

Inclusion of people with neurodiversity in Hybrid & Remote Work

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Introduction

Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation in the human brain and mind, including conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other cognitive differences. As remote work continues to grow, it is essential to create environments that are inclusive of people with neurodiversity. People with neurodiversity (sometimes referred to as neurodivergent or neuroatypical) bring unique perspectives and problem-solving skills to the table, just like any other individual, but they may face additional challenges in virtual work settings. This guide provides strategies for fostering inclusion and ensuring that neurodivergent employees thrive in remote work environments.

Understanding the issue

When people with neurodiversity are excluded from the workplace, the organisation cannot use their unique characteristics, points of view, and experiences that might lead to better decision making, both strategic and operational, and add immense value to the team. However, in remote work settings, challenges like communication barriers, sensory sensitivities, and differing work styles can make it harder for employees with neurodiversity to feel included or thrive.

What can be done to ensure the inclusion of neurodivergent employees in remote and hybrid work?



Provide Clear and Structured Communication

Neurodivergent employees, particularly those with ADHD or autism, may struggle with vague or ambiguous communication. Managers should ensure that expectations, instructions, and feedback are clear and structured. They can use written communication as much as possible, with bullet points or step-by-step instructions, to support clarity and reduce misunderstandings.



Offer Flexible Work Arrangements

Allow employees to design their workday around their peak productivity times can enhance their performance.



Foster a Supportive Work Environment

Encourage managers to engage in open, empathetic conversations with employees with neurodiversity about their specific needs and preferences. This includes understanding sensory sensitivities, preferred communication styles, and specific challenges. Managers can create a culture of support by regularly checking in with employees, offering assistance when needed, and providing feedback that is constructive and specific.



Leverage Technology for Accessibility

Ensure that remote tools and platforms are accessible for employees with neurodiversity. This may include tools with speech-to-text functionality, task management apps, and noise-cancelling technology.



Encourage Regular Breaks and Mental Health Support

Remote work can be draining for neurodivergent employees, especially those with conditions like ADHD or anxiety. Encourage regular breaks to help employees manage their focus and energy levels. Offer resources for mental health support or access to counselling services, to help employees cope with stress, anxiety, or other mental health challenges.



Promote Equal Opportunities for Career Advancement

Ensure that employees with neurodiversity have access to the same career development opportunities as their neurotypical peers. This includes clear pathways for promotion, mentoring, and skill-building. Provide accommodations in performance reviews and goal-setting to ensure that employees with neurodiversity are evaluated fairly based on their unique strengths.

In addition to these strategies, make sure to ask employees about what they might need to work efficiently: they know best what works for them and what does not! It can be as simple as asking, "How can we make you more comfortable?"

What is the role of Human Resources ?

- HR should provide training for all employees and managers on neurodiversity to promote understanding, empathy, and awareness of the unique needs of individuals with neurodiversity in remote work setting.
- HR should work with managers to ensure that employees with neurodiversity have equal access to career growth opportunities, including mentorship programs, promotions, and skill-building workshops. HR should facilitate the provision of accommodations, such as flexible working hours, specialised tools, or sensory-friendly workspaces, and ensure that employees with neurodiversity have access to appropriate mental health support and resources.
- HR should regularly assess the effectiveness of inclusion initiatives, gather feedback from neurodivergent employees, and adjust policies as needed to ensure that all employees feel supported and included.

Conclusion

The inclusion of neurodivergent employees in remote work environments is vital for creating inclusive, innovative, and high-performing teams. By providing clear communication, flexible work arrangements, and the right resources, organisations can foster an inclusive environment where employees with neurodiversity can succeed and contribute their unique talents. Inclusion requires ongoing effort from both management and HR to ensure that neurodivergent employees feel supported, valued, and able to thrive.



Further reading

- Austin, J., & Pisano, C. (2017). Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage. Harvard Business Review.
- Houghton, S., & Anderson, R. (2019). Inclusion of Neurodiverse Employees in the Workplace: Strategies and Benefits. Journal of Occupational Psychology, 24(3), 221-232.
- Robertson, J., & Ne'eman, A. (2020). Neurodiversity in the workplace: A guide for HR and managers. The Neurodiversity Employment Network.