

DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO

Don't tell me what to do: Neurodiversity inclusion beyond the occupational typecasting.

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LeFevre-Levy et al. (2022) identify "environmental niches," or occupation types best suited for autistic individuals and those with ADHD and dyslexia. Drawing on the existing research and popular media, LeFevre-Levy et al. (2022) suggest that autistic individuals are most likely to thrive in technical fields, individuals with ADHD are well suited for entrepreneurship, and that creative fields are a good match for those with dyslexia.

Although extremely popular in professional and popular literatures, typecasting individuals into occupations based on specific neurodivergence is problematic. Here, we outline several conceptual issues with assumptions underlying the typecasting, and practical implications of this approach. We then provide alternative recommendations for how researchers and practitioners can promote the inclusion of neurodivergent people across industries.

The Trouble with Typecasting

1. Typecasting fundamentally contradicts the view of neurodiversity as diversity and reflects the long-standing pathology/deficit perspective (Praslova, 2021b). The question "which jobs are the best for dyslexic people/ADHDers/autistics" is asked by the general public, managers, and reviewers of academic papers. But could this question stem from implicit ableism? Within the neurodivergent community, the test of ableism is substituting another type of diversity in statements and questions about neurodivergent individuals. The substitution test, indeed, reveals the implicit ableism behind typecasting. If neurodiversity is truly approached as diversity, asking "which jobs are most suitable for autistic people" is as limiting and ableist as asking "which jobs are most suitable for women" is limiting and sexist.

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2. Typecasting does not reflect the complexity of neurodivergence. Developmental differences often overlap and co-occur (Brimo, 2021, Pennington, 2006; Rong, 2021). Stereotypical job fit recommendations may seemingly leave individuals with dual diagnoses or multiple neurodivergent traits without any "suitable careers." However, such individuals likely have patterns of abilities that the narrow typecasting does not reflect.

3. Typecasting reflects *naturalistic fallacy*, a.k.a. "what is observable is good" phenomenon or the leap from what *is* to what *ought* to be. Although the existing research and observations may suggest that autistic people succeed in technical fields while ADHD and dyslexia are associated with entrepreneurship, such findings and observations reflect career paths constrained and shaped by societal biases. The very stereotype of "autistic tech geeks" constrains access to non-technical careers. Perpetuating this stereotype is likely to perpetuate unemployment and underemployment among autistic individuals with non-technical patterns of abilities. Moreover, entrepreneurship rates among neurodivergent individuals likely reflect the lack of employment opportunities and the fact that many workplaces are unwelcoming of neurodivergence (Praslova, 2021b).

The role of environmental effects on neurodivergent populations is also revealed by the research findings indicating that the connection between dyslexia and creativity might be learned rather than innate. Two recent meta-analyses found that dyslexic children and adolescents do not show an advantage in creativity over nondyslexic comparisons, while adults do. This suggests that creativity might be a learned response to unaccommodating environments (Erbeli et al., 2022; Majeed et al. 2021).

In addition, neurodivergent workers who have chosen nonstereotypical industries often feel the pressure to mask their identities. This may increase their labor and make maintaining employment more difficult. Moreover, the lack of disclosure (along with the lack of diagnosis, especially in older, female,

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racialized, and economically disadvantaged populations) makes statistics regarding the number of neurodivergent individuals within specific industries unreliable.

4. Typecasting relies on stereotypes regarding abilities and "deficits" associated with specific neurodivergence. These stereotypes are both limiting and widely inaccurate. For example, contrary to stereotypes, experiments demonstrate that both autistic children and adults show higher levels of verbal creativity on metaphor generations tasks than the non-autistic comparison group (Kasirer et al., 2020; Kasirer & Mashal, 2014). And while stereotypical autistic strengths list memory and crystallized intelligence, Hayashi et al. (2008) documented that youth diagnosed with Asperger's performed better than non-autistic controls on measures of fluid intelligence. The limiting steering of autistic individuals toward technical jobs is a great disservice to this population; it has both individual wellbeing and economic costs. Likewise, the expectation that dyslexic individuals demonstrate superior creativity and ADHDers pursue entrepreneurial success is likely to serve as a stressor akin to the academic success pressure placed on Asian-American students (Lee et al., 2009).

Alternative Recommendations

Rather than steering individuals of certain neurotypes toward specific occupations, researchers could critically examine industries and organizations with higher proportions of neurodivergent employees. These could serve as exemplars demonstrating inclusion strategies that can be implemented elsewhere. Specifically, studies could examine the relative effectiveness of policies, procedures, social norms, and other factors that contribute to more inclusive work environments in particular industries and organizations. Examples of potentially helpful practices include the use of work samples instead of interviews, flexible work organization, careful job matching based on specific assessment of talents, and support for employee advocacy. Inclusive work norms may develop due to the nature of the work, or because a higher proportion of neurodivergent employees tend to work and advance to leadership

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positions in an organization, which influences organizational culture and processes (Praslova, 2022b). Examination of best practices presents a fruitful opportunity to promote the inclusion of neurodivergent employees across industries. Qualitative analyses of neurodivergent people's lived experiences determining career paths - including barriers faced by unemployed people and those outside of stereotypical industries - are also likely to yield valuable recommendations.

Career guidance practitioners should focus on discovering individual patterns of ability, interests, and values using instruments validated for neurodivergent populations (e.g., Dipeolu, 2011; Hayashi et al. 2008). Multifaceted assessment is essential to helping individuals understand and articulate their strengths for optimal job matching.

An essential tool in supporting neurodiversity inclusion at work is job crafting (Praslova, 2021a). Wrzesniewski et al. (2013) stress that job crafting - active employee participation in shaping task, relational, and cognitive components of their jobs to maximize fit, meaning, and engagement - is valuable for all employees. For some neurodivergent employees, it could make a difference between having a career filled with unique contributions and suffering chronic unemployment. "Spiky" ability profiles characteristic of neurodivergent individuals mean that strengths or even notable giftedness in specific cognitive, emotional, or relational areas might be accompanied by a struggle in other areas (Baron-Cohen, 2020; Grandin, 2013; Milton, 2012; Milton et al., 2017). Organizational and manager support for job crafting is essential to neurodiversity and intersectional inclusion in the workplace (Praslova, 2022a). Along with careful job matching, job crafting can further support the person-role fit and occupational success of individuals, as well as team and organizational results.

Finally, organizational practitioners can help integrate neurodiversity as part of diversity efforts across industries and on all levels within organizations. This should include the support for leadership development and advancement of neurodivergent individuals toward leadership roles. This will help

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reduce stereotyping and promote broad inclusion rather than limited employment in specialized occupational pockets (Praslova, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b; Roberson et al., 2021). Organizations of all types can improve work environments for neurodivergent employees; examining and implementing evidence-supported inclusion strategies should be the foundation of this work.

If our field is to truly embrace neurodiversity as diversity, we must examine whether outdated notions stemming from ableism influence the questions we ask, the science we pursue, and the advice that we give. It is our responsibility to create flexible and intersectionally inclusive workplace environments where individuals with varied patterns of neurodivergent strengths could thrive (Praslova, 2022a). Replacing typecasting with inclusion across industries will liberate neurodivergent individuals to seek employment best aligned with their unique patterns or interests and abilities, rather than to be relegated to a stereotypical set of "suitable" occupations.

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