivergent individuals may require more time to adapt to these changes.

“ In the office there’s so much sensory overload, everything was a distraction. It was breaking me not everyone else.

“ I’ve had to change teams several times. I felt many people were quicker than me in building relationships and I felt put on the side.

The four companies participating in this research have already initiated a variety of initiatives. These range from flexible working arrangements to managerial training and the establishment of employee resource groups (ERGs) that provide peer support for neurodivergent employees. Notably, flexible working was perceived as the most beneficial measure for both the people whose companies had already implemented this practice and those who have not yet seen it in their workplace.

3. Many neurodivergent employees **remain undiagnosed** or have recently received a diagnosis. They require support that isn't contingent on having a formal diagnosis. Neurodivergent individuals dealing with poor mental health and multiple conditions also require additional support.

Neurodiversity encompasses a diverse range of conditions. Even among individuals with the same condition, variations exist. The impact of these conditions on individuals' everyday work lives varies significantly depending on the workplace. Yet it is notable that 46% reported feeling affected most or every day by their condition(s), while only 6% never felt impacted.

The survey analysis found that the number of neurodivergent conditions an employee had, and mental health related to impact on their work lives:

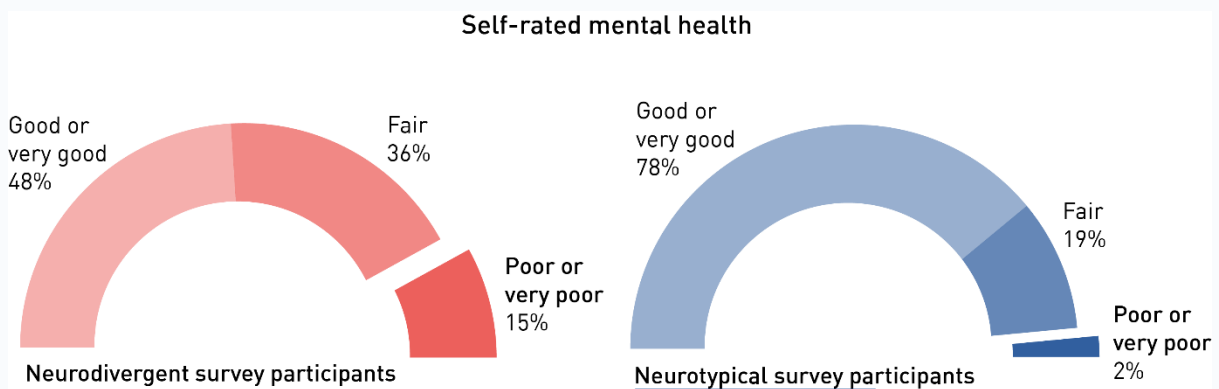
Number of conditions: Individuals with more than one neurodivergent condition reported to be negatively impacted by their condition more often.

Mental health: 68% of those affected daily by their condition reported fair or worse mental health, emphasising the relationship between neurodiversity and mental well-being.

“ I'm awaiting clinical diagnosis for ADHD. I have perimenopause and my ability to mask my personality has diminished. I'm struggling more.

“ Mental health problems go hand-in-hand with my condition. I have RSD (Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria), so any comment feels like a catastrophe.

The survey showed a considerable contrast between neurotypical and neurodivergent employees' mental health ratings, with nearly 4 in 5 neurotypical employees describing their mental health as good or very good, compared to only about 1 in 2 neurodivergent employees.



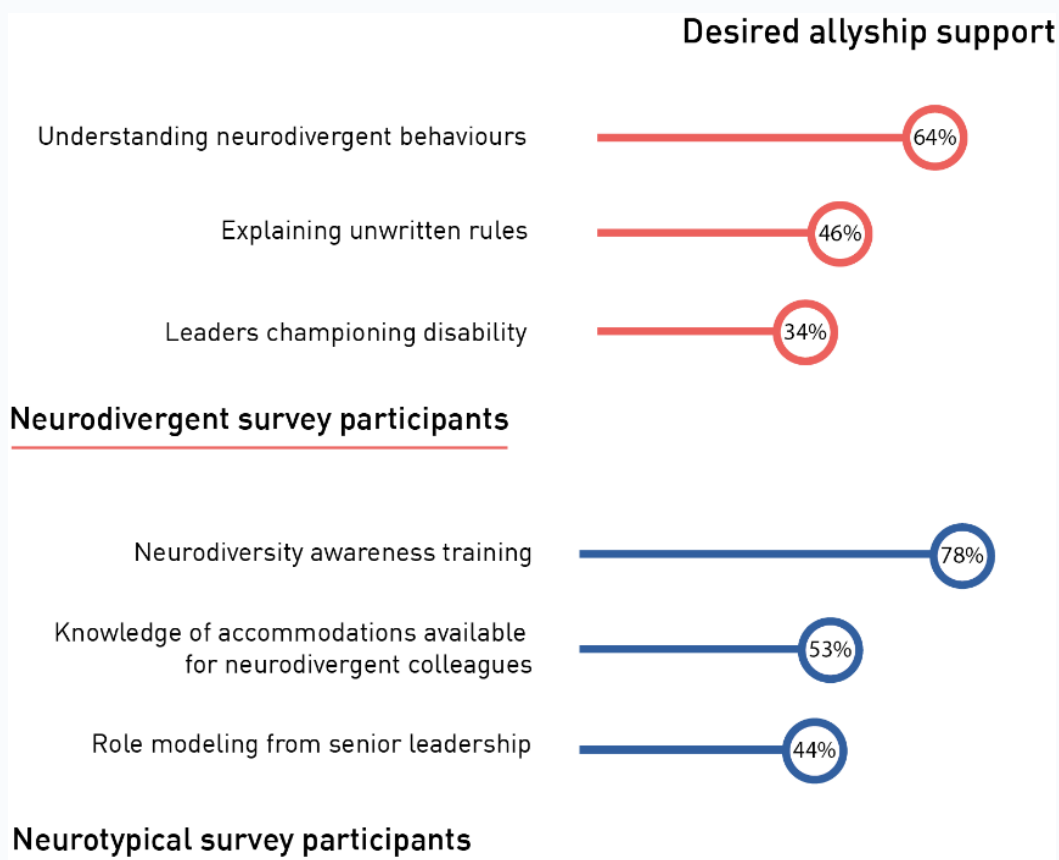
4. There is a need for **more allyship, awareness and understanding of neurodiversity**, to create a safer environment that invites disclosure.

Attitudes toward neurodiversity from colleagues play a crucial role in shaping the experiences and opportunities available to neurodivergent employees. This research revealed instances of good allyship behaviour within participating companies. But it also brought to light the existence of negative attitudes. Some of these perspectives may be attributed to a lack of knowledge and understanding about neurodiversity among neurotypical individuals, as more than half (56%) admitted to having limited or no knowledge of neurodiversity, conditions, and symptoms.

Neurodivergent employees also expressed the desire for more effort from their neurotypical colleagues to engage with neurodiversity and support their colleagues.

“ We have some wonderful people who are keen to drive change and inclusion – I can work from home but in retail you can't. Asking for questions in advance, creates equity, you have a group driving that forward, but the people on the ground don't always know how to do those things.

Similarly, neurotypical individuals asked for greater support from their companies to assist them in supporting their neurodivergent colleagues. Overall, both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals align on the need for enhanced education and awareness to help drive better allyship behaviours in the workplace.



Recommendations

What next? We offer a three-stage approach:

- **Build** (relatively low-cost initiatives to establish a baseline and raise awareness)
- **Reinforce** (higher effort programmes to enhance what's working)
- **Accelerate** (systemic actions to embed and sustain change)



Companies can engage with neurodiversity effectively by emphasising **supportive allyship** across all areas, **embedding adjustments** within workplace norms, and recognising the collective benefits of these adjustments for **all employees**.

1. Introduction

An introduction to the research, including the benefits of hiring and employing neurodivergent employees, the problem the research was set up to address, what research was conducted and the key findings.

What is meant by neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a concept that recognises and respects neurological differences in individuals. It celebrates the idea that neurological variations such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome, and Down syndrome, and others, are a natural part of human diversity. Between 15 and 20% of the global population is estimated to be neurodivergent.² Even within a particular category of neurodiversity, such as autism, there is no single type; people exhibit characteristics across a spectrum.

Neurodivergent individuals might process information, learn, and interact with the world in ways that differ from neurotypical individuals.

Some neurodivergent people may excel in specific skills such as pattern recognition, memory, or computational tasks, as well as in creativity and unconventional thinking. Others may experience challenges associated with their neurodivergence that could be improved through reasonable adjustments at work.³

Most research on neurological differences is carried out using a 'deficit' framework, focusing on what is 'missing'. Our research takes a strengths-based approach to imply that with the right inclusive company culture, neurodiversity can be a competitive advantage for companies, and lead to higher levels of innovation and productivity for all employees.

Companies can get substantial benefits by adjusting their processes to recruit, support, and integrate neurodiverse talent. This includes gaining access to a broader range of employee talents and diverse perspectives, ultimately enhancing their competitive advantage.⁴ The company benefits fall into two categories: enhanced inclusivity and improved performance.

² Doyle, N. (2020). Neurodiversity at work: a biopsychosocial model and the impact on working adults. *British Medical Bulletin*, 135(1), 108.

³ Baron-Cohen, S., Ashwin, E., Ashwin, C., Tavassoli, T., & Chakrabarti, B. (2009). Talent in autism: Hyper-systemizing, hyper-attention to detail and sensory hypersensitivity. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 364(1522), 1377–1383.

⁴ Austin, R. D., & Pisano, G. P. (2017). Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage. *Harvard Business Review*, 95(3), 96-103.

The benefits of enhanced inclusivity

A neurodiverse and inclusive culture improves employee retention, engagement, and talent attraction.

Employee retention: Neurodivergent employees exhibit notably lower turnover rates compared to neurotypical employees. Microsoft, SAP, JPMorgan Chase, and EY – which run four of the largest U.S. neurodiverse hiring programs – report a retention rate of more than 90%.⁵

Employee engagement: Companies that have implemented initiatives focusing on neurodiversity, Microsoft’s Neurodiversity Hiring Programme, discovered that neurotypical employees working in areas affected by these programmes perceive their work as “more meaningful” and report higher morale as a result.⁶

Talent attraction: Inclusion welcomes more diversity. A 2022 Glassdoor study found that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) “matters for the majority of employees and job seekers across age groups, but it matters more for younger employees, women, and people of colour.”⁷

Neurodiversity boosts company performance

Financial performance: Within inclusive companies, diversity is associated with improved financial performance. Having a diverse team gives companies a wider variety of perspectives and can lead to more creative problem-solving. Research in the US found that companies advancing disability inclusion are achieving higher-than-average gains in profitability, value creation, and shareholder returns.⁸

Productivity and innovation: Teams with neurodivergent professionals in some roles can be 30% more productive than those without them.⁹

Research has found that autistic employees “have a greater than typical/average for processing information even from rapid presentations and are better able to detect information defined as ‘critical.’”¹⁰ A case study by JPMorgan Chase found that professionals

⁵ Spellane, B. (2021, March 21). *Beautiful Minds*. Leader’s Edge.

<https://www.leadersedge.com/industry/beautiful-minds>

⁶ Austin, R.D & Pisano, (2017). *Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage*. Harvard Business Review.

<https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage>

⁷ Terrazas, A. (2002, November 29). *Who cares about diversity, equity and inclusion?*. Glassdoor.

<https://www.glassdoor.com/research/who-cares-about-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>

⁸ Jerdee, C. (2019, April 23). *What companies gain by including persons with disabilities*. World Economic Forum.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/what-companies-gain-including-persons-disabilities-inclusion/>

⁹ Mahto, M., Hogan, S.K., Hatfield, S., & Sniderman, B. (2022, January 18). *A rising tide lifts all boats*.

Deloitte Insights. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace.html>

¹⁰ Wellcome Trust (2012, March 22). *People with autism possess greater ability to process information, study suggests*.

<https://wellcome.org/press-release/people-autism-have-greater-ability-process-information-study-suggests>

in its Autism at Work initiative made fewer errors and were 90% to 140% more productive than neurotypical employees.¹¹

While working with people of similar backgrounds may feel more comfortable, it can lead to the risk of conformity and groupthink.¹² Forming teams that encompass a diverse set of skills, perspectives and ways of thinking can boost creativity. One study found that adults with ADHD demonstrated higher levels of original creative thinking and showed a stronger inclination toward idea generation.¹³ These abilities – to boost productivity and find new solutions to business problems – are vital for teams in an ever-changing competitive environment.

About the study

Neurodiversity in the Tech Sector is the largest global tech workplace study on neurodiversity to date. The #ChangeTheFace Alliance, supported by members Colt, Nokia, Samsung, and Vodafone, commissioned Inner Ambitions and the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations to conduct research aimed toward generating insights and actions to advance neurodiversity in the tech sector.

What we already know

Following the social model of disability, we know that neurodivergent people's challenges are created by a workplace environment filled with physical, attitudinal, and social barriers that exclude neurodivergent people from fully participating in work life. Real neurodiverse accessibility, equity, and inclusion in the workplace mean removing these barriers, so people are not impaired by their neurodivergent conditions. This research explicitly focuses on accessibility as a framework to better understand how workplaces can optimise for engaging and supporting neurodivergent employees.

What we don't know

What are the cultural and environmental barriers to neurodiverse inclusion? To know what actions to take and drive change, we sought to gain deeper insights into the pain points in neurodivergent employees' experiences and the company cultural and environmental barriers that hinder support.

How can companies take a more proactive and systemic approach? Whilst we know that neurodivergent employees' needs are often met in an ad hoc, piecemeal way, the companies

¹¹ Waldmeir, P. (2020, March 17). *Overlooked workers gain appeal in challenging times*. Financial times. <https://www.ft.com/content/ea9ca374-6780-11ea-800d-da70cff6e4d3>

¹² Hennessey, J. (2023, January 19). *The Benefits Of A Neurodiverse Workforce*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2023/01/19/the-benefits-of-a-neurodiverse-workforce/>

¹³ White, H. A., & Shah, P. (2011). Creative style and achievement in adults with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 50(5), 673–677. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2010.12.015>

involved in this study sought recommendations that point toward a structured, proactive, and systemic approach to change.

What's at risk

Losing out on talent and further social inequity and exclusion. Whilst neurodivergent people add value to the tech sector, they are still chronically underemployed in the population at large, a situation that leads to poorer quality of life, with accompanying declines in cognitive function and general well-being. The cascading effects of unemployment include financial insecurity, poor self-esteem, less ability to live independently, and lower community participation.¹⁴ So this study focuses on recruitment and retention issues in depth.

A win-win for individuals and companies. Understanding the pinch points in neurodivergent employees' journeys, from recruitment to career advancement, will not only help neurodivergent people find, develop, and retain careers in the tech sector, but will ultimately help all employees and companies to progress and thrive in a competitive environment.

Methodology

This research employed four methods: literature review, focus groups, a global employee survey, and #ChangeTheFace Alliance workshops. The literature review used strict criteria to find past research that addressed neurodiversity in the tech sector or other industries, identifying 54 documents of which the 28 top-scoring items were given further analysis. The focus groups were conducted with neurodivergent employees from across the four companies who took part in the study – Colt, Nokia, Samsung, and Vodafone – with an additional focus group for HR employees. These focus groups were used to identify the potential issues and solutions to better engage and integrate neurodivergent employees. All indented quotes are from focus group participants unless otherwise stated.

We also conducted a large-scale global survey of both neurodivergent and neurotypical employees across Colt, Nokia, Samsung, and Vodafone, with a total of 2,176 completed responses, the most of any neurodiversity-focused survey in the tech sector.¹⁵ The sample consisted of 1,425 neurotypical respondents, 469 neurodivergent respondents, 93 individuals who identified as neurodivergent without a condition, and 189 respondents who were either unsure about their neurodiversity status or preferred not to disclose it within the survey. The number of responses per company ranged from 385 to 612.¹⁶ More details are found in the [Appendix](#).

¹⁴ Dunn, S., Wittevrongel, K., & Zwicker, J. (2018). How do we boost employment outcomes for neurodiverse Albertans?. *SPP Research Paper*, (10/5).

¹⁵ We excluded responses that did not complete at least the first survey block.

¹⁶ It is important to note that this survey is not a representative survey of the tech sector or the four companies as the survey was conducted across multiple countries and an opportunity sampling approach was used.¹⁶ The survey primarily focusses on neurodiversity. While it does ask about specific conditions, the research did not intend to make comparisons among all conditions but rather to compare the experience of neurodivergent and neurotypical employees.

Finally, we conducted a workshop exploring the results, gaps, and implications for the companies involved in the #ChangeTheFace Alliance and the wider tech sector which are written into this report.

Main research findings

This research has four main findings which are each explored in the next four chapters:

1. **A hidden issue: the politics of disclosure and workplace adjustments**: Company culture and environment create barriers for neurodivergent people to disclose their conditions. Even when they disclose, they are rarely encouraged to seek workplace adjustments.
2. **The impact of company culture and workplace environment**: Company culture and systems can create challenges for neurodivergent individuals across their employee journey, from recruitment to daily work life.
3. **Unknown quantities: a complex group in need of support**: Many neurodivergent employees remain undiagnosed or have recently received a diagnosis. As a result, they require support that isn't contingent upon having a formal diagnosis. Neurodivergent individuals dealing with poor mental health or multiple conditions also require additional support.
4. **Allies wanted**: There is a need for more allyship, awareness and understanding of neurodiversity, to create a safer environment that invites disclosure.

The report concludes with three stages of [recommendations](#), organised by objectives:

- **Stage 1 (Build)**: setting an immediate baseline for raising awareness and supporting neurodivergent employees.
- **Stage 2 (Reinforce)**: reinforcing and advancing effective change initiatives.
- **Stage 3 (Accelerate)**: embedding, scaling, and sustaining a neurodiverse inclusive culture.

2. A hidden issue: the politics of disclosure and workplace adjustments

Discussion of the low rate of disclosure of neurodivergent conditions, the lack of reasonable adaptations in the tech sector, and the reasons for this.

The rate of disclosure in the tech sector

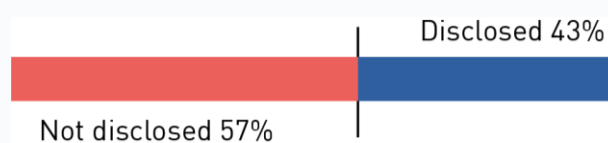
Prior research on disclosure indicates that when an environment does not encourage disclosure, neurodivergent employees are unlikely to disclose their neurodivergent condition, leading to consequences for both employees and employers.

If employees do not disclose, they might miss out on support they require. They also face increasing levels of stress and frustration, feeling forced to 'wear a mask' when at work.¹⁷ Masking to conform to neurotypical standards, via modifying behaviour or hiding aspects of one's neurodivergent identity, can cause burnout, impacting well-being and productivity. The survey found that neurodivergent respondents were five times more likely to hide crucial aspects of their identity regularly compared to neurotypical respondents. Being unable to freely display any symptoms of their condition due to the fear of stigma may also have an impact on mental health, morale and sense of belonging.

Simultaneously, from an employer's perspective, employees who face barriers to disclosing will be less engaged and productive.¹⁸ Since in most cases, there is no legal or professional duty for employees to disclose that they are neurodivergent, disclosure is much more a matter of creating a culture of inclusion so that people feel comfortable to speak up about their needs, thereby reducing the stress or need to mask. The Equal Tech report suggests that over 4 in 5 neurodivergent workers feel worried, nervous, and fearful about having conversations with their employers regarding their neurodiversity.¹⁹

Our research suggests that only 43% of people with a neurodivergent condition have disclosed, meaning that 57% have not told anyone in their company about their condition.²⁰

Figure 1 Disclosure amongst neurodivergent employees



Note: N=467

¹⁷ Reese, H. (2022, November 1). *How tech hiring managers can embrace neurodiversity*.

TechRepublic. <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/tech-hiring-managers-embrace-neurodiversity/>

¹⁸ McDowall, A., Doyle, N., & Kiseleva, M. (2023). Neurodiversity at work: demand, supply and a gap analysis. <https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/media/109514758/neurodiversity-in-business-birkbeck-university-of-london.pdf>

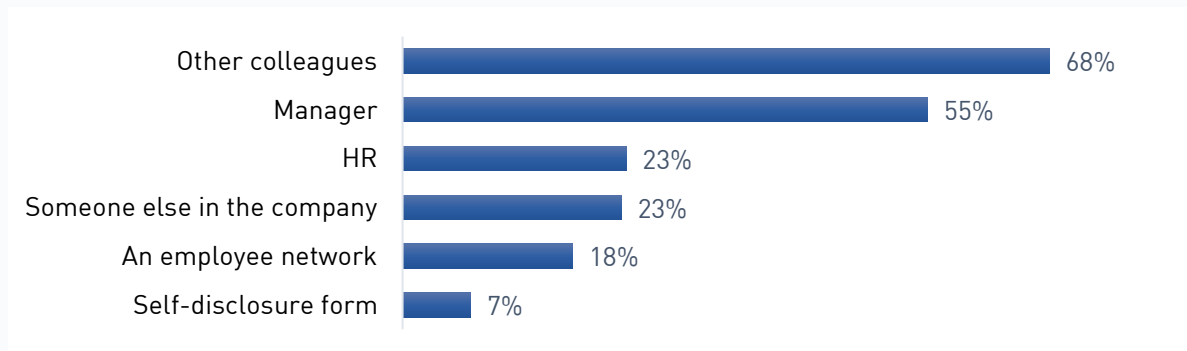
¹⁹ Sparta Global (2023). EqualTech report 2023: How neurodiverse individuals bring in-demand perspectives to tech. <https://sparta-marketing.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/Equal+Tech+Report+2023+-+FINAL+220223.pdf>

²⁰ Excluding 7 responses who stated 'prefer not to say'.

It has previously been reported that, in the tech industry, the disclosure rate is likely to be around 60%.²¹ Our research shows that disclosure is a larger issue than expected.

Of those who have disclosed their condition, it was most common to disclose to other colleagues (68%). This was followed by disclosure to managers (55%). Self-disclosure forms were the least likely mode of disclosure (7%). It is also notable that employee networks (18%) were nearly as popular to disclose to as HR (23%). Nearly half (49%) who disclosed, did so via more than one route which suggests that disclosure is a continual process.

Figure 2 Disclosure of neurodivergent condition(s) to person/entity



Note. N=196; multiple responses possible.

Why people don't disclose

Workplace disclosure is a difficult scenario for many neurodivergent people. Some previous research on autistic adults in the UK found that workplace disclosure did not always result in a positive outcome, so many employees preferred to keep their diagnosis private where possible.²² Other existing research suggested that the main barrier to disclosing neurodiversity was fear of stigma or discrimination.²³

The most common reasons for non-disclosure in this tech sector survey were that employees did not have a formal diagnosis (55%) or they did not see the value in disclosing (53%). On the surface, this is a good sign that at least fear of stigma or retaliation is not driving non-disclosure in the tech sector.

²¹ Universal Music (2019). *Creative Differences: A handbook for embracing neurodiversity in the creative industries*. Universal Music UK: London, UK. <https://www.umusic.co.uk/Creative-Differences-Handbook.pdf>

²² Romualdez, A. M., Walker, Z., & Remington, A. (2021). Autistic adults' experiences of diagnostic disclosure in the workplace: Decision-making and factors associated with outcomes. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, 6, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23969415211022955>

²³ McDowall, A., Doyle, N., & Kiseleva, M. (2023). Neurodiversity at work: demand, supply and a gap analysis. <https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/media/109514758/neurodiversity-in-business-birkbeck-university-of-london.pdf>

Figure 3 Reasons for not disclosing condition(s)



Note. N=264; multiple responses possible.

For many people, the findings mean that the workplace culture and environment do not encourage self-disclosure. One study participant reported that they rarely disclose because there is no right opportunity or setting to proactively disclose their neurodivergence at work. And when they do, it's often to a trusted colleague whom they suspect already knows they are neurodivergent.

One participant voiced the lack of visibility of neurodiversity, the low levels of awareness amongst colleagues, and unclear benefits, as reasons why disclosing to the company is risky and uncertain:

“ It feels like [disclosure] complicates that relationship between me and the organisation. Having a label is useful in my self-understanding, but I don't know how helpful it would be to the organisation. There's a general workplace lack of visibility for neurodivergence.... I don't know what situation I would find myself in to put [my condition] into a conversation.

Still, there are a substantial number of employees who don't disclose out of fear of discrimination as well as ignorance of colleagues:

“ I do not disclose my condition for lack of understanding (generally) how this condition affects people, and fear of not progressing in my career if people find out.

When and why people disclose

The circumstances around disclosure varied in this study; disclosure either occurred early on during the recruitment process, ordinary work life, or big company transitions, like the shift to remote work spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic. One company prompted a participant to proactively disclose via a form during the recruitment process:

“ In the application process you can disclose and ask for adjustments. You can say what's working well for your neurodivergent condition and mental health conditions.

Others shared that they disclosed during the recruitment process, when asked to do an unsuitable task (e.g., psychometric testing or a time-boxed presentation). Notably, two recruitment disclosures were met with different company responses. One was offered an adjustment on the spot, whilst the other participant's disclosure was not held in mind nor supported.

In the focus groups, neurodivergent employees suggested that they are more likely to disclose during daily work life as a reaction to work pressures (such as suboptimal meeting times or to decline a task like notetaking) rather than self-disclose because they are proactively prompted by their company.

Surprisingly, while few participants admitted to proactively disclosing, the survey data found that most of those who did disclose were met with support. Three in four employees who disclosed to their employer felt at least moderately supported and 13% even felt extremely supported. For those less supported, 16% felt slightly supported and just 9% felt not supported at all when disclosing.

So, if companies are willing to offer support if employees disclose, what helps neurodivergent employees to make their condition known?

What helps disclosure

In some cases, participants reported that the business area and company culture can make the decision to disclose easier:

“ The size of the office, which part of tech are we looking at and how relevant is it in the workplace, how hierarchical the company is.... These are all factors.

Some participants reported that working in more creative areas (like design) or with younger people, due to assumptions that younger people are more accepting of neurodiversity, also helped.

Some people disclosed as they felt encouraged to seek help. One focus group participant mentioned how important it was that their employer helped them get a diagnosis via their private healthcare. This then enabled them to ask for adjustments:

“ The attitude of [my company] was that I should seek help but others, including some of my family, don't understand.

In most cases, disclosure was never a one and done process. Neurodivergent employees go through multiple disclosures, with continuous conversations after their first disclosure. Continual disclosure is a difficult process to go through but made necessary due to company processes and the nature of working across groups: no company included records of who had disclosed neurodivergent conditions, putting the responsibility on employees to continuously share.

What hinders disclosure

In addition to the reasons raised by the survey such as not having a formal diagnosis (55%) and not seeing the value in disclosing (53%), other explanations of why neurodivergent employees don't disclose or ask for adjustments include: not knowing what support is available, feeling overwhelmed or intimidated by the process of asking for adjustments, general stigma of neurodiversity, or simply not encountering the right moment to disclose.

Still one participant suggested that it is often easier to disclose and get support for a mental health condition rather than disclose a neurodivergent one because it doesn't carry the same stigma and is perceived as merely temporary.

“ I've never really disclosed (my neurodiversity) in a working environment. I once disclosed depression in a previous job. This research might help me and other neurodivergent people. ADHD/ASD aren't discussed in the same way as mental health is, as it's more a characteristic of you. Neurodiversity feels more personal... it's not something that has the potential to be changed.

Lastly, one participant suggested that there is not a right moment to disclose, nor felt comfortable enough to disclose proactively. To add further nuance to this view, they felt that disclosure would perhaps do more harm than good and suggested that the type of neurodiverse condition played a role too.

And still, few who disclose also ask for adjustments

Only 9% of neurodivergent employees requested an adjustment or support, just 41 people in our sample of nearly 500 neurodivergent employees.²⁴ The vast majority of neurodivergent employees who asked for adjustments had also disclosed their condition.

This rate is concerning since, in most cases, adjustments can help neurodivergent employees to perform better. For employers, the cost of most interventions is either nothing or very low cost, such as allowing flexible working, exemption from certain interactions, or technology such as noise-cancelling headphones. Reasonable adjustments can allow neurodivergent employees to perform at their best.

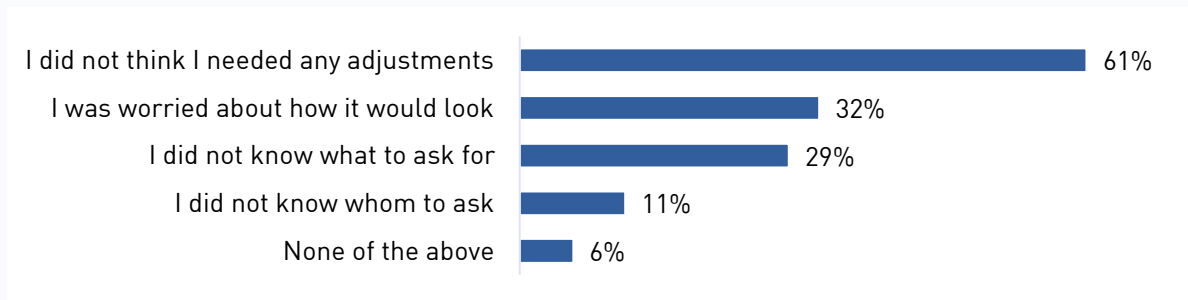
Why is the rate of adjustment requests so low?

According to the survey data, the most common reason why people didn't request an adjustment was because they didn't think they needed any (61%). Also, about one-third were worried about how it would look (32%) or didn't know what to ask for (29%). Whilst neurodivergent employees often believe there isn't support available or asking for it would have negative repercussions,²⁵ in most cases neurodivergent people feel like mainstream resources for employees are sufficient for them to do their work.

²⁴ Excluding 14 responses who stated 'prefer not to say'.

²⁵ Sparta Global (2023). EqualTech report 2023: How neurodiverse individuals bring in-demand perspectives to tech. <https://sparta-marketing.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/Equal+Tech+Report+2023+-+FINAL+220223.pdf>; Heasman, B., Livesey, A., Walker, A., Pellicano, E., & Remington, A. (2020). *DARE report on adjustments*. Centre for Research in Autism and Education, Institute of Education, UCL, London, UK. <https://dareuk.org/dare-adjustments-toolkit>

Figure 4 Reasons for not requesting adjustments



Note. N=413; multiple responses possible.

Adjustments during recruitment

Requests for adjustments often coincide with disclosure during the hiring process. However, it's important to note that making a request for an adjustment doesn't always guarantee that the adjustment will be provided. In one example, an applicant was allowed to skip psychometric tests:

“ I remember the hiring process well. The thing I found concerning was psychometric testing, like naming emotions. I told the company about my condition, and they let me skip that.

In other cases, disclosing during the hiring process did not lead to the expected adjustments:

“ During the interview process you had to do presentations within an hour. The last interview, I told them I was (neurodivergent) at the beginning of the process and they said that was fine, but they did not allow me [extra] time to process the information for the presentation.

Adjustments in context and practice

There are a few reasons why adjustments aren't always successful. Two stand out however: social pushback without a diagnosis and lack of confidence around how to support neurodivergent employees with adjustments.

Because of workplace culture, meeting norms, and the general challenges of group dynamics, neurodivergent employees may still meet resistance around their company-approved adjustment. For instance, even when a neurodivergent employee requests an adjustment to support their effectiveness at work (e.g., a meeting exemption), they may still have to defend and justify the adjustment.

“ I have a reasonable adjustment, which is great on paper, but I have to disclose and defend myself when people ask.

The low rate of diagnosing neurodivergent conditions, explored in [Chapter 4](#), may explain why not all adjustments are granted or successful after approval: of the 41 neurodivergent people in our sample who requested adjustments, only 56% (23 people) received what they requested and 29% (12 people) partially.

The second reason adjustments might not be welcomed or successful is that employers feel insecure about supporting neurodivergent employees.²⁶ This lack of confidence means that in most cases, there is little information available on what support is available to neurodivergent employees. This makes the process of asking personally risky:

“ I don't know what support is available, and I'm not comfortable enough to ask for it. It's partly fear but also, I'm new in the organisation.

In cases where employers offer tailored support the positive effect on morale and performance can be enormous:

“ [My company] are very supportive at managerial level, I'm very lucky. My manager is very flexible, I was glad I went through with telling my manager about my condition.... From a managerial point of view, they help by giving me more creative tasks. And if I need to go to a psychiatrist, they don't mind if I get my work done. We have an understanding.

Implications for the sector

Companies should facilitate an environment encouraging disclosure without the need for formal acknowledgment, as proactive disclosure remains low. Creating a psychologically safe culture through neurodiversity awareness training and supportive practices is crucial. Most disclosures occur reactively amid high-stress work demands, indicating the need for trust-based environments that prompt proactive disclosure. Encouraging disclosure is vital, considering the majority disclose to colleagues rather than management, emphasising the importance of peer neurodiversity awareness for enhancing the daily experiences of neurodivergent employees. Moreover, only a small fraction (9%) of neurodivergent employees request adjustments or support, potentially resulting in heightened stress from masking, indicating the necessity of promoting a culture where disclosure is acceptable despite prevalent stigmas and career concerns (27% and 24%, respectively).

Whilst multiple US-based surveys show that about 60% of workplace adjustments for disabilities (beyond neurodiversity) cost absolutely nothing or are very cost-effective, such as a quiet corner for focused work, or more time during interviews, what this research implies, is that many of the adjustments that would support neurodiversity equity and inclusion are rooted in company culture and require making changes to human behaviour. For example, changes to work processes, such as sending materials in advance, facilitating focused group discussions that minimise ambiguous language and check for clarity in the group, learning to give/receive feedback with neurodiversity in mind, and supporting neurodivergent colleagues with change, whether related to project direction, role adjustments, team additions, or changes in work procedures, would benefit all employees.

²⁶ Weber, C., Krieger, B., Häne, E., Yarker, J., & McDowall, A. (2022). Physical workplace adjustments to support neurodivergent workers: A systematic review. *Applied Psychology*.

In addition, establishing transparent and comprehensive support not only benefits neurodivergent individuals but also extends advantages to neurotypical employees, enhancing motivation and productivity through adjustments designed for diverse needs.

3. The impact of company culture and workplace environment

Discussion of the challenges neurodivergent employees face across various stages, from recruitment and induction to daily working life and job transitions.

How we understand neurodiversity in the workplace

The term 'neurodiversity' was originally influenced by the social model of disability.²⁷ This model doesn't view neurodivergent individuals as impaired because of their conditions. Instead the social model recognises that societal structures, processes, and attitudes are disabling individuals, creating barriers for them to take part in society. In contrast, the medical model located disability within the individual and focused on 'fixing' the individual to fit with society. Using the social model we see that the individual is not disabled, but the environment is disabling.²⁸

In a workplace context, the social model implies that we should reflect on how the workplace excludes neurodivergent employees from fully engaging in work life. Policies and practices should be shaped to accommodate the needs of neurodivergent employees, to create an environment and culture where everyone can participate and thrive.

Recruitment and induction

Previous research highlights some of the obstacles individuals with neurodiverse conditions face when workplaces are not inclusive. Processes are usually designed by and for neurotypical people, as early as at the hiring stage. The Equal Tech report illustrates that there is often only little support during the recruitment process. The majority of neurodivergent employees who took part in their survey expressed dissatisfaction with the efforts made by companies across different sectors to improve the recruitment of neurodivergent employees. Only 21% of their survey respondents indicated that workplaces tailored recruitment practices to neurodivergent candidates.²⁹ An illustration of a non-inclusive practice are open questions during an interview. These disadvantage autistic individuals who often take literal meanings first and may struggle to interpret implicit meanings.³⁰

²⁷ Doyle, N. (2020). Neurodiversity at work: a biopsychosocial model and the impact on working adults. *British Medical Bulletin*, 135(1), 108.

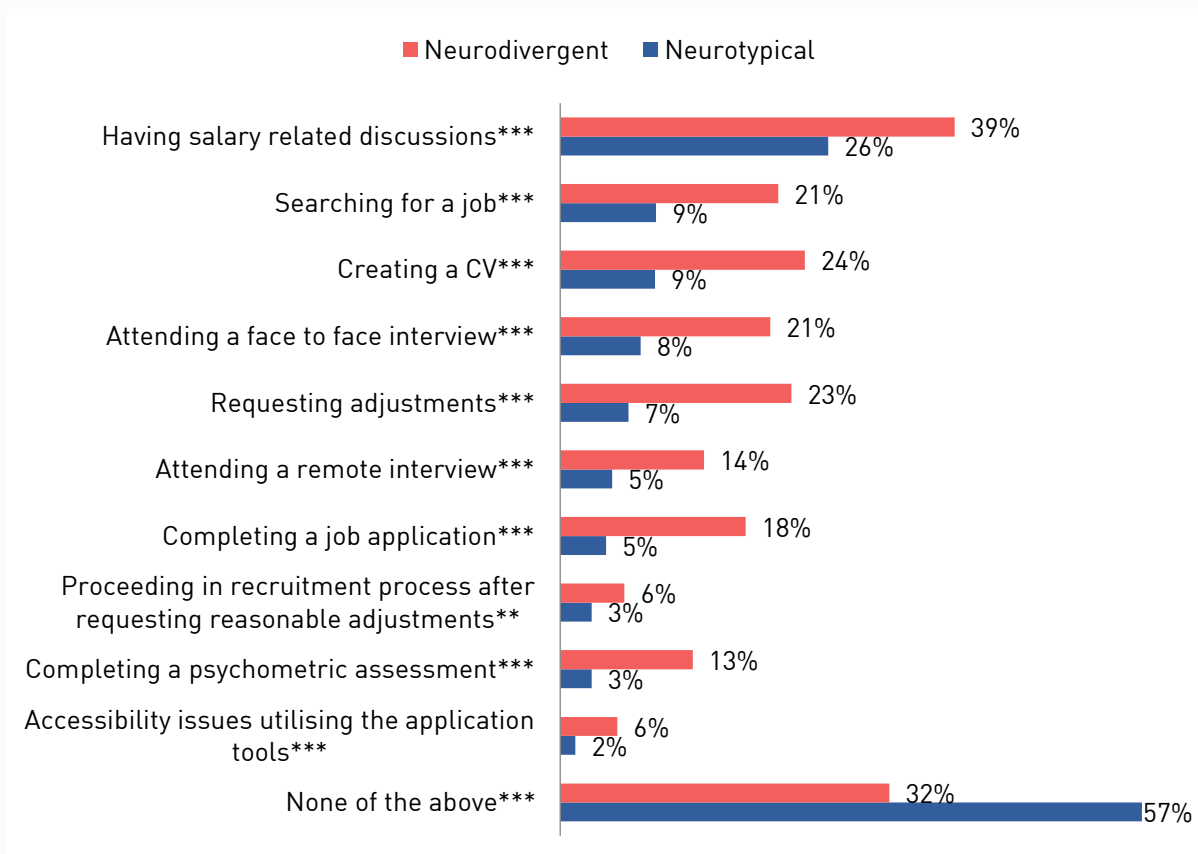
²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sparta Global (2023). EqualTech report 2023: How neurodiverse individuals bring in-demand perspectives to tech. <https://sparta-marketing.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/Equal+Tech+Report+2023+-+FINAL+220223.pdf>

³⁰ Lup, D, & Canonico E. (2020). *Are recruiting practices throwing away neurodiverse talent?* LSE Business Review. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2020/03/03/are-recruiting-practices-throwing-away-neurodiverse-talent/>

The broader implication is that employers exclude neurodivergent individuals or create additional barriers for these individuals because they don't adapt their hiring processes to accommodate and support neurodivergent professionals. In fact, a recent survey by The Institute of Leadership & Management among UK companies showed that most UK managers would not hire neurodivergent talent.³¹

Figure 5 Challenges when applying for a job in the current company by neurodiversity group



Note. $N=469$ and $N=1425$; multiple responses possible; asterisks indicate significance level * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

Our research supports and deepens previous research. Various barriers still exist during the recruitment process, from completing applications to attending interviews (see Figure 5). When examining all the potential challenges during recruitment that were listed in the survey, neurodivergent employees encountered more difficulties than neurotypical people, on average 1.8 compared to 0.8.³² Looking at all job search and application processes separately reveals a consistent pattern: neurodivergent individuals found each stage challenging than neurotypical individuals.³³ Notably, having salary related discussions was

³¹ The Institute of Leadership (2020). *Half of all leaders and managers would not employ a neurodivergent person*. <https://leadership.global/resourceLibrary/half-of-all-leaders-and-managers-would-not-employ-a-neurodivergent-person.html>

³² $p < .001$.

³³ $p < .01$.

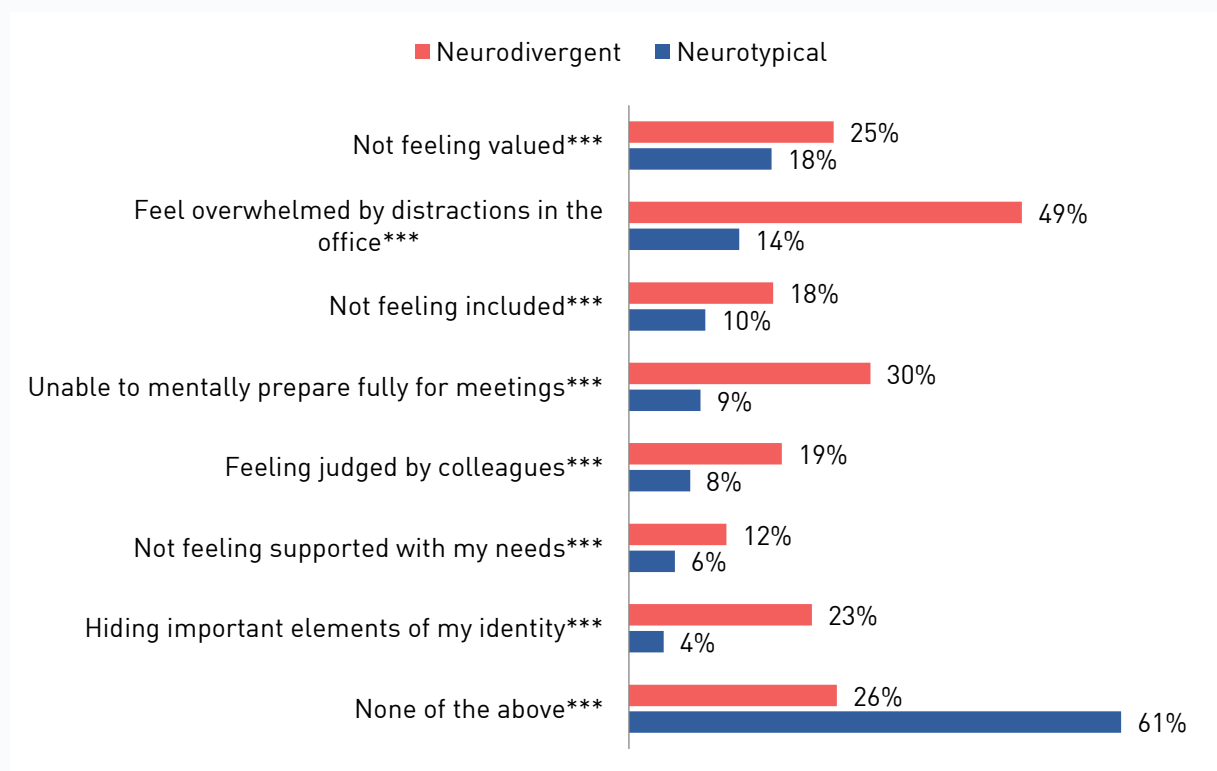
most commonly experienced as a challenge, with 39% of neurodivergent employees and 26% of neurotypical employees considering this a challenge.

The most substantial difference between neurodivergent and neurotypical employees was found in completing psychometric assessments and completing job applications, with neurodivergent employees being four times more likely to have found this challenging when applying for their current company.³⁴ It is worth noting that these percentages might be a conservative estimate. All individuals who participated in the survey were actually hired by the company they completed the questions about; the survey does not include the views of those who applied but were not selected and might have experienced an even greater number of challenges.

Daily challenges

Following on from the discussion of the recruitment phase, this research also offers additional insights into the nature and extent of challenges neurodivergent employees face in their work environment (both in office and working from home), in contrast to their neurotypical colleagues.

Figure 6 Experiences on a regular basis at the current company by neurodiversity group



Note. $N=469$ and $N=1425$; multiple responses possible; asterisks indicate significance level * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

Neurodivergent employees have a greater number of challenging experiences related to their psychological well-being and interactions with colleagues. On average, neurodivergent

³⁴ $p < .001$.

employees encounter 1.7 of the listed challenges on a regular basis at their current company, as shown in Figure 6 compared to 0.6 experiences for neurotypical employees.³⁵

Our analysis shows that neurodivergent employees are **more likely to experience each workplace challenge** compared to neurotypical employees.³⁶ Among these experiences, the most common workplace challenge for neurodivergent colleagues is the feeling of being overwhelmed by distractions either in the office or vis-a-vis their virtual work environment, with one in two experiencing that on a regular basis.

In the office

The focus group discussions delved deeper into the importance of the in-office work environment and the impact of poorly functioning IT systems, open-plan offices, centralised HVAC, and hotdesking.

Some neurodivergent employees expressed frustration working in the office due to poorly functioning office IT systems, which may suggest that it is more disruptive (or noteworthy) to neurodivergent employees:

“ The office mandate is time wasted. Nothing works in the office: banned systems... and the internet is poor.

Others highlighted a reduced ability to concentrate and that open-plan office layouts could be overwhelming. These layouts increase the chance of visual distractions and noise disturbances, and temperature regulation is more difficult.

“ Offices weren't built with neurodiversity in mind at all, it's always been hotdesking which is tricky for a lot of people with disabilities... I had an autistic breakdown the last time I went in as there were no desks that weren't near agile spaces.

On the other hand, some neurodivergent employees preferred the structure of the office environment and the stimulation it offers of working alongside colleagues. For instance, an employee with ADHD explained that their condition hinders them when working from home, as they are easily distracted when working on their own and prefer to be in the same room with colleagues.

“ Being at home too much is not good for me. I'm distracted at home; I can even play games. I have less control and need stimulation.

Lastly, some participants expressed a deeper wish for reflection (by peers, managers, and senior leaders) on how a work task aligns with the setting to reconsider policies such as mandated in-office days and whether forced engagement is productive.

³⁵ $p < .001$.

³⁶ $p < .001$.

Working remotely

During the focus group discussions, the value of flexible work arrangements was primarily centred on remote work, as opposed to flexible hours or flexitime. Neurodivergent employees emphasised various advantages of working from home, such as having better control over their sensory environment, increased concentration, and greater ease in approaching colleagues:

“ I’ve worked from home for more than 16 years. It allows me to focus and concentrate on the job at hand. As soon as people move about my eyes wander around. I can’t even write an email.

Discussions highlighted diversity among neurodivergent individuals, acknowledging their differing preferences. For some, technology played a vital role in supporting their daily work, such as auto-scheduling and facilitating notetaking through transcription functions:

“ The technology helps. I’m vowel blind. Dyslexia is easier to cope with due to technology, we all have the best technology out there.

For others, excessive reliance on technology can pose challenges in terms of managing workloads:

“ The pandemic led to the rise of Teams, which is helpful in some ways, but I find it difficult to manage and stay on top of emails, WhatsApp, and calls. It’s too much overload.

Some reported difficulty in navigating the group dynamics of virtual meetings, particularly that people were suspicious around disabling cameras and automatic transcription.

Adapting to changes in the workplace

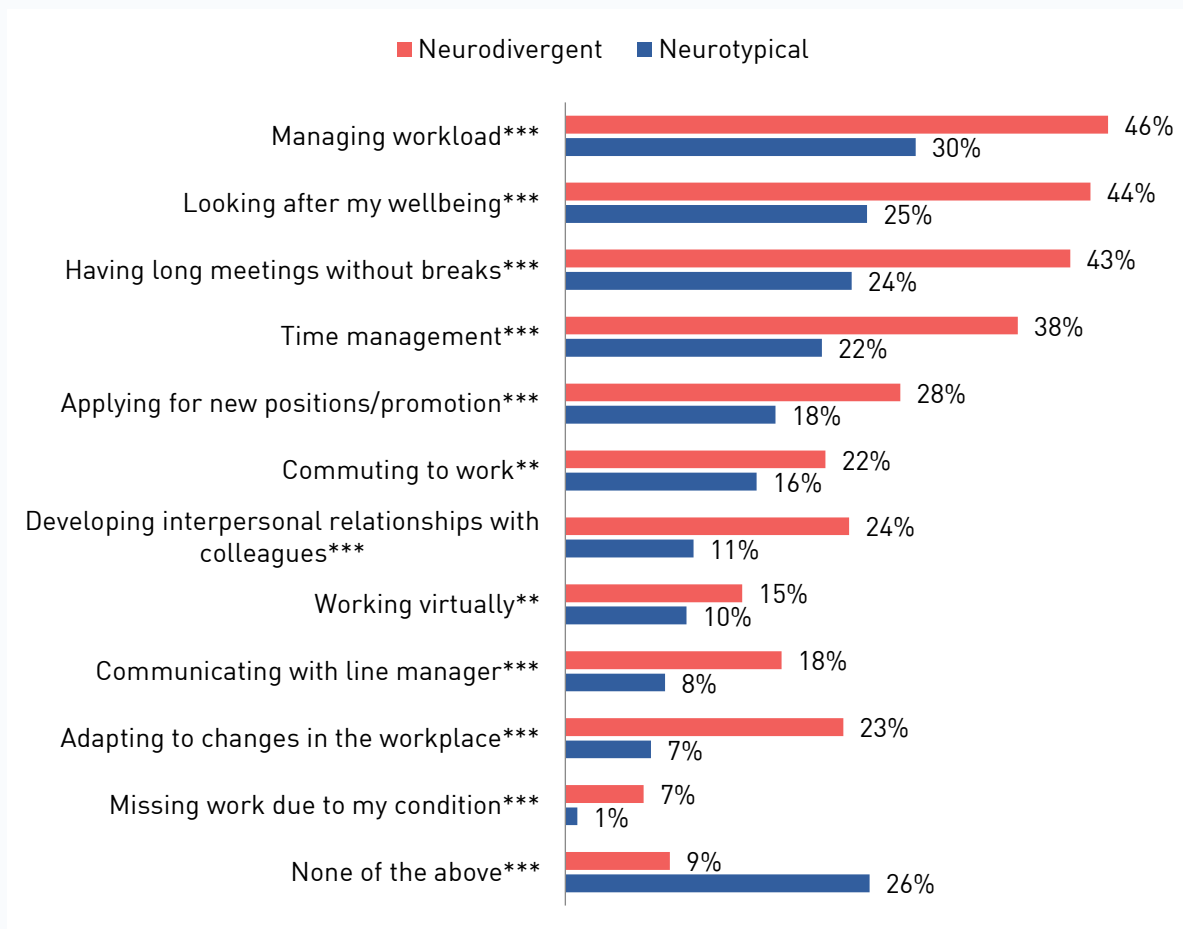
Similarly, neurodivergent employees reported experiencing more workplace challenges than neurotypical people, on average 3.0 compared to 1.6 challenges.³⁷ When investigating each area separately, it becomes evident that neurodivergent employees encountered more challenges in each aspect.³⁸ Notably, the most common challenge across both groups was managing workloads, though it was significantly less challenging for neurotypical (30%) than for neurodivergent (46%) employees.³⁹ The most substantial difference in the survey between neurodivergent and neurotypical employees was observed for two aspects: ‘missing work due to my condition’ and ‘adapting to changes in the workplace’, as shown in Figure 7.

³⁷ $p < .001$.

³⁸ $p < .01$.

³⁹ $p < .001$.

Figure 7 Challenges in working life by neurodiversity group



Note. N=469 and N=1425; multiple responses possible; asterisks indicate significance level * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

Neurodivergent colleagues mentioned examples of difficulties with adapting to change in the focus groups, ranging from difficulties with changing teams to new IT or Information and Communications Technology systems. Any change or introduction of new process can potentially create stress and anxiety for neurodivergent individuals.

When changes involve re-structuring or team transitions, it is notable that neurodivergent individuals may require more time to adapt to these changes, potentially leading to feelings of exclusion or being left out.

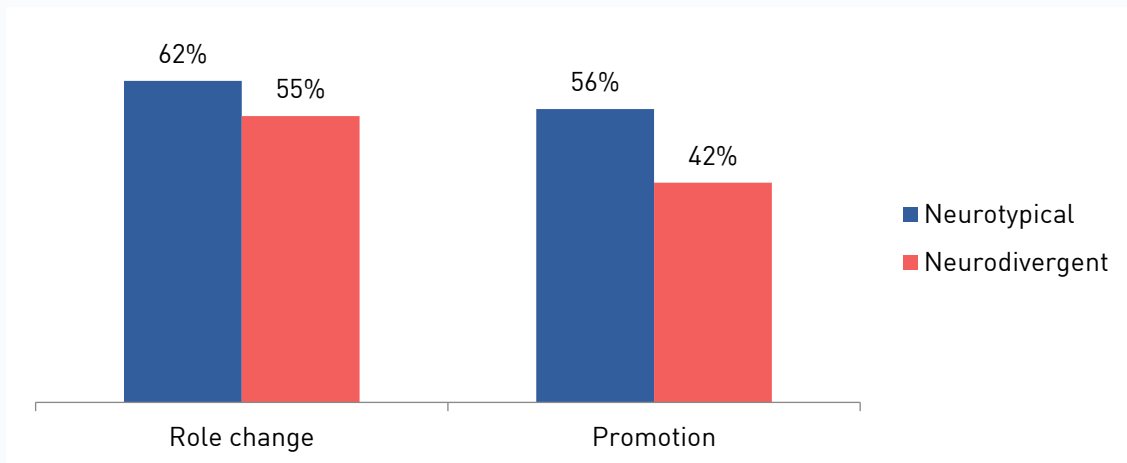
“ I’ve had to change teams several times. I felt many people were quicker than me in building relationships and I felt put on the side.

It’s important to acknowledge that various neurodivergent conditions, while sharing certain commonalities, also come with their unique strengths and challenges, manifesting in different work-related barriers. The perspective provided here offers a broad overview encompassing all neurodivergent individuals, without delving into the nuanced distinctions that exist among different conditions (see further discussion in [Chapter 4](#)). It is notable though that despite the different challenges, each difficulty was experienced significantly more by neurodivergent colleagues than neurotypical.

Managing individual transitions – progression/promotion

Our survey investigated individual transitions within the workplace. One important finding was that a greater proportion of neurotypical employees had changed roles and received promotions since joining the company compared to neurodivergent employees, as illustrated in Figure 8.⁴⁰ The difference was larger regarding promotion than role change. However, as might be expected, the age of employees and duration at the company were stronger predictors for promotion and role change than neurodiversity.

Figure 8 Role change and promotion by neurodiversity group



Note. N=469 and N=1425. 'Prefer not to say' has been excluded.

This difference in transition rates might be attributed to various factors, such as the career aspirations of neurodivergent colleagues, as the quote below highlights:

“ While some may aspire to ascend to higher levels, for others, success might mean being in a role they like; not everyone wants to become a leader in a traditional hierarchy.⁴¹

However, the survey also showed that a higher percentage of neurodivergent employees (28%) found it challenging to apply for new positions or seek promotions in comparison to neurotypical employees (18%). This implies that many neurodivergent employees face additional barriers to promotion.

What have companies implemented already?

Policies, programmes and practices can help to create an inclusive and supportive environment for neurodivergent individuals. Accessibility initiatives range from reducing barriers, promoting inclusion and education admitting that more can and needs to be done.

⁴⁰ $p < .05$ and $p < .001$, respectively.

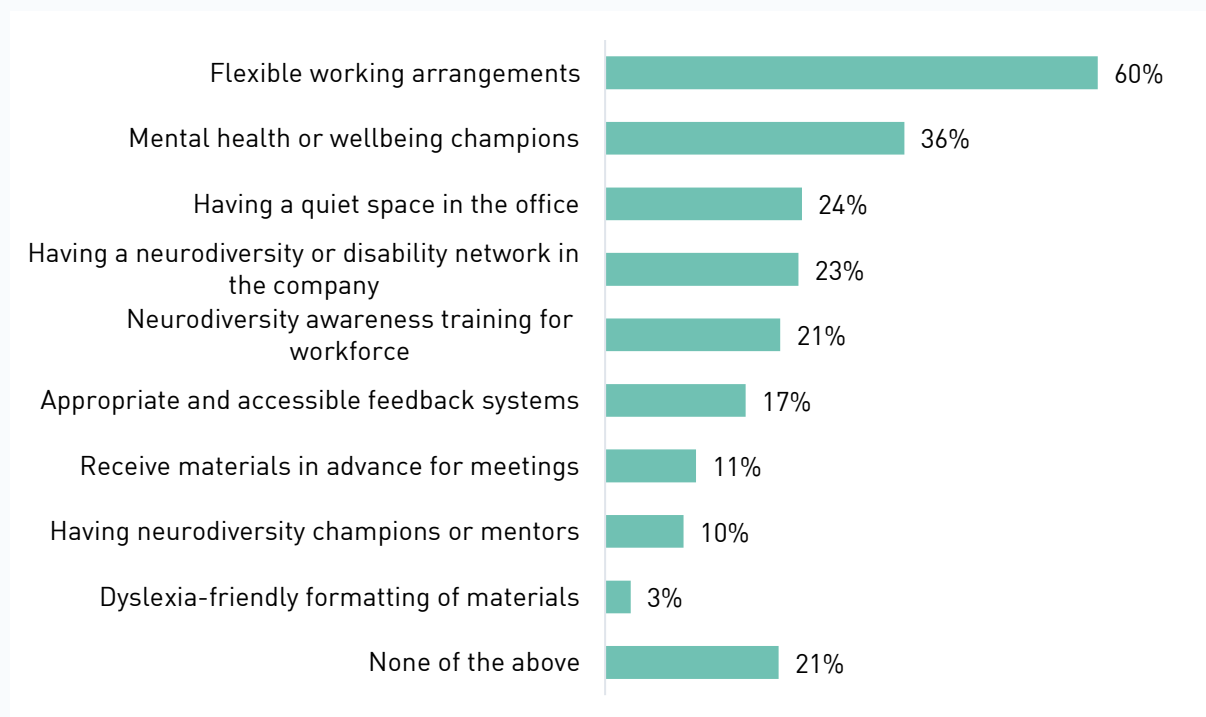
⁴¹ Deloitte Center for Integrated Research (2022). *A rising tide lifts all boats - Creating a better work environment for all by embracing neurodiversity.*

<https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/insights/topics/talent/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace.html>

The four #ChangeTheFace Alliance companies whose employees participated in the research have already implemented or are kicking off initiatives to improve inclusion of their neurodivergent employees. These include flexible working arrangements, education for managers, hiring managers, talent attraction and HR, allyship, employee assistance programmes for neurodivergent employees and those who have neurodivergent family members, employee resource groups (ERGs) offering peer support for neurodivergent employees and those struggling with mental health and workplace adjustments, offering IT-support and quiet spaces for focused work.

Not all employees are aware or have access to such initiatives, though only 21% indicate that their company has yet to implement any accessibility initiative. According to responses of neurodivergent employees, the most prevalent initiatives reported were flexible working arrangements (60%), followed by mental health or well-being champions (36%). Dyslexia-friendly formatting of materials was the least commonly implemented initiative, with only 3% of all neurodivergent respondents indicating its adoption (see Figure 9).

Figure 9 Accessibility initiatives implemented by company

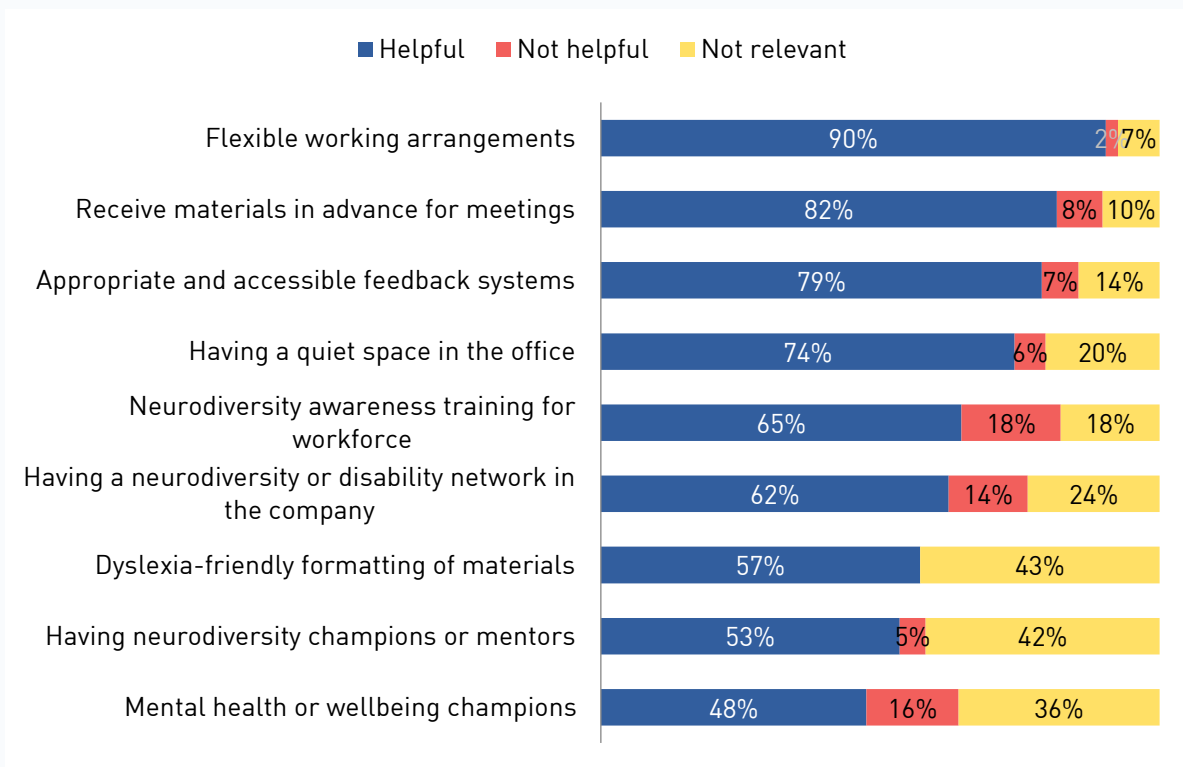


Note. N=453 (neurodivergent respondents only); multiple responses possible.

What are the initiatives that neurodivergent employees find most helpful?

Flexible working arrangements were the most prevalent measure and were also rated as the most helpful. This held true for both the group of respondents whose companies had already implemented this measure and those who could not work flexibly but believed it would be beneficial. Most neurodivergent employees also thought receiving materials in advance of meetings, appropriate feedback systems, having a quiet space and neurodiversity awareness training has been helpful to them personally (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 Helpfulness of implemented accessibility initiatives



Note. N=14-270 (neurodivergent respondents only).

Implications for the sector

Neurodivergent individuals face many barriers during the recruitment process. Addressing these challenges is crucial to accessing a more neurodiverse talent pool. Many neurodivergent individuals require more time and support to adapt to changes in the workplace. This insight underscores the importance of offering tailored support and accommodations during periods of change or transitions within the industry.

Companies can make a significant impact by implementing various initiatives to support neurodivergent employees. Measures such as flexible working arrangements, managerial training, and employee resource groups have been found to be beneficial for neurodivergent individuals but rely on more robust and committed vertical and lateral allyship. Such initiatives have the potential to improve the well-being and productivity of all employees, regardless of their neuro-variation.

Not all neurodivergent individuals face the same challenges or require identical accommodations. Recognising the diversity within neurodiversity, understanding individuals' unique strengths and challenges, and tailoring support accordingly is vital for fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace culture in the tech sector.

4. Unknown quantities: a complex group in need of support

Discussion of the types of neurodivergence present in the Tech Sector and which sub-groups are most affected by their conditions in the workplace.

Neurovariation type

Estimates of the number of neurodivergent people globally vary widely, in part due to the newness of neurodiversity research, and the different legal definitions around disability that may or may not include all neurodevelopmental conditions. This affects how neurodiversity is tracked. In the UK, for example, approximately 3-4% of the adult population is estimated to have ADHD, around 1% are autistic, and 1-4% affected by OCD.^{42,43} These ranges imply that we know that many people are neurodivergent but there is still a high level of uncertainty regarding how many.

Among the tech sector survey sample, the most common condition is ADHD with about 11% of our sample identifying with this condition. Dyslexia, autism and OCD were equally common with about 1 in 20 survey respondents identifying with the condition. Down syndrome, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia, Synaesthesia, and Tourette syndrome were less common among our sample. Other conditions survey respondents listed included: anxiety (different forms), depression, epilepsy, Dyscalculia and Auditory Processing Disorder.

Table 1 Neurodiverse conditions amongst survey participants

| | N | % |
|---|----------|----------|
| ADHD | 234 | 10.8% |
| Dyslexia | 118 | 5.4% |
| Autism | 111 | 5.1% |
| OCD | 97 | 4.5% |
| Other (Down-syndrome, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia, Synaesthesia, Tourette syndrome) | 71 | 3.3% |
| Other (other conditions not listed or assumed conditions) | 37 | 1.7% |

Note. N=469.

⁴² National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. (2023). *Health topics A to Z*. <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/>

Scientific literature still lacks contextualised, practical advice for employers and neurodiverse employees, and the science-practitioner gap is growing.⁴⁴ Literature does suggest that each condition implies separate strengths and challenges in the workplace:

Autism: Most research has been conducted on autism in the workplace. Autistic individuals usually experience four main problems in everyday working life: effective communication, time management, task prioritising, and organisation of work; stress management and emotion control; and sensory sensitivity.⁴⁵ These are balanced by distinct strengths, as often autistic employees possess intense focus, attention to detail, lateral thinking, enhanced memory and productivity.⁴⁶

Dyslexia: Dyslexic employees thrive in verbal comprehension but struggle with processing sounds and holding lots of incoming information all at once in the mind.⁴⁷

ADHD: For people with ADHD, issues with working memory, concentration and self-regulation are balanced by high enthusiasm, passion, loyalty, and creativity.⁴⁸

Low rates of diagnosis

The average diagnosis rate for neurodivergent conditions was just over one-third (37%) of neurodivergent employees. This is similar to the disclosure rate of 43% and aligns well with the highest reason for not disclosing their conditions – without a medical diagnosis, companies appear less willing to accept that an employee is ‘truly’ neurodivergent. This situation is made more severe depending on type of condition: diagnosis rates range by condition to a large extent, from 24% for OCD to 50% for dyslexia (see Figure 11).

⁴⁴ Doyle, N., & McDowall, A. (2022). Diamond in the rough? An “empty review” of research into “neurodiversity” and a road map for developing the inclusion agenda. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 41(3), 352-382

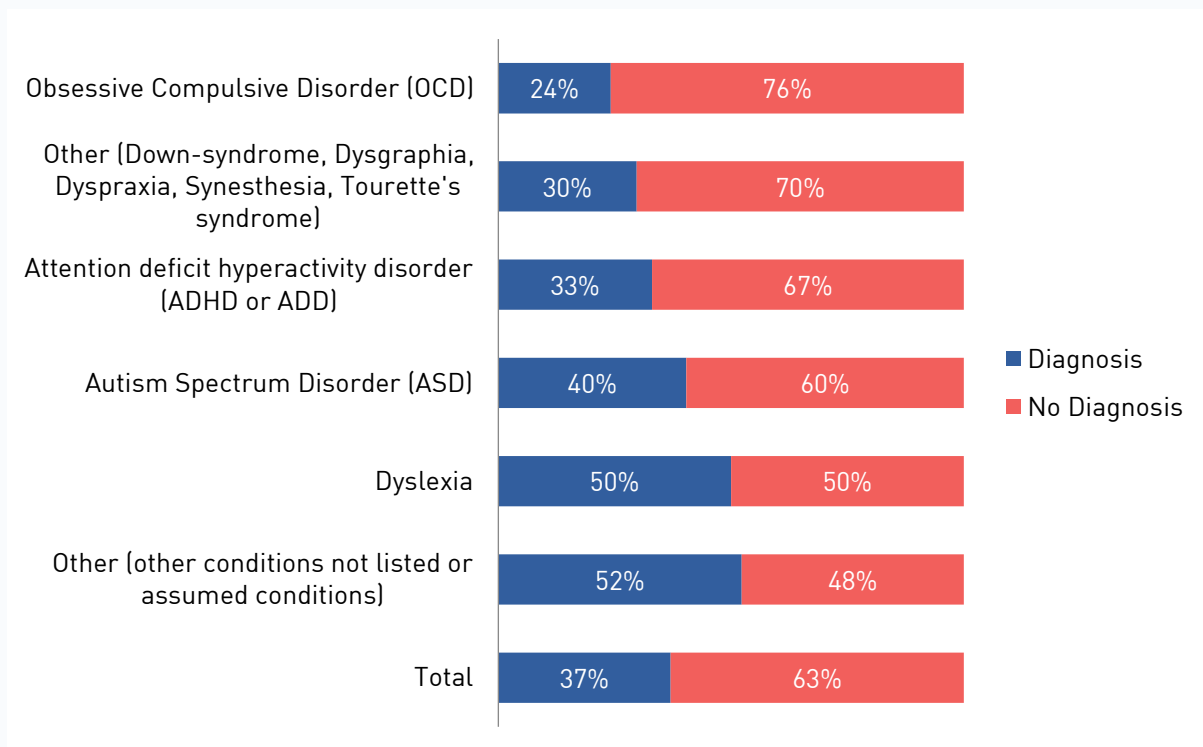
⁴⁵ Tomczak, M. T. (2022). How can the work environment be redesigned to enhance the well-being of individuals with autism?. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 44(6), 1467-1484.

⁴⁶ Krzeminska, A., & Hawse, S. (2020). Mainstreaming neurodiversity for an inclusive and sustainable future workforce: Autism-spectrum employees. *Industry and higher Education: Case studies for sustainable futures*, 229-261.

⁴⁷ Waseem, U. (2019). *Resources at Work for Dyslexia: Surely, we can do more?*. Genius Within CIC <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/downloads/schools/business/resources-at-work-for-dyslexia>

⁴⁸ Lauder, K., McDowall, A., & Tenenbaum, H. R. (2022). A systematic review of interventions to support adults with ADHD at work—Implications from the paucity of context-specific research for theory and practice. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.893469>.

Figure 11 Diagnosis rate by condition



Note. N= 622. Responses 'I don't know' and 'Prefer not to say' were excluded.

There are a number of reasons for this variable diagnosis rate, and it much depends on the ease of diagnosis in the country of residence, and social perceptions of the condition including prejudice and stigma, and, for the tech sector, whether diagnosis is supported in private healthcare packages.

In addition, a large proportion of people are diagnosed as adults, and sometimes far into adulthood. A previous study, Sparta Marketing's Equal Tech report, showed that only 26% of neurodivergent employees were diagnosed during childhood while 31% were diagnosed as adults. A further 15% were currently undergoing a diagnosis, while 28% were planning to seek an assessment in the future.⁴⁹ This trend for late diagnosis was also reflected in our focus groups, where nearly half of participants were diagnosed in their 30s.

⁴⁹ Sparta Global (2023). EqualTech report 2023: How neurodiverse individuals bring in-demand perspectives to tech. <https://sparta-marketing.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/Equal+Tech+Report+2023+-+FINAL+220223.pdf>

Implications for lacking diagnosis and recent diagnosis

The trend for neurodivergent employees to have either no diagnosis or a recent, adult diagnosis has several implications for tech companies and their employees.

First, company support and healthcare provision can make a big difference in supporting diagnosis: several focus group participants used company private healthcare to seek diagnosis.

Second, some found getting a diagnosis during their working lives empowering. It is easier with a new diagnosis to ask for what they need: they are better able to advocate for themselves and others. For some, the diagnosis isn't crucial as they understand their condition well. Having knowledge of their undiagnosed condition helps a lot with their role and fits well with the work environment:

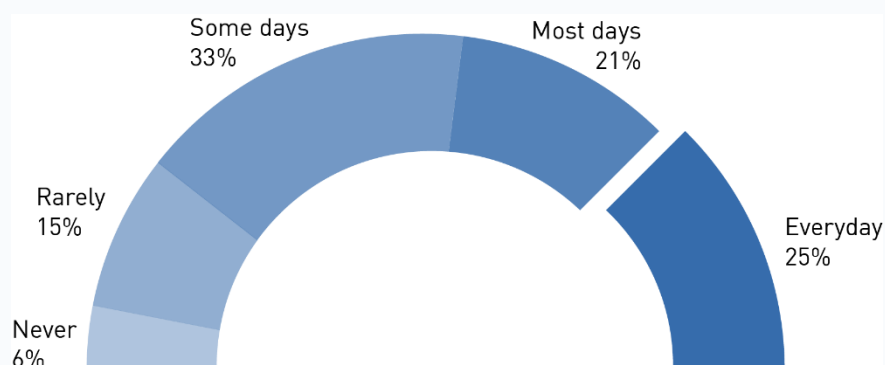
“ The fast-paced nature of the field works well with my ADHD.... We have short timelines, are very reactive and so I will do things like minimise the use of Excel where it's not necessary. I'm not formally diagnosed. I've lived most of life without knowing about ADHD.

For others, a late diagnosis can be more stressful as employees feel like they are 'playing catch up,' and lack expertise about what it means to have the condition.

The impact of neurodivergent conditions in the workplace

As shown in previous sections, neurodivergent employees face heightened levels of challenge, from hiring to promotion, compared to neurotypical colleagues, which implies that workplace design has not yet accommodated their needs. Unsurprisingly, employees' experiences of their neurodivergent conditions in the workplace varies, and this is reflected in our survey results. Nearly half of neurodivergent employees (46%) feel impacted by their neurodivergent conditions at work on most days, if not every day. Nearly an equal proportion (48%) are just sometimes impacted by their neurodivergent conditions whilst at work. Only 6% never feel impacted by it.

Figure 12 Frequency of feeling impacted by ND condition(s) in the workplace



Note. N=467.

During the statistical analysis, different variables were correlated to the number of challenges that were experienced by neurodivergent employees. These included age, gender

identity, LGBTQ+ identity, mental health and number of conditions.⁵⁰ Two factors had statistically significant correlation with how often an employee feels affected by their neurodivergence whilst at work: mental health rating and the number of neurodivergent conditions.

Neurodiversity and mental health

As mentioned in Chapter 2, masking, the practice of concealing one's neurodivergent traits to fit societal or neurotypical norms, often exerts a significant toll on the mental health of neurodivergent individuals. The constant effort to camouflage natural behaviours or characteristics in social settings leads to chronic stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Masking demands a continuous cognitive load, requiring individuals to monitor and modify their actions, expressions, or communication styles, leading to a sense of inauthenticity and isolation. Moreover, the suppression of one's true identity can amplify feelings of alienation, contributing to a decline in self-esteem and mental well-being. Over time, this masking behaviour can exacerbate existing mental health conditions, such as anxiety or depression, and impede access to appropriate support or understanding, ultimately impacting the overall mental health and quality of life for neurodivergent individuals. It is well-documented that neurodivergent people are more susceptible to co-morbid health conditions such as anxiety and depression. It is broadly recognised that well-being and self-care are some of the biggest issues that neurodivergent employees face.⁵¹ Mental health permeates every aspect of a neurodivergent individual's life, having knock-on effects on relationships, physical health, and much more.⁵²

Previous research had found that neurodivergent individuals working in digital and tech sectors were found to have a much higher incidence of anxiety and depression, at 84% compared to 49% in those that are neurotypical.⁵³ Long-term research into the impact of ADHD across the life span indicates that anxiety is a core symptom of the condition which becomes more prominent over time.⁵⁴

In our survey we asked both neurodivergent and neurotypical employees about their mental health. Overall, 7 in 10 survey participants described their mental health as either good or very good. However, comparing neurodivergent with neurotypical survey respondents shows that on average, neurodivergent employees rate their mental health as significantly worse than neurotypical survey respondents.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Ethnicity was not asked about during the survey due to difficulties in asking about minority identification and race in a global survey, and due to privacy concerns from legal teams.

⁵¹ McDowall, A., Doyle, N., & Kiseleva, M. (2023). Neurodiversity at work: demand, supply and a gap analysis. <https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/media/109514758/neurodiversity-in-business-birkbeck-university-of-london.pdf>

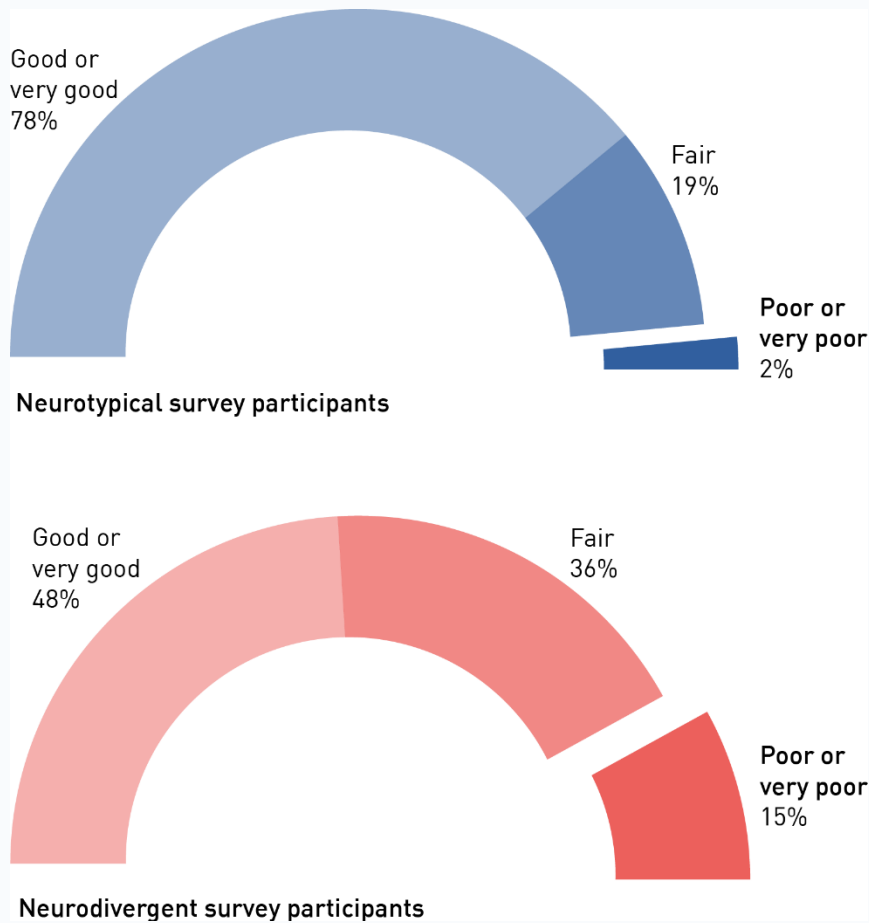
⁵² Graham, J. (2022, August 26). *Why we need to stamp out the neurodiversity stigma*. HRZone. <https://www.hrzone.com/lead/culture/why-we-need-to-stamp-out-the-neurodiversity-stigma>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lauder, K., McDowall, A., & Tenenbaum, H. R. (2022). A systematic review of interventions to support adults with ADHD at work—Implications from the paucity of context-specific research for theory and practice. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.893469>.

⁵⁵ $p < .001$

Figure 13 Mental health rating by neurodiversity group

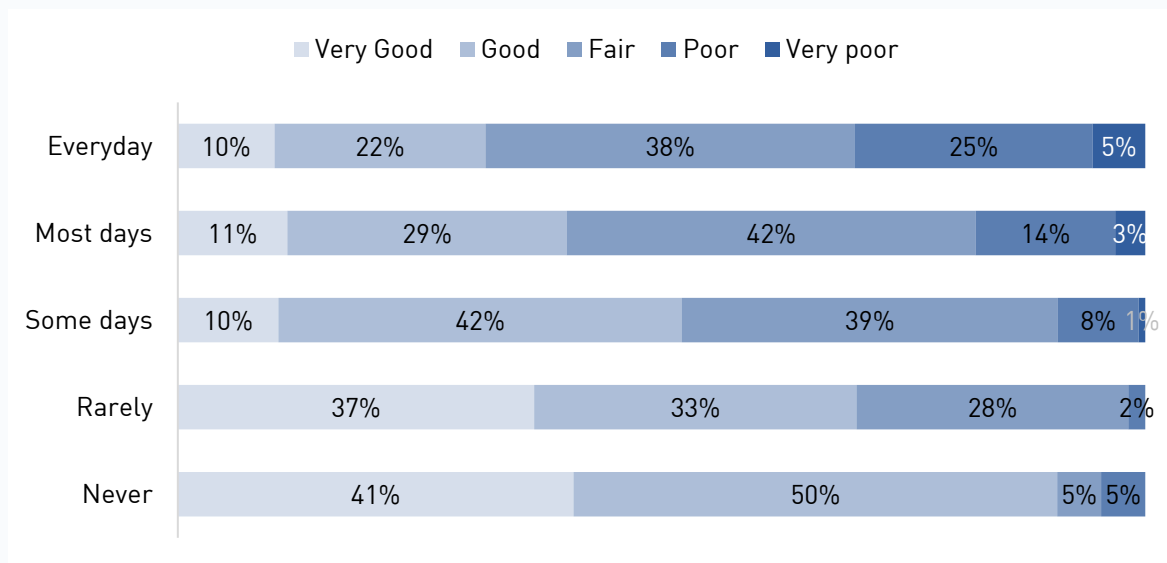


Note. N=1271 and N=428.

Mental health rating was also the strongest predictor of whether a neurodivergent employee would often feel impacted by their condition in the workplace.⁵⁶ Those who had worse overall mental health were more often reported to be impacted by their condition and vice-versa. Of the people who were impacted every day by their condition, 68% had fair or worse mental health. It was most common for people with very poor mental health to be impacted every day.

⁵⁶ Other factors included in this analysis were age, gender, number of neurodiverse conditions, and LGBTQ+ status.

Figure 14 Feeling impacted by condition(s) in the workplace by mental health rating



Note. N=430.

We further explored the relationship between mental health and experience of challenges. This showed that poorer mental health also led to more challenges during recruitment, more challenges at the workplace and poorer experiences at the workplace.

Having both neurodivergent conditions and mental health conditions was clearly difficult for many employees:

“ Even with positive feedback I get imposter syndrome.... Negative feedback feels like a knife in the heart. Mental health problems go hand-in-hand with my condition. I have RSD (Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria), so any personal comment feels like a catastrophe.

Multiple neurodivergent conditions

Just identifying which type(s) of neurodivergence an employee has does not necessarily imply how the condition will affect them. As well as mental health issues, even within a particular form of neurodiversity people exhibit characteristics across a spectrum. We also found that many employees had a number of conditions, what's known as co-morbidity. Whilst the majority of neurodivergent employees only selected one condition, nearly 30% had two or more conditions, and 8% had three or more.

Table 2 Number of neurodiverse conditions

| | N | % |
|-----------|-----|-----|
| 1 | 336 | 72% |
| 2 | 96 | 20% |
| 3 | 25 | 5% |
| 4+ | 12 | 3% |

Note. N=469.

There was a small significant relationship⁵⁷ between the number of neurodiverse conditions that an employee had and the frequency of feeling impacted by their condition in the workplace. This means that those who had more conditions reported to be negatively impacted more often. Our analysis also showed that people with more conditions were more likely than people with one condition to face challenges during recruitment and face challenges at the workplace.

Balancing multiple neurodivergent conditions was clearly difficult for some study participants. One described how they felt impacted at work with multiple conditions:

“ For autism, I’m high functioning. I do feel like I’m on a different wavelength, that’s no reflection on colleagues but it’s quite alienating. For ADHD, I thought I just had a short attention span. That’s progressively increased over time. For executive function... I structure everything to the nth degree. OCD I’ve experienced since I was a teenager. I recite lists, usually inaudibly... I try to be discreet at work. There is co-morbidity, as I’m having depression and anxiety treatment as well.

For some employees, their neurodivergent condition coincided with a mental health condition:

“ Focus group participant 1: There’s a range of neurodivergent people here, some are purely in the ADHD camp, some in ASD, and people like me who have both. With co-morbid conditions, they contradict each other.

Focus group participant 2: I’ve also got anxiety!

Focus group participant 1: Same!

Focus group participant 3: Mental health problems go hand in hand.

It appears that having multiple neurodivergent conditions is linked to stress, and more experiences of challenges in the workplace.

Intersectionality and neurodiversity

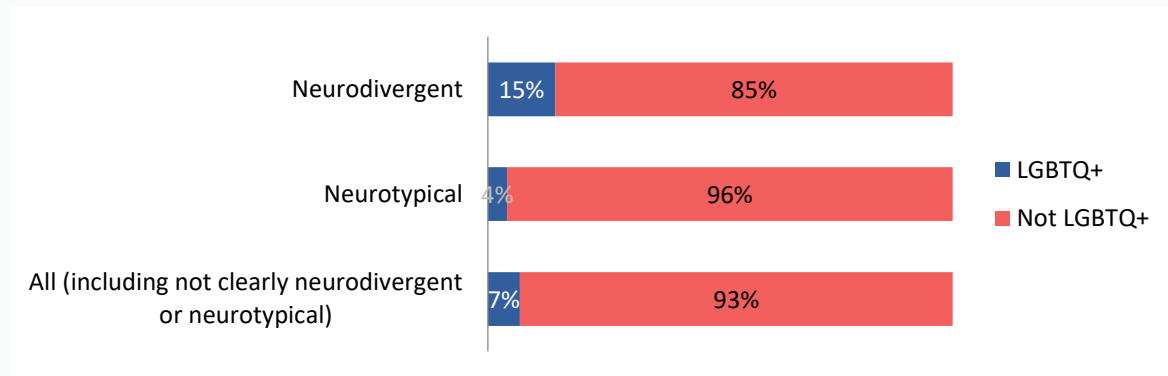
The survey data contained several identity intersections, including gender, age and LGBTQ+ identification. These were collected as literature suggested a potential relationship between marginalised identities and neurodiversity.

⁵⁷ $p < .01$, $r = 0.18$.

Our statistical analysis showed that gender identity did not seem to be correlated with neurodiversity when looking across all conditions. About half (49%) of neurodivergent respondents identified as male, compared to 50% of neurotypical respondents.

By contrast, LGBTQ+ rates were higher for neurodivergent employees than for neurotypical – 15% compared to 4%.

Figure 15 LGBTQ+ by neurodiversity group



Note. N=428, N=1271 and N=1950.

In general, LGBTQ+ identification in neurodivergent employees did not seem to be a predictor for the feeling impacted by neurodivergent conditions. The exception to this was that neurodivergent LGBTQ+ employees experienced a great number of challenges during recruitment. We suggest further research would be helpful to understand the intersection between LGBTQ+ identification and neurodivergence.

Implications for the sector

Given that nearly half of neurodivergent employees (46%) feel impacted by their neurodivergent conditions at work, companies must consider that the workplace may be a contributing factor and is amplifying the challenges associated with their neurodivergence.

In response, how can companies shape the workplace (e.g., culture, environment, and systems) to mitigate the impact of employees' neurodivergent conditions, and enable them to thrive instead?

Further, the findings show there is a strong correlation between employees' neurodivergence being impacted at work and mental well-being, which invites the question; how can companies foster a workplace culture that minimises neurodivergent employees' need to mask therefore supporting their mental well-being?

The survey found that a significant proportion (68%) of those affected daily by their condition reported fair or worse mental health. Acknowledging this relationship is critical for companies to prioritise mental health support for neurodivergent employees.

Employees with multiple neurodivergent conditions reported more frequent negative impacts on their work lives. Understanding these complexities and the interplay between various neurodivergent conditions and the workplace environment is essential for providing adequate support and accommodations.

The impact of neurodiversity on work life is influenced by personal characteristics such as age, LGBTQ+ identity, and other circumstances. Companies need to recognise these intersectional factors to provide inclusive and supportive environments tailored to diverse individual needs within the workforce.

5. Allies wanted

Discussion of the knowledge and awareness of neurodiversity in the workplace, and allyship behaviour.

Attitudes towards neurodiversity from neurotypical colleagues

Attitudes towards neurodiversity can have a big influence on the experience of neurodivergent employees and what opportunities are available to them. Promoting positive attitudes, awareness and knowledge about neurodiversity supports a more inclusive workplace where neurodivergent employees can thrive alongside their neurotypical colleagues. As shown in [Chapter 2](#), neurodivergent employees predominantly choose to disclose to their colleagues, indicating a significant level of trust with this group.

The insights from focus group discussions underscore the significance of age as a determining factor in attitudes towards neurodiversity. Younger employees are described as more open and accepting towards neurodiversity, making neurodivergent people more inclined to engage in conversations with younger colleagues. In contrast, older employees are characterised as somewhat more critical of the existence of certain neurodivergent conditions. This insight from the focus groups also links to the fact that a higher proportion of individuals among younger age groups identified as neurodivergent in the survey, with 52% of those aged 18-24 reporting at least one condition, as opposed to only 16% of those in the 55+ age group.

Focus groups also gave examples of various individual attitudes of colleagues or managers that were not seen as supportive of neurodiversity. For example, one focus group member mentioned an instance where an employee was asked to obtain a diagnosis for work adjustments instead of taking their word for it. In general, unsupportive attitudes and culture were described as contributing to a social environment where neurodivergent individuals felt the need to prove their value in order to challenge these attitudes.

“ My line manager acts like they're doing me a favour to have reasonable adjustments and that I should be grateful.

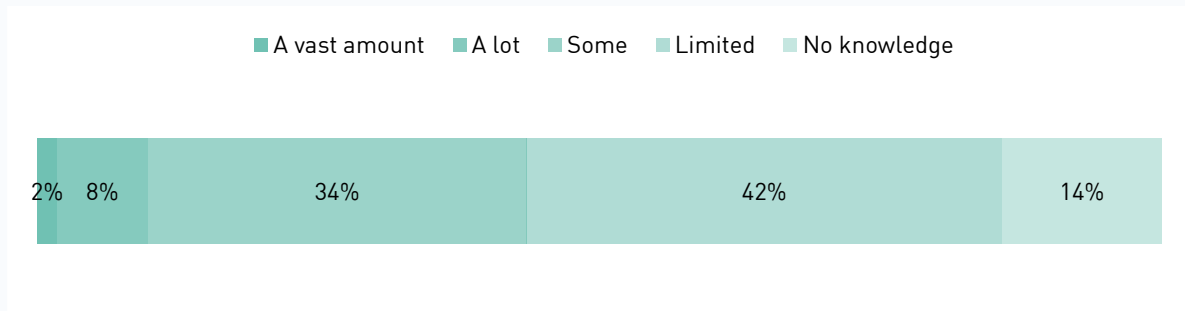
Dyslexia was specifically mentioned as a condition for which individuals faced repercussions. Several participants in the focus groups shared striking examples, some to the extent of nearly facing termination due to spelling errors.

Lack of knowledge about neurodiversity

Some of these negative attitudes could be attributed to a lack of knowledge and understanding about neurodiversity among neurotypical individuals. The survey showed that more than half of neurotypical employees (56%) stated to have no or limited knowledge of neurodiversity. Only 10% reported to have vast or a lot of knowledge (see Figure 16).

Insights from the focus groups supported these statistics, with members mentioning a limited understanding of what it's like to be neurodivergent and the challenges in knowing how to effectively interact and communicate with neurodivergent individuals. For instance, in one example cited an autistic individual was required to attend social events, which could lead to heightened social anxiety.

Figure 16 Knowledge about neurodiversity, conditions and symptoms

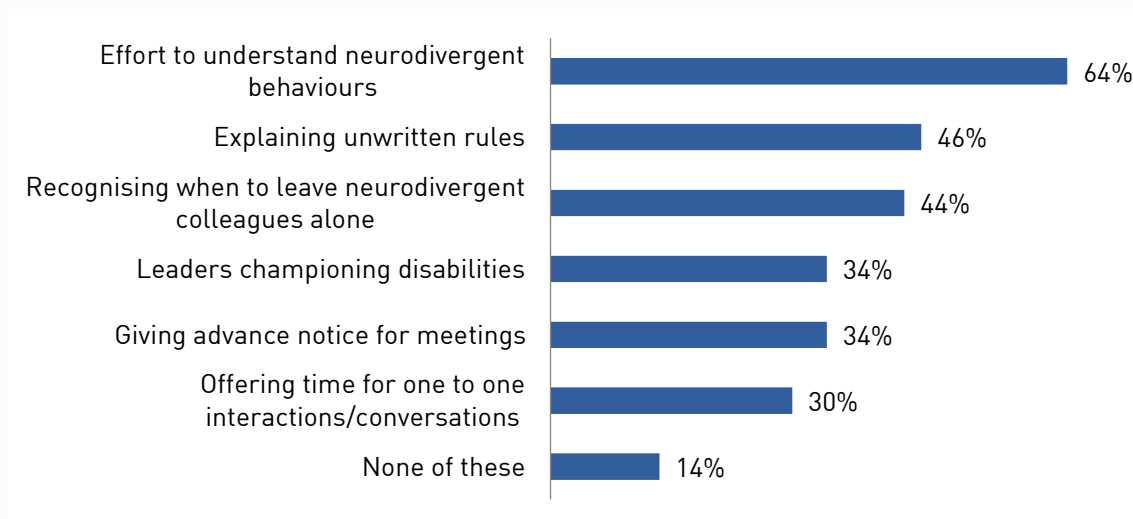


Note. N=1393 (neurotypical respondents only).

What would neurodivergent employees like from their colleagues?

Linked to the issue of limited knowledge and understanding amongst neurotypical colleagues, the survey revealed that about two-thirds (64%) of neurodivergent employees wished for greater effort from their neurotypical colleagues to understand their behaviour (see Figure 17). Most employees with a neurodiverse condition (86%) selected at least one of the suggested allyship behaviours from colleagues.

Figure 17 Desired allyship behaviours from colleagues



Note. N=437 (neurodivergent respondents only); multiple responses possible.

In addition to these, neurodivergent employees shared during the focus groups a range of other allyship behaviours they would like to see related to improved communication, inclusive language and increased awareness and knowledge of neurodiversity and related adjustments.

Regarding communication and feedback, neurodivergent employees would like clear and specific communication and feedback, and avoidance of open-ended questions. They also expressed their desire to speak openly about neurodiversity needs.

“ I want solutions-focused feedback.... Be clear and kind in the feedback.

Concerning language, neurodivergent employees stated their preference for identity first language, while acknowledging that there is a sensitivity whether to refer to neurodiversity as a condition or disability for individuals.

“ I felt safe, but not everyone will be comfortable calling it a condition or disability. That can hinder people.

Regarding awareness about the use of technology and adjustments, neurodivergent focus group members generally would appreciate greater awareness from colleagues of what adjustments are available and more empathy around managing these adjustments. More specifically, enhanced awareness about the use of technology, including camera usage and transcription, would reduce barriers for neurodivergent people to participate in meetings.

“ We have helpful tech and need to understand how to use them best.

Neurodivergent employees also stated in the focus groups the desire for greater knowledge about neurodiversity from their neurotypical colleagues. This desire for more knowledge extends not only to the topic of neurodiversity in general but also to the specific conditions, recognising that each condition comes with its unique strengths and challenges. This would also help to clarify common misconceptions of barriers of certain conditions.

“ We have a personal support programme, but they don't have services tailored for autistic people. I wanted a therapist who had some greater awareness of autism but it was quite difficult to get this.... That's an accessibility issue, it's difficult to get support, unless they go to a specialised institute.

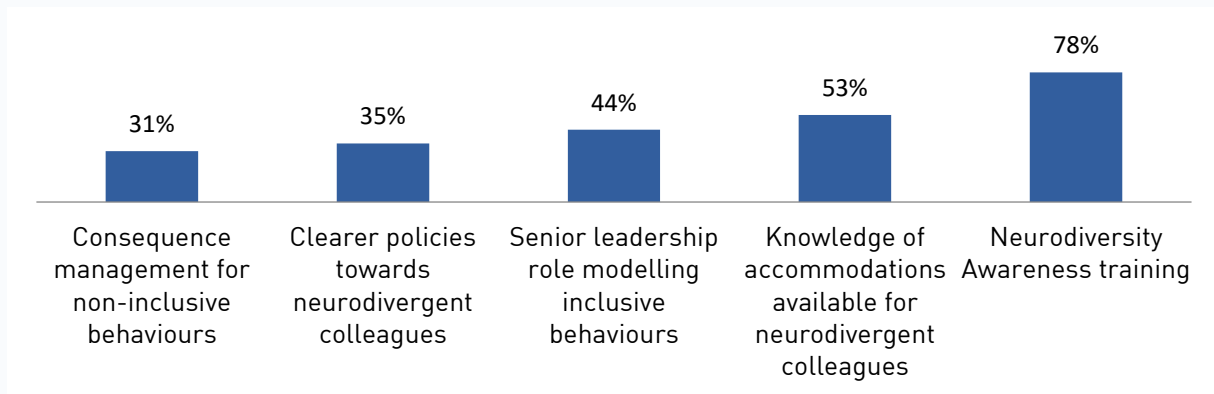
Generally, there is a significant movement within companies towards improving the situation for neurodivergent employees, but this is hampered by the lower level of knowledge amongst the rest of the employees.

“ We have some wonderful people who are keen to drive change and inclusion – I can work from home but in retail you can't.... You have a group driving that forward, but the people on the ground don't always know how to do those things.

What support would neurotypical employees like?

In line with the views of neurodivergent employees regarding the lack of knowledge and awareness of neurodiversity, 78% of neurotypical employees expressed an interest in receiving neurodiversity awareness training. Additionally, more than half (53%) stated the desire for more knowledge about the adjustments available for neurodivergent employees and nearly half (44%) would like to see senior leadership role modelling inclusive behaviour (see Figure 18).

Figure 18 The support neurotypical employees want from their company to help neurodivergent colleagues



Note. N=1223; multiple responses possible.

Implications for the sector

The study revealed that more than half (56%) of neurotypical individuals admitted to having limited or no knowledge about neurodiversity, its conditions, and symptoms. Bridging this knowledge gap through education and awareness initiatives is essential to foster a more supportive and inclusive environment for neurodivergent employees.

Attitudes toward neurodiversity significantly influence the experiences and opportunities available to neurodivergent employees. While commendable allyship behaviours were observed within participating companies, the research also showed the presence of negative attitudes. Addressing these negative attitudes stemming from a lack of knowledge and understanding among neurotypical individuals is crucial for fostering an inclusive workplace culture.

There is a shared desire among neurodivergent individuals for increased efforts from colleagues to engage with neurodiversity and offer support. Similarly, neurotypical individuals expressed their desire for greater company support to assist them in supporting their neurodivergent colleagues. Encouraging this engagement and support through educational programmes and initiatives can significantly contribute to a more supportive workplace environment for everyone.

While this research has highlighted the need for increased awareness, knowledge and behavioural change, there are already examples of allyship behaviour in the companies that took part in the research. Examples of such allyship behaviour include a general openness and willingness to learn, supportive line manager relationships, and agreeing to implement adjustments: This is a strong baseline to build upon in the future.

6. What next? A three-staged approach

Companies should acknowledge the presence of neurodivergent employees in their workforce, regardless of whether they disclose their neurodivergence formally. There is a wide population of undisclosed neurodivergent employees, and another group of nearly a quarter of our study participants who were not able to determine whether they were neurodivergent or not. Given that up to 20% of the world population is neurodivergent, the following recommendations would be helpful to a wide population, beyond those who are known to be neurodivergent.

Based on evidence from this study (primary and secondary research) and a blend of recommendations from leading practice, we identified seven key areas for advancing neurodiversity in the workplace: leadership, allyship, hiring, adjustments, structured supportive environments, performance management and career development, and additional support. These areas centre an employee's experience of their work life journey and reflect the importance of allyship (from leaders, managers, and peers).

We also split the recommendations according to the phase that companies are currently in, recognising that some companies are further along their inclusivity journey than others:

- Stage 1 (Build): Relatively low-cost initiatives to set up the baseline in all areas, raise awareness and support a neurodiverse workforce.
- Stage 2 (Reinforce): Higher-effort programmes to reinforce and progress what's working.
- Stage 3 (Accelerate): Systemic actions to embed, scale, and sustain effective culture changes.

| | | BUILD | REINFORCE | ACCELERATE |
|---|---|-------|-----------|------------|
| LEADERSHIP | | | | |
| Build in accountability | Set company-level goals related to neurodiversity. | | | |
| | Embed goals within job roles across the company. | | | |
| Champion neurodiversity initiatives | Role model inclusive behaviours and encourage others to do the same. | | | |
| Develop visible, vocal, and valued representation | Ensure representation of neurodiversity among senior executives. | | | |
| Scale and embed learning and good practice | Implement feedback mechanisms to find out what works and where difficulties are rising. | | | |
| | Share, scale up and evaluate successful programmes. | | | |

| | | BUILD | REINFORCE | ACCELERATE |
|---|--|-------|-----------|------------|
| ALLYSHIP | | | | |
| Institute simple meeting protocols | Adjust meeting protocols to meet neurodivergent needs: advance notice, sending materials beforehand, optional camera usage, and automatic transcription. | | | |
| Combat bias and promote inclusion | Neurodiversity awareness training for all employees on topics such as understanding neurodiversity, sensitivity to terminology and communication. | | | |
| | Training on 'Speak up culture' which includes systematic education on neurodiversity and ways that colleagues can act as allies to neurodivergent employees | | | |
| | Role-specific neurodiversity training for managers, mentors/buddies, and HR/occupational health. | | | |
| HIRING | | | | |
| Employ prescriptive recruitment practices | Be as precise as possible in job adverts to set clear expectations, including what to expect in the process and what accommodations are available. Role descriptions should only include essential skills. | | | |
| Offer choice in the interview process | Proactively offer reasonable adjustment options such as extra time, and the potential to do written rather than oral tasks. | | | |
| Debias hiring methods | Train hiring managers on suitable interview techniques that keep neurodiversity in mind. | | | |
| | Standardise interview processes to reduce biased impressions about a candidate's likeability or flexibility. | | | |
| Embrace alternative recruitment practices | Develop partnerships with NGOs and VCSEs to identify and attract qualified neurodivergent candidates. | | | |
| | Run 'innovation' competitions to attract people who think differently and select candidates based on their skills and ability to solve problems rather than social skills. | | | |
| | Employ non-interview methods for assessing, training, and managing neurodiverse talent. | | | |
| | Gradually introduce candidates to the company over several days instead of a one-day interview. | | | |

| | | BUILD | REINFORCE | ACCELERATE |
|---|--|-------|-----------|------------|
| ADJUSTMENTS | | | | |
| Be flexible | Provide adjustments for neurodivergent employees, even without a formal diagnosis. After disclosure, presume the need for adjustments unless proven otherwise. | | | |
| | Ask and tailor solutions to individuals to find the most appropriate adjustments. | | | |
| | Offer neurodivergent-friendly solutions to all employees, to boost well-being and performance. | | | |
| Provide individuals more control and information for solo working | Grant employees' more control over their work environment by minimising sensory distractions and ensuring comfort. | | | |
| | Offer quality-of-life adjustments like providing noise-cancelling headphones, screen readers, and tinted screens for dyslexic employees. | | | |
| | Facilitate remote work on demand and allow flexible working hours. | | | |
| | Gather data on the different outcomes associated with each adjustment and how workplace context affects outcomes. | | | |
| Support working across groups | Implement a "passport" system which documents accommodations made for specific employee needs. This can reduce the stress of renegotiating adjustments. Consider privacy, discrimination and stigma carefully before implementing. | | | |
| Co-discover and adapt solutions | Regularly gather feedback and reassess company policies and plans in collaboration with neurodivergent employees to ensure adjustments are still effective. | | | |
| | Crowdsource new ideas for improving inclusion practices. | | | |
| Embed processes around disclosure and securing adjustments | Ensure a seamless transition from recruitment to onboarding for candidates and a straightforward process for disclosure and support. | | | |
| | Proactively encourage formal and informal disclosure by investing in team building. Foster psychological safety, trust, and strong peer relationships. | | | |
| Help employees decipher company culture | Facilitate neurodivergent employees' integration into the workplace culture by clarifying both written and unwritten rules through mentors, buddies, ERGs, managers, or an official memo on the company portal. | | | |
| | Offer a 'soft skills' module aimed at new neurodivergent hires to familiarise them with workplace norms. This may be especially | | | |

| | | BUILD | REINFORCE | ACCELERATE |
|---|---|-------|-----------|------------|
| | beneficial for those new to the sector and the company's unique culture. | | | |
| Consider adjustments around workspace and work organisation | Make adjustments to workspace so that designated areas have limits to light exposure and office movement, like walking or conversing. | | | |
| | Adjustments to work organisation to implement no-meeting days and a flexible approach to work. Further enable asynchronous contributions and computer mediated communication. Eventually embed lateral ways of working such as self-organised teams over traditional hierarchical structures. | | | |
| Be purposeful about workspace design | Design new workspaces with neurodiversity in mind from the beginning to enable neurodivergent employees to thrive, being aware of the challenges of hotdesking and open-plan office designs. | | | |
| | Evaluate IT systems from a neurodiversity perspective to identify and address potential negative impacts of certain technologies. | | | |
| STRUCTURED SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS | | | | |
| Welcome more one-to-ones | Encourage a culture of one-to-ones and shorter catchups across all levels. | | | |
| Enhance and support line management | Develop a toolkit for a strengths-based management approach. Provide person-centred tools that help managers recognise and value neurodivergence. Line managers should be encouraged to ask people about their challenges and their needs and adjust accordingly. | | | |
| | Guidance for managers should be adapted to encourage neurodivergent-friendly practices such as offering short catchups throughout the day instead of weekly one-to-ones if it suits their colleagues better. | | | |
| | A coaching programme for managers on supporting neurodivergent employees. | | | |
| | Establish manager support groups to enhance understanding, empathy, and effective management practices in handling neurodiversity in the workplace. | | | |
| Needs-based coaching | Provide coaching based on an employee's specific needs that can amplify workplace adjustments. | | | |
| Scope and develop a neurodivergent-focused | Scope a mentorship programme tailored to assist neurodivergent employees. A well-defined structure is crucial for the effectiveness of this scheme. | | | |

| | | BUILD | REINFORCE | ACCELERATE |
|---|---|-------|-----------|------------|
| mentorship/buddy programme | Ensure existing mentors or buddies are equipped with the right skills to support neurodivergent colleagues. | | | |
| Implement a broad system of support | Set up a formal buddy system for neurodivergent employees and knowledgeable colleagues trained to support neurodiversity and complement their skillsets. Conventional systems would allow neurodivergent employees to ask questions about company culture or receive general guidance at work. | | | |
| | An ad hoc 'body double' buddy system between fellow neurodivergent employees or with a neurotypical colleague can help to complete a defined task if on the same team, project, or business area. | | | |
| | Buddying can also be encouraged through working in structured pods of about 15 people alongside colleagues (in a ratio of 4:1) whilst accompanied by two managers and a consultant who address neurodiversity-specific issues relevant to the task. This temporary safe environment allows participants to build skills and suits new neurodivergent employees. | | | |
| | Establish a broad support ecosystem of mentors, sponsors, leaders, or designated groups where neurodivergent individuals can seek guidance, assistance, and understanding. | | | |
| PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT | | | | |
| Rethink performance evaluation and career development | Align performance goals to a person's strengths and capabilities and hold them accountable to the agreed-upon goals. | | | |
| | Guidance and training for performance appraisers should encourage appraisers to interrogate their assumptions about their ideal employee profile to minimise bias against neurodivergent employees. | | | |
| ADDITIONAL SUPPORT | | | | |
| Signpost internal resources | Document and communicate company policies and information in a variety of easily-accessible formats ranging from short-form executive briefs to step-by-step process screenshots and video formats when practical – to accommodate a diversity of learning style preferences. | | | |
| | Offer guidance for employees on effective neurodivergent-friendly communication styles, for example unambiguous language and bulleted formats. | | | |
| | If neurodiversity focused ERGs do not exist, explore the benefits of starting one and the required steps. | | | |

| | | BUILD | REINFORCE | ACCELERATE |
|--|--|-------|-----------|------------|
| | If neurodiversity focused ERGs do exist, proactively communicate its existence and how to join as a standard induction practice | | | |
| Signpost external resources | Provide information concerning resources available to neurodivergent employees outside their workplace, including government-supported programs and VCSE sector initiatives. | | | |
| Seek external partnerships | Collaborate with disability support partners that work with neurodivergent people to develop advice on workplace protections and support afforded to neurodivergent individuals. | | | |
| Provide clinical and mental health support | Ensure that diagnosis for neurodivergent conditions is included in any employer private medical insurance package. | | | |
| | Train and assign mental health champions who specialise in neurodiversity. | | | |
| | Provide professional mental health support to employees. | | | |

Three key considerations will help companies to engage with and embrace neurodivergence in the workplace:

Adjustments exist in a wider social context that hinges on supportive vertical and lateral allyship. Therefore, strong allyship cuts across all areas. To protect the well-being of neurodivergent employees, adjustments must be successfully embedded within workplace rules and norms to mitigate the stress of neurodivergent employees repeatedly having to self-advocate.

Adjustments for neurodivergent employees benefit everyone, regardless of their neurodiversity status, so companies should embrace this upside.

Becoming a more neurodiverse and inclusive company is a journey and every company is different; some level of adaptation is needed to fit a company's unique culture and context.

7. Appendix - survey procedures and demographics

Survey design and dissemination

The survey sought to gather data on the experiences of neurodivergent employees in the Technology Sector and their accessibility. It was aimed at both neurodivergent and neurotypical employees. The survey was designed in light of the literature review, with support from the #ChangeTheFace companies involved in this research. The English version of the survey was translated into Chinese, Czech, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean and Spanish by native speakers.

The survey was administered using Qualtrics, and an anonymous link was distributed through the internal email channels of each of the four companies. The survey opened in August and concluded in October 2023.

Several methodological limitations apply to the sample and the survey. First, it was a self-selected sample, and no post-stratification weighting was performed. Hence, the sample cannot be treated as representative but due to the large sample size, the surveys can provide a good indication of the experiences of neurodivergent employees in the four companies. Second, as a global survey, neurodiversity conditions definitions and practises for diagnosis varied.

Analysis procedures

All data were analysed in IBM SPSS and figures were created in Microsoft Excel and Adobe Illustrator. All data were prepared and cleaned, which included the assignment of missing values, deletion of irrelevant variables, recoding of items, and variable type changes. Respondents who didn't complete the first survey block were excluded.

Analysis followed the research hypotheses based on the literature review and focus groups. The statistical analysis involved descriptive statistics such as the calculation of frequencies as well as inference statistics mainly to test for differences between subgroups (such as neurodivergent and neurotypical respondents). Statistical analysis also included regression and correlation analysis. Tests were selected based on the measurement levels of variables and test assumptions. Effect sizes were calculated in addition to significance test results to judge about the magnitude of an effect and were interpreted according to standard conventions.

Sample description

A total of 2176 respondents were included in the analysis. The sample characteristics are:

- The gender distribution was fairly balanced.
- The vast majority of the sample was between 25 and 54 years old.
- Most identified as non-LGBTQ+.
- The country respondents were based in ranged, though approximately one-third worked in the UK.
- Job roles varied from intern to director, with over one-third classified as specialists/coordinators.
- The employment period showed a mix from less than 1 year to over 10 years.

The tables below provide more detail about the demographics and work-related information.

Table A1 Gender

| | Male | Female | Non-binary | Prefer to self-describe | Prefer not to say |
|----------|------|--------|------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| N | 965 | 898 | * | * | 74 |
| % | 49% | 46% | * | * | 4% |

Note. *Numbers below 25 are suppressed.

Table A2 Age

| | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65+ | Prefer not to say |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------------------|
| N | 73 | 452 | 591 | 516 | 224 | * | 88 |
| % | 4% | 23% | 30% | 26% | 11% | * | 5% |

Note. *Numbers below 25 are suppressed.

Table A3 LGBTQ+

| | Yes | No | Prefer not to say |
|----------|-----|------|-------------------|
| N | 127 | 1713 | 105 |
| % | 7% | 88% | 5% |

Table A4 Countries

| | Czech Republic | Finland | France | Germany | Greece | India | Italy | Luxembourg |
|----------|----------------|---------|----------|---------|--------|-------|-------|------------|
| N | 41 | 47 | 27 | 117 | 159 | 174 | 204 | 38 |
| % | 2% | 2% | 1% | 6% | 8% | 9% | 11% | 2% |
| | Netherlands | Poland | Portugal | Romania | Spain | UK | Other | |
| N | 50 | 88 | 30 | 59 | 70 | 562 | 258 | |
| % | 3% | 5% | 2% | 3% | 4% | 29% | 13% | |

Table A5 Job role

| | Director | Head of Department | Senior manager | Manager | Specialist/Coordinator | Intern | Other | Prefer not to say |
|----------|----------|--------------------|----------------|---------|------------------------|--------|-------|-------------------|
| N | 41 | 71 | 208 | 421 | 704 | 58 | 341 | 105 |
| % | 2% | 4% | 11% | 22% | 36% | 3% | 17% | 5% |

Table A6 Employment period

| | 0-12 months | 13-24 months | 2-5 years | 5-10 years | 10+ years | Prefer not to say |
|----------|-------------|--------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------------|
| N | 260 | 229 | 347 | 363 | 707 | 51 |
| % | 13% | 12% | 18% | 19% | 36% | 3% |

