

What can employers do to create more neuro-inclusive workplaces?

A recent report from the CIPD revealed that for almost a third of organisations (32%), neuroinclusion is not a focus, with small businesses being the least likely to do so.

But ADHD and other neurodiversities can be a huge asset for organisations looking innovate and grow, due to unique skills such as the ability to hyper-focus, extreme productivity, creativity and enthusiasm. For startups looking to rapidly scale their business, ADHDers are the perfect hire! If you're not prioritising neuroinclusion, you're missing out.

Here are three important steps that employers must follow if they want to harness the strengths of an increasingly neurodivergent workforce:

Understand Neurodiversity

As neurodiversity has become more visible and more people come forward seeking support, the stigma and politicisation of ADHD and similar conditions has also increased. Conversations around neuroinclusivity can therefore be uncomfortable for employers who may feel they don't have the knowledge or skills to support a neurodivergent employee – after all, everyone experiences a condition differently and how one person with ADHD navigates work can be very different to another.

Company-wide neurodiversity training should be mandatory as it ensures

everyone is aware of neuroinclusion and understands that it is a priority in the workplace. From this training, you can put policies in place to provide all-important structures and precedents for neuro-inclusion, such as accessing specific funds for adjustments like Access to Work (UK Gov). It also means that access to reasonable adjustments is made clear and recognised, ensuring neurodivergent people feel able to get the support they need.

Training should be tailored accordingly – if an employee discloses a new condition, managers should receive specific training on this condition. Employers should remember that they don't need to be a medical professional to have an adult conversation about how best to support someone who is neurodivergent. Disclosing a condition can make someone feel very vulnerable – three in 10 don't feel comfortable disclosing a neurodiverse condition to HR or their manager, so you should recognise the significance of doing so.

Think of the big picture

It's all well promoting neuroinclusivity across some aspects of the workplace, but if this isn't reflected across all areas, it is not meaningful. For example, your recruitment process should also be audited and tailored so that neurodivergent candidates are not disadvantaged – such as by offering questions or tasks in advance of an interview, or allowing written notes and removing psychometric tests.

Similarly, you should tackle barriers to progression – there is often a lack of diverse talent promoted into some positions for example. Neuroinclusivity is not a tick box exercise, but should result in real and effective changes.

Draw on the neurodiversity policies mentioned above to set out the reasonable adjustments that are available, such as working from home or flexible working. A truly neuro-inclusive workplace accommodates everybody, all the time. So things like working from home should be available to everyone when they feel they need it, not only as something that can be granted after a long bureaucratic paper trail, fostering a culture of personal responsibility and trust.

Make the most of people's strengths

To allow neurodivergent employees to reach their full potential, focus on their strengths, rather than their weaknesses. Adjust each person's role according to their skillset, cultivating an environment where everyone thrives and can contribute their full potential.

ADHD employees, for example, often thrive within fast paced working environments, demonstrating super productivity and the ability to meet tight

deadlines. They are also 300% more likely to start their own business, so you want these entrepreneurial people working with you, not for the competition or even becoming your competition!

This strength is down to our 'interest based nervous system' which means ADHDers can be incredibly motivated by things they find interesting or novel, or that gives them an adrenaline rush (i.e. the pressure of a tight deadline!). Challenging work could literally feel easier than administrative tasks which require very little thought. Assigning tasks to suit each individual's 'zone of genius', where they can hyper-focus and play to their strengths, will result in extraordinary work from everyone, improving team performance and energy.

As an employer, you can work to these strengths by encouraging task-swapping between employees and also breaking down long-term goals into short-term 'sprints' to maintain motivation. By being adaptable, you will soon see results as your workforce becomes happy, engaged, loyal and wildly productive – help people to work with – not against – their neurodivergent strengths!

If nothing else, the Covid pandemic showed the value of flexibility where needed – there shouldn't need to be a crisis for jobs to work for the individual, in place of an outdated model where people are burnt out by rigid roles that did nothing to inspire engagement at work. Neuro-inclusion and accessibility means everybody benefits – it's a no-brainer.

Employers and business owners have the power to make waves that ripple far beyond themselves. It's time to think differently about people who think differently.

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