

The Neurodiversity in All of Us

When you hear the word neurodiverse, what comes to mind first? Different? Strange? Often when people hear the word neurodiverse, there tends to be a negative association attached to it. Let's step away from that. Let's dive a little bit deeper into what it really means to be neurodivergent or for someone to be neurodiverse. Neurodivergent individuals are not just people who are diagnosed on the spectrum or with another type of mental diagnosis. Neurodiversity is a natural variation in how people's brain's function. It's called a spectrum for a reason; there is such a wide span of what one must have or what one must be to be a neurodiverse individual. If you think about it, everyone one of us falls somewhere on the neurodivergent spectrum.



Are you the type of person that likes to be super organized, or someone who likes to keep sensory items like a stress ball on your desk when you're overwhelmed? Do you work best in quieter environments with little to no distractions? All these specifications are all part of having a different variation of how each one of our brains works. Every single person is different and unique for a reason, if we were all the same, imagine how boring that would be. Oscar Wilde said it best, "Be yourself; everyone else is already taken."

The Different Ways for Someone to Learn

One of the things to remember is that everyone's learning style is different from one another. There are several different ways one can learn. Below are the main learning styles most people fall under.

7 Main Types of Learning Styles:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Reading/Writing
- Kinesthetic

- Social
- Solitary
- Analytical

Neurodivergent employees can bring several key strengths to a team: attention to detail, problem-solving, creativity, productivity and efficiency. Everyone single one of us brings something unique to our team in the workplace. We all come from different ways of thinking, different backgrounds and different experiences. All these differences are what makes us, us.

Ways to Make a Work Environment Successful for Everyone

Some things to consider in the work environment include but are not limited to, the noise level, the brightness of overhead lights, cubicle/office set-up, and social interactions. Have you ever been in the office and from the moment you walk in you are bombarded with very bright lights? Do you ever find yourself sitting at your desk and noticing that it is unusually loud and you wish everyone would dial it down just a bit so you could focus more?

A lot of factors in our environments go into how efficient and productive we are based on what we work best in. Jake Jorgovan, a professor of Workplace Statistics at the University of Arizona, states that *"Accommodations in the workplace like being able to wear headphones, having desk lamps, keeping stress/sensory items in their desk, and having comfortable chairs and other adjustable accommodations were shown to increase productivity by 76% for certain tasks, leading to more efficient task completion for a diverse workforce"*.

Ways to Improve Productivity in a Workspace

- **Lighting:** Increase natural lighting or use full spectrum lighting to improve mood and focus and consider desk lamps to accommodate people's sensitivity to bright lights
- **Noise Control:** Minimize noise distractions by providing quieter workspaces, headphones, or soundproofing materials.
- **Ergonomics:** Invest in ergonomic furniture like adjustable chairs and standing desks to reduce physical strain and discomfort.
- **Decluttering:** Promote a clean and organized workspace to reduce anxiety and improve focus.
- **Workspace Layout:** Design a balanced layout with areas for both collaboration and focused work.
- **Add Plants:** Plants can improve air quality, reduce stress, and boost mood.

By accommodating neurodiverse employees based on their learning styles and the way they work best in their workspace, employees are then able to be set up for work productivity success. Aubrey Blanche, Senior Director of People Operations at Culture Amp stated that *"Given that up to 60% of the population is considered to be neurodiverse, it's an almost indefensible talent strategy to not consider the needs of these populations in your workplace"*.

Modifications in a work environment mean that we are putting the needs of ourselves and our employees first by meeting people where they are at.

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