



Neurodiversity at Work

with Laura G. Anthony

Agenda

- **Introduction to Neurodivergence**
 - **Common Types and Challenges**
 - **Employment Implications**
- **Strategies for Inclusive Practices**
 - **Employment Interviews**
 - **Conduct Investigations**



Introduction to Neurodivergence



Initial questions...

- Are you familiar with the term **neurodiversity**?
- Do you **know someone** who identifies as neurodivergent? (self, family member, friend, colleague)?
- Do you know that person **well**?



**If you've met
one neurodivergent person,**



**If you've met
one neurodivergent person,
you've met **exactly one.****

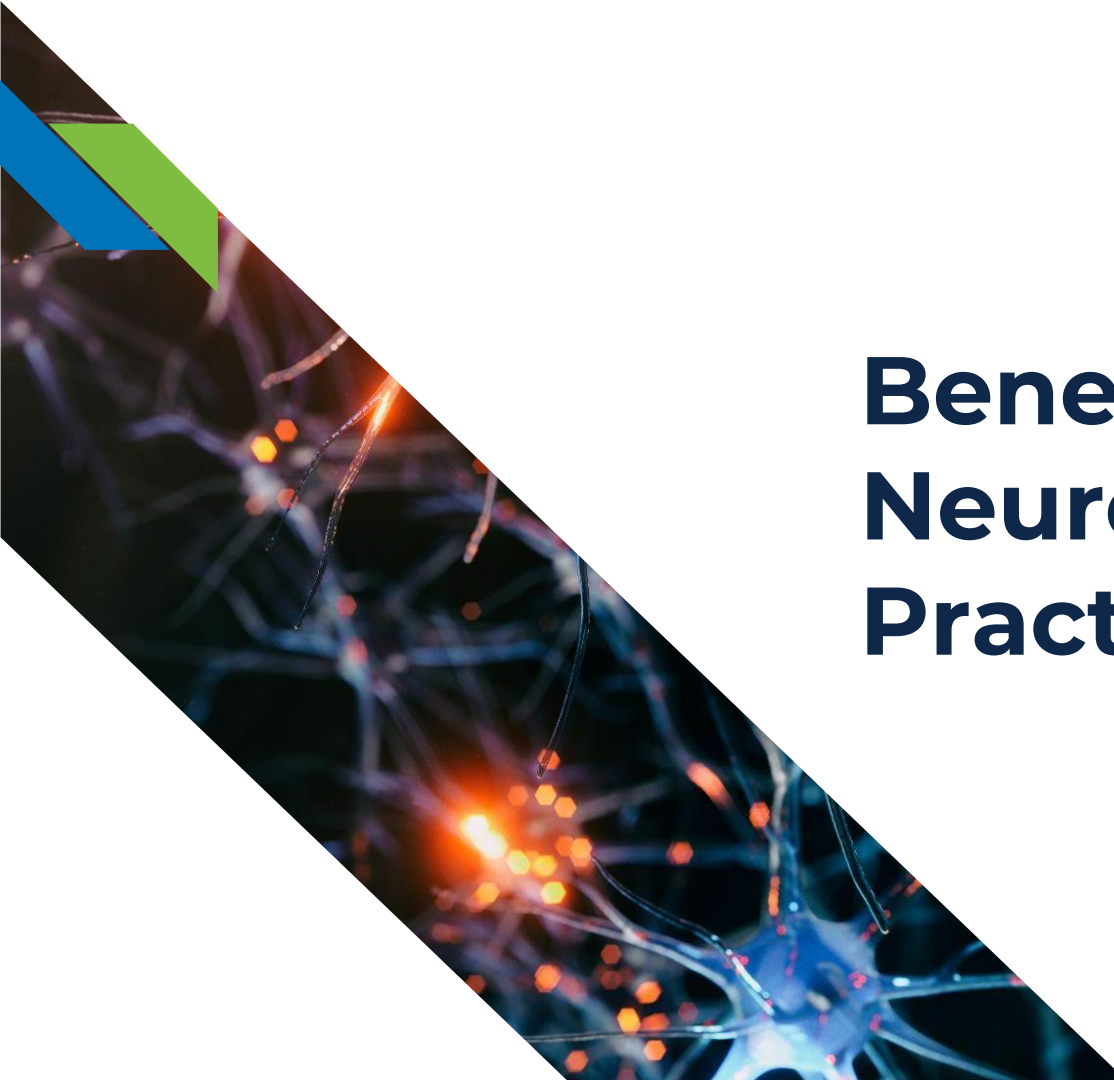


Neu·ro·di·ver·gence

noʊrō,dī'vərjəns

Noun: Reflects the differences in how our brains develop and function, which enable us to process, recall and communicate information in unique ways.

Related Term: Neurodiversity, which recognizes the infinite traits and abilities that can result from different brains working differently.



Benefits of Neuroinclusive Practices

Workforce strengths

- Strong attention to detail and factual knowledge
- Dependable and conscientious
- Creative and innovative
- Able to work independently
- High retention and attendance rate



Common Types of Neurodivergence



Learning/Processing Differences

- Dyslexia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyscalculia

“My teachers thought I was lazy and not very clever... I couldn't always follow what was going on. On one of my last days at school, the headmaster said I would either end up in prison or become a millionaire.”

Richard Branson – Business owner



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Challenges

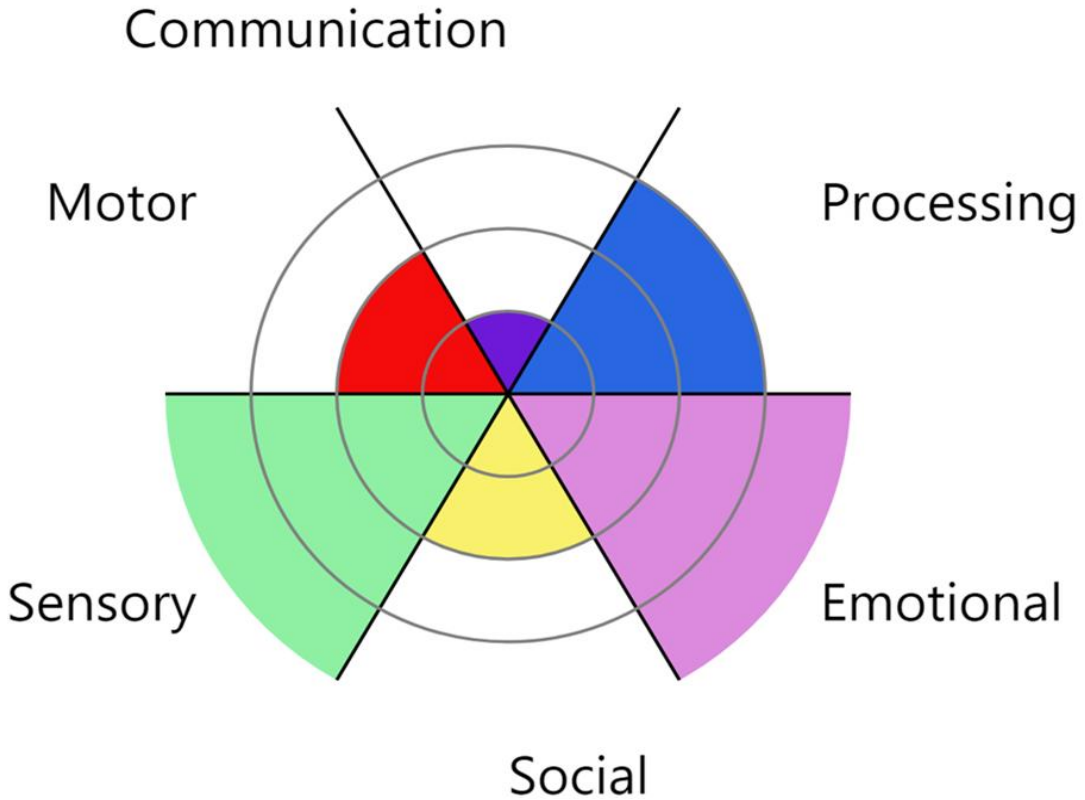
- Social communication
- Social interaction
- Across multiple contexts

Restrictive, repetitive patterns

- Behavior
- Interests
- Activities



Autism: Linear spectrum or wheel?





Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

**ADD
ADHD**

- Predominantly hyperactive/impulsive
- Predominantly inattentive
- Combined



Implications for Employment Practices



Common Characteristics & Employment Implications



Sensory

- Sensitivity to sight, sound, smells, taste and touch
- Over or under stimulated
- Can trigger an emotional response, stimming or withdrawal

[S]tims such as dribbling sand through my fingers... calmed me down....sounds that hurt my ears stopped. [We] do these repetitive behaviors because it feels good in some way. It may counteract an overwhelming sensory environment ...

Temple Grandin



Common Characteristics & Employment Implications



Processing

- Working memory
- Planning
- Organization
- Response Time
- Attention

My diagnosis has definitely made me not follow the stream. I think outside the box.

Greta Thunberg



Common Characteristics & Employment Implications



Emotional Regulation

- Inflexibility
- Anxiety/Anger
- Rejection sensitivity
- Fatigue
- Withdrawal

If I'm not careful in how I sleep, how I eat, how I manage my routine, I can become overwhelmed and it can feel like the whole world is just too heavy to bear.

Trevor Noah



Common Characteristics & Employment Implications



Communication

- Language use
- Bluntness
- Affect
- Conversational turn taking
- Fixations

One of my symptoms included my obsession with ghosts... I became obsessed with Hanz Holzer, the greatest ghost hunter ever. That's when the idea of... Ghostbusters was born.

Dan Aykroyd



Common Characteristics & Employment Implications



Social Interaction

- Eye contact (avoiding or sustained)
- Social camouflage
- Masking
- Engagement

I want people to see how it is, to see that you shouldn't judge... People with Asperger's do put a barrier up because they don't know how to trust people. I try not to. I want to let people in.

Susan Boyle



Why is this Relevant to Employers?



Why is this Important?

Prevalence

- 15-20% of the population
- Numbers are increasing

Hidden

- Underdiagnosed and untreated
- Undisclosed at work

Bias

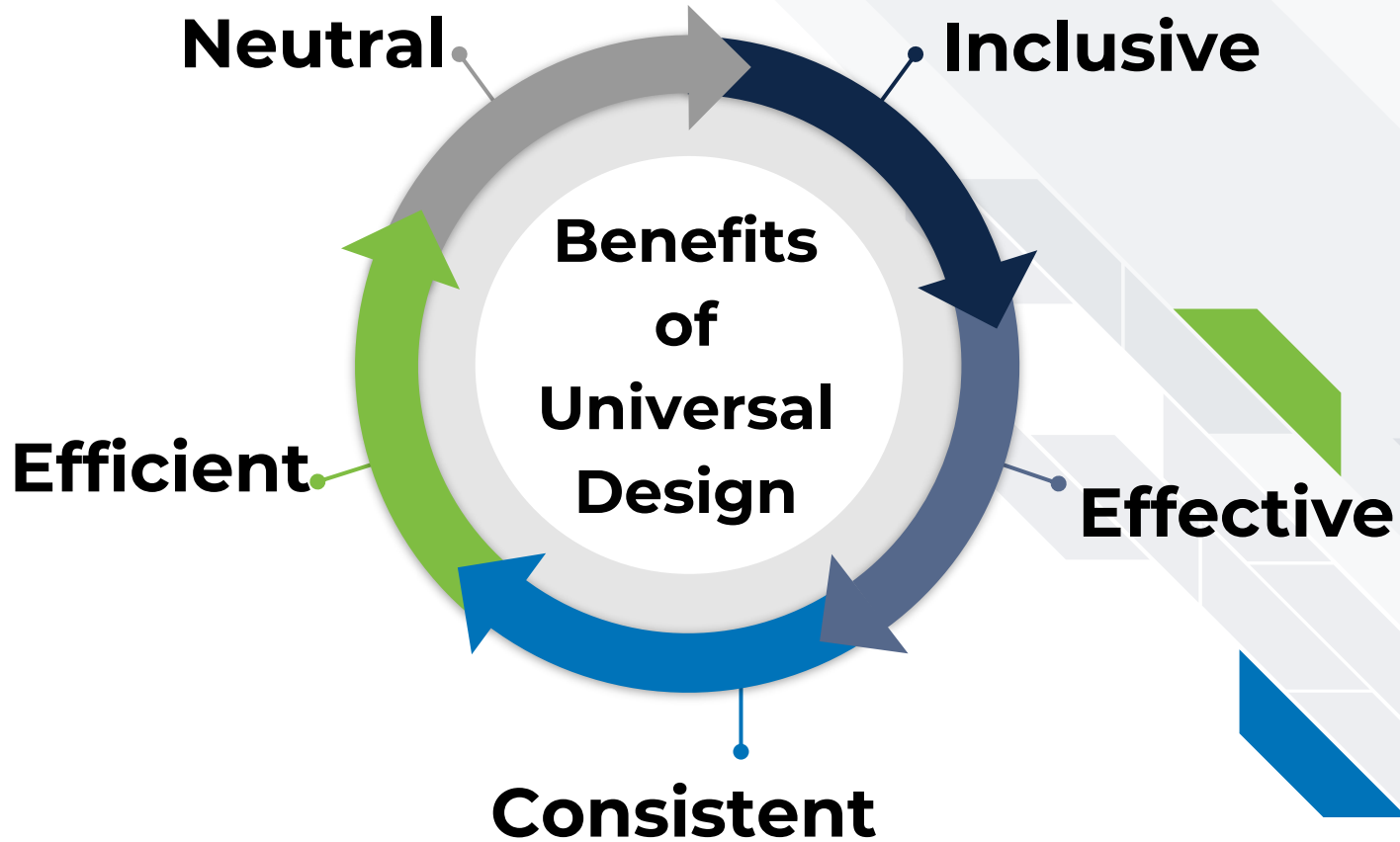
- Assumptions about capacity, needs, and credibility

The Interview





Universal Design Strategies to Promote Neuroinclusion



Tiered Interventions





Level 1: Systemic Efforts

- Training
- Language use
- Process adjustments
- Sharing information in multiple modes
- Providing supports (resource materials, breaks, support person as permitted)



Level 2: Talent Recruiting

Job Postings and Interview Structures

- List skills required for the job
- Describe physical and social environments
- Use concise and understandable language
- Limit number of interviewers
- Consider competence-based process or demonstration



Level 2: Interviews & Investigations

Provide Process Overview

- Describe logistics: start/end time, interviewer, setting availability of breaks and accommodations
- Share potential for multiple sessions
- Identify policies and standards
- Consider preview of topics and/or questions



Level 2: Consider Sensory Needs

Sight

lighting
clutter
(virtual
and in
person)
window

Sound

ambient
sounds
clock
HVAC
talking

Taste

mints
water
snacks

Smell

cologne
diffuser
cleaning
supplies
food

Touch

fidget
items
hard/soft
seating
hand-
shake



Level 2: Meeting Considerations

- **Greeting**
- **Share information about role, expectations**
- **Rapport building**
- **Invitation to share information about**
 - **Themselves**
 - **Supports they may need to feel comfortable**
 - **What you can do if they start to feel discomfort**



Level 2: Interview Techniques

- **Should you begin with open-ended questions?**
- **Pivot if necessary and consider**
 - **Specific and targeted questions**
 - **Visual prompts**
 - **Segmenting topics (WAFA technique)**
 - **Check for understanding and need for breaks**



Responding to Challenges

**Discomfort
Distress**

- Provide reminders of support options
- Acknowledge discomfort
- Redirect to supports
- Try to de escalate
- Check yourself



Responding to Challenges

Detours

- Reflect what was shared
- Redirect
- Address relevance
- Rephrase the question



Responding to Challenges

Disengagement

- Acknowledge discomfort
- Return to easier topics
- Allow different methods of responding
- Check for comprehension



Responding to Challenges

**Delay or
Discontinue**

- Extend response time
- Reinforce expectations
- Check your bias
- Consider pausing or discontinuing



After the Interview

Follow up

- Clarify next steps
- Document
- Invite questions or additional information
- Consider providing interview summary for feedback and clarification



Takeaways

- Understanding what is neurodivergence
 - Divergence = differences
- Why this topic is important for HR professionals
- Strategies to create neuroinclusive employment practices



Remember

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you've met **exactly one**



Remember

If you've met one neurodivergent
person,

you've met **exactly one**

because **great minds don't think alike**

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