

Embracing neurodiversity in the AI-powered workplace: A new paradigm for success

In today's rapidly evolving work landscape, employers everywhere should be harnessing the dual potentials of neurodiversity and artificial intelligence. World-renowned educator, entrepreneur and activist Dr Maureen Dunne explains why...

There's an adage that while AI might not be coming for your job in particular, someone who knows how to use it effectively might be. Many people today are familiar with the sentiment— some 77% of respondents to a [recent survey](#) were concerned that AI would cause job loss within the year; meanwhile, a [recent report by PwC](#) predicted that some 30% of today's jobs run the risk of automation by the mid-2030s. Amidst the flurry of conversations around artificial intelligence, one thing is clear — tomorrow's workplace is going to look very different to the one of today.

Confronting these challenges isn't just a question of having the right software; it's about having the right personnel to harness its potential. Companies looking to optimise their talent pipeline should be looking to recruit creative, nonlinear thinkers capable of navigating an economic landscape fast in flux. Which is another way of saying they should be looking to harness the potential of neurodiversity.

Research demonstrates neurodivergent individuals can be 30% more productive than their neurotypical colleagues, are less prone to cognitive bias and usually more consistent in rational decision-making. These are the sorts of margins that the US intelligence community and companies like Dell and Microsoft are now investing in. They have good reason to do so. Not only are they building a more inclusive society, they are also constructing more robust organisational cultures capable of weathering the stormy seas ahead.

From neurodiversity to neurodiversification

Neurodiversity encompasses a range of cognitive variations, such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, and more. An estimated 15-20% of the world's population exhibit some form of neurodivergence. Despite the size of the community, it still represents a vast pool of talent that has been undeveloped and underutilised in the workplace.

This is a big mistake. Research has shown that the cognitive variations of neurodivergent people are extremely valuable in a wide variety of work capacities. The ability to engage in lateral thinking and approach and analyse problems from unique angles can act as a stop-gap against damaging forms of group think and a rudder during uncertain times. As the scope of AI's capabilities expand, these skills are more important than ever.

Businesses everywhere need to get on board. The way they should do so is through a process I call "Neurodiversification." Neurodiversification takes a strength-based approach to neurodiversity, and applies it to the world of management and commerce. It entails diversifying your workforce to include the broadest range of cognitive abilities and perspectives.

The benefits of doing so are clear. According to James Mahoney, head of Autism at Work for JPMorgan Chase, autistic employees were up to 140% more productive than their neurotypical peers. Another study from the *Creative Research Journal* in 2016 found that ADHD students scored significantly higher than neurotypical students in originality, novelty and flexibility on an invention task, as well as increased cognitive flexibility in word association tests. And when it comes to machine learning, leading financial services companies like Ernst & Young and Credit Suisse have invested extensively in onboarding autistic individuals because the results speak for themselves — they consistently outperform their neurotypical peers.

These are all crucial advantages for any business — and nurturing them should be at a top priority. Neurodiversification is more than an ethical commitment or a buzzword. It is a strategic business imperative that drives tangible results for

companies looking to thrive in an AI-driven future.

Some practical steps...

So where does one start? Raising awareness is a good first step. This can take the form of a value statement or memorandum issued by the head of an organisation. Once those values are established, the next priority should be implementing policies on both grass-roots and top-down bases in order to prompt a paradigm shift. And that's where HR departments come into the picture.

They should start with recruitment. Active review and modification of hiring practices is critical to ensuring inclusivity is a substantive, and not just a rhetorical commitment. HR should also look at reducing reliance on traditional interview structure. This review could look to alternative practices such as sending interview questions ahead of time to reduce anxiety and incorporating more task-based assessments. These types measures help create an environment that signals a commitment to promoting the well-being of neurodiverse employees from the get go.

HR should also look at tailoring onboarding and mentorship programs to address the needs of neurodivergent personnel, and then establish feedback mechanisms that facilitate lateral communication of what works and what doesn't. Different people will have different ways of working, so remaining centered on the individual and maintaining a flexible approach is key. Related to this is the question of remote work — some neurodivergent people are more productive in environments in which they feel familiar. An openness to remote or hybrid workplace protocols demonstrates an accommodating attitude.

It's all about sending the right message to your employees — that you'll listen to them, and that you're there for them. By investing in neurodiversification, companies can not only foster a culture of inclusion, creativity, and innovation, but attract and retain top talent to give them that competitive edge. As AI continues to shift the ground beneath everyone's feet, talent is the one thing employers can rely on. Now is no time to get left behind.

Dr Maureen Dunne is CEO of *Autism Community Ventures* and author of *The Neurodiversity Edge*.