Success Enablers:

A Manager's Guide to Supporting Neurodivergent Employees

The term "success enablers" shifts the narrative from reactive "reasonable adjustments" and "accommodations" to proactive strategies that empower all employees, particularly neurodivergent individuals, to excel in the workplace. This language focuses on creating environments and systems that unlock potential rather than simply addressing deficits. Moving away from deficit-focused terms like "accommodations" reframes support as an investment in strengths and contributions, fostering an inclusive culture where diverse perspectives are recognised as valuable assets. By adopting this approach, we promote equity, dignity, and collaboration, enabling everyone to succeed on their terms.

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1. Shift Your Perspective: Embrace Strengths, Not Deficits

- **Reframe "Needs" as "Strengths"**: Instead of focusing on limitations highlight the unique talents neurodivergent employees bring. This strengths-based approach fosters a culture of growth and collaboration.
- **Use Affirmative Language**: Replace phrases like "they struggle with" or "they need accommodations" with alternatives like "they excel when…" or "they thrive with…" to reinforce the employee's value.
- **Recognise Neurodivergence as a Natural Variation**: Embrace neurodivergent ways of thinking as valuable, diverse perspectives rather than "challenges" to fix.

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2. Success Enablers Instead of "Accommodations"

- **Think Enablers, Not Adjustments**: "Enablers" are proactive tools and strategies that help everyone perform at their best, moving away from reactive adjustments and highlighting success pathways for neurodivergent employees.
- **Focus on "Best-Fit" Environments**: Create an environment that allows all employees to work in ways that amplify their strengths.

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3. Language to Encourage Success, Not Pathology

- **Reframe Descriptive Language**:
  - Instead of "struggles with organisation," use "excels with structured timelines."
  - Instead of "challenges with focus," use "brings creativity to diverse tasks."
- **Highlight Contribution**: Lead conversations with what neurodivergent team members bring to the table. For example, say, "They bring an innovative perspective to complex problems."

4. Success Enabler Strategies

- **Enable Clarity in Communication**: Use concise language, summarise meetings in writing, and consider providing agendas in advance. These aren't "adjustments" for those who "struggle"; they're success enablers that benefit everyone.
- **Align Roles with Strengths**:
  - Detail-oriented team members (often associated with autism) thrive in roles requiring precision.
  - Creative thinkers (often associated with ADHD) excel in dynamic tasks like brainstorming and problem-solving.
- **Empower Autonomy and Flexibility**: Flexibility isn't a "special accommodation"—it's a universal success enabler that lets employees work in ways that maximise their productivity and creativity.

5. Practical Tools as Success Enablers

- **Noise-Cancelling Headphones**: Beneficial for employees who prefer quiet or find noise distracting, these headphones allow for focused, distraction-free work.
- **Quiet Zones and Break Spaces**: Create designated quiet areas for employees who benefit from low-sensory environments. This helps employees recharge and maintain productivity.

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- **Visual Planning Tools**: Tools like whiteboards, flowcharts, or project management software (e.g., Trello, Asana) support employees who thrive with visual aids for task organisation.
- **Flexible Workspaces**: Allow employees to adjust their workspace layout to suit their needs. Standing desks, adjustable lighting, or ergonomic seating can make work more comfortable and productive.
- **Task Management Apps**: Tools like Toggl, Clockify, or Focus@Will help employees manage their time and track progress. These apps support focus, pacing, and effective prioritisation.
- **Fidget Tools**: Items like stress balls or hand fidgets enable focus by providing a small sensory outlet without disrupting others.

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6. Building an Inclusive Language Framework

- **Reframe "Fixing" Language**: Avoid terms like "overcoming difficulties" or "managing deficits." Instead, use language that centres on success and skill-building.
- **Success-Oriented Feedback**: Provide feedback that emphasises growth and contributions. For example, "Your detailed work on this report was invaluable," rather than "Despite needing help with details, you did well."
- **Cultivate a Growth Mindset**: Encourage a team-wide growth mindset, seeing every employee as having evolving skills and strengths.

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7. Fostering a Neuroaffirmative Culture

- **Encourage Neurodiversity Awareness**: Promote open discussions around neurodiversity and emphasise valuing diverse ways of thinking.
- **Model Inclusive Behaviour**: Demonstrate neuroaffirmative language in meetings and interactions, setting a standard of respect and acceptance.
- **Provide Opportunities for Skill Application**: Recognise neurodivergent employees' abilities and create opportunities for them to excel, such as including detail-oriented employees in quality control or creative thinkers in innovation sessions.

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8. Success Enabler Scenarios and Reframed Language

- **Scenario 1**: A neurodivergent employee benefits from quiet spaces for focused work.
    - **Reframed Language**: "This person excels in focused tasks. Quiet zones enable them to contribute at their best."
- **Scenario 2**: A team member with dyslexia prefers visual over written instructions.
    - **Reframed Language**: "They thrive with visual aids. Using flowcharts or diagrams enables clear understanding."
- **Scenario 3**: An ADHD employee brings energy to creative problem-solving but benefits from structured task lists.
    - **Reframed Language**: "Their innovative thinking is invaluable. Task lists help them channel creativity into actionable steps."

9. Creating a Success Enabler Action Plan

- **Identify Enablers, Not Adjustments**: Look for tools, workflows, or communication methods that will amplify neurodivergent employees' unique abilities.
- **Plan Success Reviews**: Establish regular check-ins focused on how enablers are working and what additional strategies could further their success.
- **Encourage Knowledge Sharing**: Invite neurodivergent employees to share their preferred success enablers with the team, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.

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