Our Beautiful Minds

An Introduction to Neurodiversity at Work
Today’s session

Part 1: Building awareness
- What is neurodiversity?
- Strengths and challenges
- Barriers to success at work

Part 2: Taking action
- Making effective adjustments
- Building psychological safety
- Challenging exclusive behaviour
How can we define neurodiversity?
What is neurodiversity?

The range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population.

Key terms:

• Neuro-divergent / neurominority: A person is defined as one whose neurological development and state are atypical.
• Neuro-diverse / neurominorities: a group whose members are neurodivergent.
• Neuro-typical: A person who is "neurologically typical" - within the typical (average) range for human neurology.
• Neurotype: types of diagnosable neurodiverse conditions
15–20% of the global population is neurodivergent
The most common neurodivergent conditions

**Autism spectrum disorder**
A spectrum condition which impacts how people think and interact with the world.

**ADHD**
Often presents as inattentiveness, or hyperactivity and impulsiveness

**Dyslexia**
Characterised by difficulties with reading, writing and spelling.

**Dyspraxia**
Impacts on a person's movement and coordination.
Spiky Profiles

Dyslexic Spiky Profile

- Writing Speed
- Expressive Vocabulary
- Passage Comprehension
- Visual Processing Speed
- Spelling
- Working Memory
- Auditory Memory
- Letter Naming
- Reading Fluency

Source: British Psychological Society
Strengths and challenges
Autism spectrum disorder

**Strengths:** Memory; Innovative thinking; Attention to detail; specialist skills

**Challenges:** Time management; need for routine; communication

ADHD

**Strengths:** Innovative thinking; Attention to detail; specialist skills

**Challenges:** Impaired executive functioning; Time management; prioritisation; concentration; volatility; impulsiveness; restlessness.

Dyslexia

**Strengths:** Entrepreneurialism; Creativity; Visual reasoning; 3D thinking; seeing the big picture.

**Challenges:** Working memory, Processing speed; Time management

Dyspraxia

**Strengths:** Verbal comprehension, creativity; seeing the big picture.

**Challenges:** Motor difficulties; Working memory

Challenges with mental health and self-esteem
What is working memory?
Try to remember this number:

022 341 57 26
Working memory

Try to remember this number: 285 3678
A neuro-typical phonological loop
A neurodivergent phonological loop
Common characteristics:
The Cocktail party effect
Brain saturation
Degrees of distraction in open-plan offices
How does being neurodivergent impact on an employee in the workplace?
A lack of understanding
Stigma

- **65%** of neurodivergent employees were worried about stigma and discrimination from management¹

- **55%** of neurodivergent employees were worried about stigma and discrimination from staff¹

- **61%** of neurodivergent employees have experienced stigma at work²

Sources:
Common barriers within the workplace

- Recruitment process
- Work environment
- Communication
The catch 22

- Employees feel excluded
- Not safe to disclose needs
- The barriers persist
- They can’t perform at their best
- They don’t get the support they need

The barriers persist
The Neurology of Exclusion

Exclusion

- Activates dACC
- Social withdrawal
- Less discretionary effort

Inclusion

- Sense of belonging
- More creativity with implementation
- Safe to innovate
What is “masking”? 

Neurodivergent masking refers to the practice of concealing or suppressing aspects of one's neurodivergent traits or conditions, in order to fit in with the norms of the workplace or society.
Why does disclosure matter?

Employees were 6.1 times more likely to receive their Reasonable Adjustments if they disclosed their condition.

Source: Pearn Kandola
What can we do to support our neurodivergent colleagues?
Ways to support neurodivergent colleagues

- Making effective adjustments to ways of working
- Creating psychological safety
- Challenging exclusive behaviour
1. Making effective adjustments
What are Reasonable Adjustments?

Changes the Organization may put in place to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to:

- A Member of the Personnel’s disability when doing their job
- A candidate’s disability when applying for a job”
## Common types of reasonable adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexibility</th>
<th>Software</th>
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<td>E.g. Having a flexible schedule and being able to work from home.</td>
<td>E.g. mind-mapping, speech-to-text, coloured overlays.</td>
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<th>Work environment</th>
<th>Coaching</th>
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<td>E.g. Lighting adjustments, access to private space, noise-cancelling headphones.</td>
<td>E.g. support with communication, wellbeing, time management.</td>
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Sources:
Informal adjustments to ways of working

**Minimising stress**
- Let people tell you how they would like to work
- Give advance notice of tasks
- Think about the degrees of distraction
- Don’t overload with verbal instructions

**Written communications**
- Use ‘sans serif’ font such as Arial and Tahoma
- Include diagrams, flow charts or pictures
- Prioritise important tasks first, with bullet points
- Print or copy text on coloured paper or provide a plastic overlay.
Everyone has their own unique set of strengths and weaknesses.

So tailor adjustments to the individual.
2. Building psychological safety
Psychological safety:
A shared belief held by members of a team that it is safe to put oneself at risk.
Psychological Safety

A shared belief held by members of a team that it is safe to put oneself at risk.

How?
- Encourage ideas, debate and challenge
- Apply curiosity and compassion
- Avoid blame
- Convey trust in others
- Show care and concern for individuals
# How to build psychological safety

| Develop understanding | • Celebrate neuro-difference  
|                       | • Run inclusion workshops  
|                       | • Improve your own understanding  
| Encourage openness    | • Encourage neurodivergent colleagues to express their needs  
|                       | • When people speak up, listen and respond appropriately  
| Focus on growth       | • Make it clear that you value learning and growth over perfection  
|                       | • Avoid shaming people for mistakes  
|                       | • Focus on strengths  
| Commit to action      | • Measure psychological safety, review regularly, take appropriate action  
|                       | • Follow through with adjustments  

3. Challenging exclusive behaviour
‘I’m being dyslexic, I can’t spell that’

‘How rude...they must be on the spectrum’

‘I get so OCD about my filing’

‘My friend has that too so I know how you feel’

‘I’ll speak for you’

‘You don’t look autistic’

‘They wouldn’t understand’

‘That’s beyond their capabilities’

‘How do you cope?!’

‘We’ve not got all day’

‘Why do you never listen?’

‘It’s kinder not to invite them...they’d just feel uncomfortable’

Micro-incivilities

‘The kinds of daily, commonplace behaviours which signal, consciously or unconsciously, to members of out-groups that they do not belong and are not welcome.’
How to Challenge: The Continuum of Intervention

‘I’ve asked you several times to stop making that type of comment. I have no choice but to ask you to leave this meeting’

‘I feel uncomfortable when I hear that sort of comment and I would prefer that you don’t share those views again here’

‘That comment could cause offence – it is based on negative stereotypes and isn’t in line with our commitment to diversity and inclusion’

‘I do wonder how our team would feel if they felt we were making these kind of assumptions’

‘I used to use that term but then I heard that it makes my neurodivergent colleagues uncomfortable.’
Recap: Ways to support neurodivergent colleagues

- Making effective adjustments to ways of working
- Creating psychological safety
- Challenging exclusive behaviour
“Innovation is most likely to come from parts of us that we don’t all share.”

Anka Wittenberg, (Chief D&I Officer, SAP)
Further training and resources

CERN Learning Catalogue (all available in English et en français):

Sign up for the following learnings in the CERN Learning Hub:

**Active Bystander**: aims to empower staff to challenge poor behaviours, and bring about cultural change through the reinforcement of messages defining the boundaries of unacceptable behaviour.

**"Coffee Machine" responding discrimination at work**: an original approach to addressing inappropriate behaviour at work is performed as a short theatre piece.

**Blind Spots and Unconscious Bias**: This workshop provides a framework and tools to help you change your behaviours and practices in order to improve team dynamics and organisational performance by being more inclusive.

Read more here:

"What is Neurodivergent Masking & Why Do Professionals Do It?" – Inclusion Hub, 13 Apr 2023

e-resources on respect in the workplace

CERN Diversity & Inclusion homepage: [https://diversity-and-inclusion.web.cern.ch/](https://diversity-and-inclusion.web.cern.ch/)
Support Services for CERN Personnel

1. Contact the CERN Medical Services psychologists: https://hse.cern/content/mental-health-support or directly by email: psychologist.medical.service@cern.ch

CERN Psychologists offer to the CERN Personnel (employed and associated) primary care psychological consultations in English or French in complete confidentiality. Their mandate covers:

- guidance
- advice
- provide tools to better manage a given situation,
- refer you to a suitable practitioner, if necessary.

1. Send a mail to the Supporting Neurodiversity at CERN (“SNAC”) informal network, if you would like to join and share your experiences, give suggestions, or be an ally to colleagues who are neurodivergent: neurodiversity.contact@cern.ch (emails received and handled confidentially by SNAC co-chairs Louise Carvalho and Rob Heaton Mills), or to diversity.inclusion@cern.ch
Local Resources for CERN Personnel

In and around Geneva:

a. La Fondation Pole Autisme: http://www.pole-autisme.ch/fr
b. Autism Info Service: https://www.autismeinfoservice.fr/informer/obtenir-diagnostic
c. University of Geneva courses, such as “Troubles du spectre de l’autisme: biologie et neurosciences” here: https://moocs.unige.ch/offre/cours-ouverts/troubles-du-specre-de-lautisme-biologie-et-neurosciences
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