

Planting The Seeds of Neuro-inclusion

Building A Workplace That Supports Neurodivergent Talent 

Fairtrade America | 3.28.2025



Welcome and Introductions

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Session Expectations Takeaways

Logistics Access, Engagement, Feedback



Session Contents

1 Neuro-inclusion & Culture	2 Neurodiversity	3 Leadership Mindset
4 Workplace Strategy	5 Barriers	6 Defining Impact



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Neuro-inclusion and Culture

What is Neuro-inclusion?

A belief in value of the full spectrum of the human experience and varied perceptions.



1



MANY WORKPLACES HAVE EXPECTATIONS THAT ALL EMPLOYEES ARE THE SAME AND WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN A UNIFORM STRUCTURE.

CONSIDER A NEW PERSPECTIVE.

EVERY EMPLOYEE IS UNIQUE AND VALUABLE... LIKE A PUZZLE PIECE.

VARIATIONS MAY PRESENT CHALLENGES, BUT IT IS WELL WORTH IT WHEN YOU CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO SEE HOW THEY ALIGN.



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Key Concepts of Neuro-inclusion

- Self-Awareness Education and Acknowledging Assumptions
- Acceptance Belonging and Well-being
- Systems and Processes Universal Intention and Access
- Inclusive Leadership Practices Top-down implementation



1 Neuro-inclusive Best Practices

- ⌚ Noticing Assumptions
- ⌚ Accepting Diverse Thinking
- ⌚ Leading with Curiosity
- ⌚ Using a Strengths-based Approach
- ⌚ Encouraging Open Communication
- ⌚ Providing Access
- ⌚ Allowing for Flexibility
- ⌚ Modeling Behaviors



1 Benefits of a Neuro-inclusive Workplace Culture



Values Reflected
Openness, Diversity, Acceptance
Internally and Externally



Workforce Optimized
Increased Talent Pool
Enhanced Performance



Employee Satisfaction
Increased Well-being
Retain Talent



Strengths Leveraged
Diverse Thinking
Innovation, Creativity and Problem Solving



1 Neurodivergent Traits Are Strengths

curiosity persistent intellectual quantity detail-oriented reliable
analytical technical insightful
high-energy non-linear
unique hyperfocus meticulous commitment innovation specialized knowledge
honest pattern-recognition
creativity enthusiasm
breakthroughs resilience adaptability problem-solving
stem quick-thinking risk-taking authentic
logical expertise passionate



| ¹ Inquiry Invitation

What is important about prioritizing neuro-inclusion for your organization?



| ² Understanding Neurodiversity



Neuro = Nervous System | *Diversity* = Variety
Cognitive variations determine how we process and interact with the world around us.

The Evolutionary Perspective of Humanity

Biodiversity and Cognitive Diversity

- Skills
- Perspectives
- Experiences



| ² What It Takes To Fit In



Neurotypical is a concept that reflects social and societal expectations.

"Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."



2 Defining Disability

Disability is a disruption of behavioral ability due to internal or external barriers (or their combination) leading to a compromised performance in specific functions and specific environments.



2 Neurodivergent Conditions



Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
Learning Disabilities
 Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia
Anxiety Disorders
Tourette's Syndrome
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
Sensory Processing Disorder



2 Example Presentations in the Workplace

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- Difficulty sustaining focus; distraction
- Procrastination
- Hyperactive thoughts/Excessive restlessness
- Interrupting
- Executive Function Impairments (Time Mgmt, Planning & Prioritizing, Organization, Inhibition, Working Memory, Emotional Regulation)



2 Example Presentations in the Workplace

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Difficulty interpreting and responding to social cues
- Initiating and maintaining conversations (small talk)
- Difficulty with change/Transition
- Sensory experiences that cause distress
- Repetitive behaviors/Stimming



2 Example Presentations in the Workplace

Learning Disabilities

- Dyslexia - Difficulty processing visual information
* reading/spelling/writing
- Dyscalculia - Difficulty processing numbers
* prioritization, organization, instructions
- Dysgraphia - Interference in fine motor skills
* handwriting and/or thoughts translated in to written form
- Dyspraxia - Interference in gross motor skills
* coordination and balance

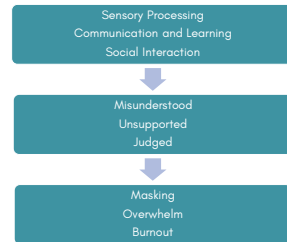


2 Common Myths

- ✗ Myth | Neurodiversity is a new trend, synonymous with autism.
- ✗ Myth | Neurodiversity impacts intelligence.
- ✗ Myth | Neurodiversity is a mental illness.
- ✗ Myth | Neurodivergent people are all the same.



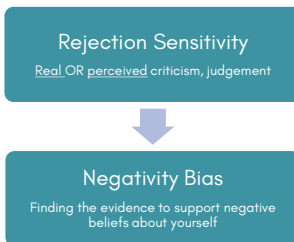
2 Neurodivergent Experiences in the Workplace



Challenges within traditional workplaces become barriers that hinder performance, job satisfaction and career advancement.



2 Internal Narratives



Self-critical rumination of thoughts that are likely due to a lifetime of not fitting in, being rejected, and primarily having challenges pointed out to you.



2 The Burnout Cycle



Burnout is a chronic state of mental, emotional and physical exhaustion.

Employee resiliency, efficiency of output and connection to work is compromised.



2 Neurotypical Expectations vs. Neurodivergent Reality

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Maintain eye contact | ⇒ | Difficult to speak or listen and process |
| Participate in meetings | ⇒ | Verbal contributions challenging |
| Be still and seated | ⇒ | Need stimulation to pay attention |
| Physical environment | ⇒ | Sensory overload = physical distress |
| Small talk/functions | ⇒ | Difficulty with interpersonal relations |
| Disclosing a diagnosis | ⇒ | Targeted with discrimination |



2 Disclosing A Diagnosis

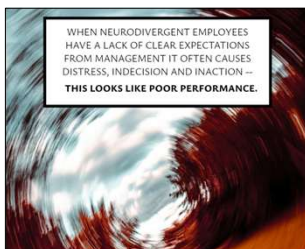
A personal decision at any stage in the employee life cycle.

Considerations for discerning safety:

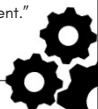
- Past experiences cause fear of discrimination or judgement.
- Diversity awareness, acceptance and advocacy.
- Concern for privacy with employees' personal information.
- Relationships with colleagues and managers.
- Messaging from leadership and organization.
- Support for professional development.
- Opportunities for engagement and feedback.



2 Perception Informs Assumptions



Self-advocacy to seek clarity or additional information by the ND employee in traditional workplaces is feared...
"I will look incompetent."



2 Inquiry Invitation

Identify potential challenges faced by neurodivergent employees in your organization.



3 Neuro-inclusive Leadership Mindset



Perspective: Limitations $\Rightarrow$ Contributions



Key Principles: Compassion, Curiosity and Flexibility



Engagement: Mutual Exchange



Modeling: Top-Down Example



3 Focus on Contributions



Strengths-forward approach leverages talents, skills and abilities to overcome obstacles.

Learn to understand and apply strengths effectively.

Determine support needs from network of colleagues with complementary skills.

Growth mindset nurtured to be persistent and solution-oriented.



3 Key Leadership Principles



Compassion versus Empathy

Curiosity leans in to understand without judgement.

Flexibility enables an outcome without determining the route.



3 Engagement Loop



Mutual exchange reflects openness and acceptance.

Co-creation of systems, workflows and solutions.

Empowers autonomy and confidence.

Creates an environment of psychological safety.



3 Modeling Values Across The Organization



TOP-DOWN influence promotes action.

Modeling for ND individuals anchors learning.

Behavior reflects priorities.



3 Inquiry Invitation

How have you been influenced by demonstration that forms your leadership?

What stands out as a practical action that would shift your leadership practices?



4 Designing a Neuro-inclusive Workplace Strategy

Neuro-inclusion is the practice of creating an environment where ~~neurodivergent~~ people feel accepted, respected, supported, and valued.

- Proactive and Intentional
- Establish Trust and Safety
- Maintain Well-being



4 Components Applied to Your Strategy



Acceptance



Access



Clarity



Communication



4 Tolerance versus Acceptance

Tolerance

Willingness to endure differences

Acceptance

Actively embraces diversity

"Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are." – Brene Brown



4 Awareness Paves the Path to Acceptance



All-Employee Awareness Training

Providing education to support internal mindsets that reflect neuro-inclusive values enables the work force as a whole to embrace what is real that can't always be seen.

It reinforces a culture of understanding and acceptance.



4 Radical Acceptance

"Happiness lies not in finding what is missing, but in finding what is present."
–Tara Brach, PhD.



Promotes Equity



Empowers Action



Produces Results



4 Access = Reasonable Accommodations

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
Reasonable Accommodations

A modification or adjustment to a job or work environment that permits an employee with a disability to participate in the hiring process, perform essential functions, or enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.

- ✓ Person-focused.
- ✓ Interactive process.
- ✓ Timely implementation.
- ✓ Reviewed for efficacy.



4 Example Accommodations

Reasonable = "feasible" or "plausible" to provide without undue hardship

- Assistive Technology
- Flexibility
- Environment/Sensory
- Essential vs. Marginal Duties
- Executive Function Support



Employee and Employer Resource: askjan.org



Employee and Employer Resource: askjan.org

A to Z of Disabilities & Accommodations

Click on the tabs to browse the index!



By Disability By Limitation By Work-Related Function By Topic By Accommodation

► By Disability

By Disability - Find information on various disabilities, impairments, and conditions.

► By Limitation

► By Work-Related Function

► By Topic

► By Accommodation

Addison's Disease	Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgia	Human Immunodeficiency	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Aging	Chronic Pain	Huntington's Disease	Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome
Albinism	Colorblind/Color Vision Deficiency	Intellectual Disability	Pregnancy
Alcoholism	Cumulative Trauma Conditions	Latex Allergy	Quadruplegia



Situations and Solutions Finder @ AskJAN.org

- Centralizes workplace accommodation scenarios
- Examples from organizations large and small, across industries, and from the private and public sectors
- Various health conditions and disabilities represented

Situations and Solutions Finder



4 Provide Clarity

- Be direct.
- Be consistent.
- Be explicit.

Directives. Expectations. Feedback. Processes.

Reduce the need for employees to assume, interpret or read between the lines on what you expect for a workflow, outcome, response time, deadline, etc.



4 Ambiguous Language vs. Clarity

- Just get it done when you can.
 - It would be great if you could handle this.
 - The project timeline is delayed.
 - The new employee is in the pipeline, be ready to participate in orientation.
- ...these are statements, not instructions...vs.

- Please have that report to me by Friday at 2pm.
- Consult with our marketing firm to get an estimate for the scope of work we outlined.
- We are unable to source accurate information at this time in order to move forward with our priority project. Let's table this for now. I will let you know next steps by Tuesday.
- We will be onboarding the new employee next Wednesday. Please reserve an hour after lunch to present an overview of your team's services.

4 Communication

Everyone processes information differently.

Intake and output of information is related to learning and processing styles.

V.isual A.ural R.eading/writing K.inesthetic

- ✓ Strategic content delivery that accommodates all learners.
- ✓ Re-frame contribution/participation expectations.



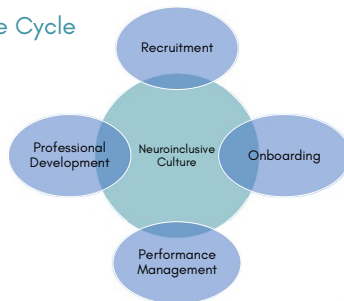
4 Employee Life Cycle

⌚ Perspective

⌚ Principles

⌚ Values

⌚ Practices



4 Recruitment

Advertisement - Concise and clear job description, messaging about organizational values, and access to accommodations in processes

Availability - Provide access to org. point of contact

Resume Review - Diverse team member review, consider criteria

Interview - Diverse panel, provide questions in advance and info about what to expect, offer accommodations, don't stack questions



4 Onboarding

- Provide advance information about environment
- Provide industry terminology
- Provide all-employee awareness initiatives to foster inclusivity
- Confidential and standardized processes
- Assess communication and learning needs, environmental/sensory adjustments, task management supports, social/team dynamics



4 Onboarding – Interactive Assessment

Communication Preferences:

How do you prefer to receive information? (written, verbal, visual) Do you need clear and concise instructions? Are there any communication triggers that might cause stress?

Work environment Adjustments:

Do you need a quiet space to focus? Are there any sensory sensitivities that could be managed with adjustments to lighting or noise levels? Would flexible work hours or breaks benefit your productivity?

Task Management and Organization:

What tools or strategies help you stay organized? Do you prefer structured deadlines or flexibility in project timelines? How can we best break down complex tasks into manageable steps?

Interpersonal and Team Dynamics:

How comfortable are you with large group meetings? Do you have any specific needs regarding social interaction with colleagues? How can we best facilitate open communication and feedback within the team?



4 Performance Management

- Proactive approach to engagement; set goals together, be available
- Establish routine check-in; consistent and responsive
- Identify and leverage strengths
- Notice skill gaps or patterns that can be supported with training/tools
- Provide timely and individualized positive and constructive feedback
- Allow processing time and follow-up



4 Performance Management - Interactive Assessment

Preferences for Engagement:

- How do you like to be acknowledged for successes?
- What is the best way to deliver positive and constructive feedback?
- When have you felt misunderstood in your professional experience?
- What makes you feel valued?
- What causes stress in your role?



4 Professional Development

Executive Function Coaching

Tools and skills tailored to the individual to improve Time Management, Planning & Prioritization, Task Management and *Emotional Regulation*

Mentorship Program

Provides guidance, support, and a pathway for professional development, while also fostering a sense of community and belonging

ND Awareness Training

Neurodiversity affirming communication, interaction and problem-solving skills that promote adaptability and flexibility



4 Inquiry Invitation

How do current practices, processes or policies in place help or hinder neurodivergent talent in your organization?



5 Overcoming Organizational Barriers

Lack of Awareness	What training or support is needed?
Budget Constraints	Small, realistic steps that impact change.
Resistance To Change	"What you resist persists." - Carl Yung



5 Addressing Bias in the Workplace

Bias - formed by our experiences and what is familiar to us

Unconscious Bias at Work

- Favor people who are similar to us
- See good in others due to a personal like-mindedness
- Stereotypes interfere with objective assessment
- We seek information to confirm what we already believe
- Make assumptions about something unusual



5 Action with Intention

First glance assessment; low hanging fruit

Invite ND talent to engage in process

Identify 2-3 actionable strategies



5 Inquiry Invitation

What are actionable solutions to implement systemic change?



6 Evaluating Impact

- Outcomes to Strategic Action
- Employee Engagement
- Retention Rates
- Performance Indicators
- Qualitative Feedback



6 Inquiry Invitation

What will success look like for you personally or your organization with this new information?



Questions? 

...Let's Connect

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