

A Neurodivergent-Friendly, Strength-Based Approach to Corporate Hiring and
Learning: Training Modules for Change

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ABSTRACT

Those who are cognitively diverse often experience years of discrimination throughout their lives, discrimination that has a profound effect on their mental health and career trajectories. As the neurodivergent label grows to include more than autistic individuals, the Neurodiversity Movement also grows stronger and corporations are taking notice. A talent pool of neurodivergent adults is emerging and yet they are hitting systemic barriers (e.g. entrance into the talent pool, the interview processes, onboarding and integration, and corporate culture) that place them at a disadvantage within the workplace environment. In order to address these barriers, I have created deliverable modules for the corporate environment that introduce accurate terminology, share the strengths of various neurological profiles, and build awareness and acceptance of the neurodivergent mind; all of which ultimately impact future policy by opening doors that have been historically difficult to access. My community partner is NeuroGuides, a non-profit organization that works with neurodivergent adults and trains corporate leadership worldwide in moving from a simple diversity model to true inclusivity and universal design.

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Introduction

Dr. Nick Walker (2014) defines neurodiversity as “the diversity of human brains and minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species” (Walker, 2014, What it means section). Of the many ways neurodiversity is defined, I find this definition is the strongest. To further expand on Dr. Walker’s definition, understanding the term neurodiversity requires a willingness to develop an appreciation of those with cognitively diverse minds, an acknowledgment of the unique talents that are innate to their neurological profile, compassion towards their lived experiences, and the ability to recognize the strengths they bring to the table (Walker, 2014). Once that process happens, inclusion and belonging are the natural results; these results, in turn, opens up the opportunity for innovation. After working with K-12 children for many years in helping them thrive through meaningful advocacy and accommodation, I began to wonder if it is possible to recreate this path towards inclusion and a sense of belonging within the corporate world. After all, twice exceptional children grow up to be twice exceptional adults and all twice exceptional adults are neurodivergent individuals.

This wondering led me to my internship with Ultronauts (Ultronauts, 2022), a company where 75% of their staff identify as autistic, and down the rabbit hole of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) initiatives; as each component is important in supporting, attracting, recruiting, and the retention of neurodivergent individuals (Ultronauts, 2022). The acronym, DEIB, includes four powerful components that are necessary for organizations to thrive and for a culture of belonging

to exist (Findem, 2022). The challenges and opportunities I discovered during this internship process were eye-opening and it led me to my capstone project.

Neurodivergent (ND) individuals, a term that will be dissected in greater depth in later chapters, struggle to enter the workforce because their neurology is not widely understood or accepted by both managers and colleagues alike (Bailin, 2019). While many organizations have policies in place that address general DEIB initiatives (e.g. Coca-Cola, Mastercard, and Johnson & Johnson), some go a step further personalizing for neurodivergent individuals (e.g. Red Hat Software, EY, and SAP). This personalization comes by specifically naming neurodiversity as a subset of DEIB and taking the struggles and challenges experienced by this population into account when setting policy. Companies that have personalized for neurodiversity report gains in profit, productivity, innovation, and an overall positive corporate culture (Austin & Pisano, 2017).

However, without strategic planning and thoughtful training by credentialed specialists, countless opportunities are left on the table, such as employee engagement and quality improvement; an oversight that impacts a company's profitability, harms the culture of the workplace, and most importantly upholds the systemic barriers that work against cognitively diverse individuals. Credentialed specialists understand the lived experiences of ND individuals, are aware of the nuances within this field, and make it a point to include actual ND individuals in any conversation or policy change that directly impacts them. Additionally, advanced certifications or degrees in appropriate fields contribute to a specialists' qualifications.

For neurodivergent individuals to successfully enter and be accepted in the workplace I have created modules that 1) introduce accurate terminology, 2) share the strengths of various neurological profiles, and 3) build awareness and acceptance of the neurodivergent mind; all of which ultimately impact future policy by opening doors for NDs that have been historically difficult to access. Through a focused 5-step process of building understanding, creating awareness, providing a safe space for acceptance, fostering inclusivity, and establishing a culture of belonging, the stage is set to unlock human potential and create endless possibilities both for the employees and their employers.

My community partner is NeuroGuides, a non-profit organization that works with neurodivergent adults and trains corporate leadership worldwide in how to move from a simple diversity model to true inclusivity and universal design. They are engaged daily in workplaces with all persons to build an understanding of true neurodiversity and are dedicated to changing the narrative for neurodivergent persons (The Foundation for Life Guides of Autistics, n.d.).

For my Capstone project I created two (2) modules, one (1) strategic planning template, and one (1) supplemental bid proposal for companies and HR representatives that wish to embrace a learning culture, neurodiversity, and support neurodivergent adults through inclusive programming and initiatives. Both modules discuss accurate terminology, share the strengths of various neurological profiles, and build awareness and acceptance of the neurodivergent mind. The focal point of my problem of practice, and the main focus of the second module, addresses the systemic barriers (e.g. entrance into the talent pool, interview process, onboarding and integration, and corporate

culture) that exist for neurodivergent adults, which places them at a disadvantage within the workplace environment.

The Beginning

Inspirational individuals are few and far between, but when you come across them they can spark a light inside you. The first time I heard Sir Ken Robinson speak about creativity and education that light was ignited for me. His words rang true then as they do today. The late Sir Ken Robinson spoke about our current education system being designed, structured, and conceived for a different age. The effect of these conceptions have resulted in conformity: an increase of standardized testing, a rise in school boredom, over medicated children churned through the medical model, and missed opportunities for divergent thinking (Robinson, 2010).

These were all things I experienced as a classroom teacher within the public school system, but I thought I could circumvent these frustrations and injustices by moving to the private sector. After making this move, I took on various administrative roles including Dean of Faculty and Head of School. Unfortunately, even with the authority that these titles brought me, the private school system was not that different. Although I was able to cut through a lot of red tape and set policies that were far more inclusive than those I experienced in public school, private schools still presented big challenges. I noticed that putting people into boxes and labeling others is almost an impossible practice to get away from. I also noticed that the ones who were always labeled, either officially or unofficially, were the twice exceptional learners. Twice exceptional is a term with a long and varied history which begins in 1836 and ends in 2004 with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Baum et al., 2017b). This act allowed educators to work with students holistically, honoring and serving both

their strengths and their disabilities, which acknowledged twice exceptional students in public education (Baum et al., 2017b).

The journey of a twice exceptional individual can be challenging, even within the safety of a school that is accepting of them, and I began to wonder how twice exceptional (2e) students experienced the world once they left my school and entered the workforce. I contacted some of my former students, now adults, and listened to their stories. I learned of struggles and successes and realized that the education and corporate systems are not as different as one may think: systems mirror each other, all individuals have requirements that need to be met in order for them to perform at their best, and the culture of an organization has a huge impact on the success of that organization. I came to learn that the effect of the narrow conceptions that Sir Ken Robinson (2010) spoke about in our educational system unfortunately extended to the workplace culture for millions of 2e or neurodivergent individuals; a place where top-heavy organizational charts, non-inclusive and demeaning policies, and lack of understanding were reminiscent of the conformity and bureaucracy I encountered in K-12 schools.

Change is difficult; it can feel insurmountable when someone is trying to change something that is bigger than themselves. Social justice movements experience this push and pull at all times, when ideology develops at a faster pace than practice (Hughes, n.d.). The Neurodiversity Movement (Walker, 2014) falls under this category. Today, corporations are in the midst of these growing pains and it is influencing their DEIB initiatives. Much can be learned by taking a page from the educational playbook and building a bridge between the Neurodiversity and the Twice Exceptional Movements, as all 2e individuals are also neurodivergent.

Understanding this connection would help provide academic context and established research to neurodiversity initiatives, which are essentially still in their infancy. A stronger connection between these two movements will also open doors for high school and college students to seek mentorship and internship opportunities, a path that will help open doors and begin to break down early barriers for neurodivergent individuals. Providing this level of guidance and partnership from someone who is neurodivergent themselves, or is strongly influenced by the lived experiences of those who are neurodivergent, is a powerful combination. This level of support, mentorship, and coaching can be life changing when trying to navigate new situations. Having someone to talk with about the job application process, resume building, if and when to disclose a disability or condition, and practicing interview skills can be instrumental to a neurodivergent individual's success (Exceptional Individuals, 2020).

It is not enough, however, to simply acknowledge a diverse population. We must move past acknowledgment in order to incorporate researched-based neurodiversity initiatives and work towards shifting from deficit-based to strength-based approaches that lead to understanding and acceptance in the workplace. This shift requires challenging the deficit-based models that have the intended, or unintended, result of separating individuals and hindering their potential for belonging (Hiemstra & Van Yperen, 2015). One way to do this is through the use of a strength-based approach that supports neurodivergent persons by providing information that highlights an individual's strengths and provides appropriate pathways for growth and development (Hiemstra & Van Yperen, 2015). This type of approach allows employees to perform at their optimal level and creates a culture of belonging that is necessary for true innovation and job satisfaction to occur.

Word choice is a powerful tool to use in order to enact change. The wide use of different words and terms when discussing neurodiversity as well as not having a common or accepted vocabulary creates confusion and misunderstanding. Neurodiversity, as a term, is still relatively new but gaining popularity (Baron-Cohen, 2019). It exists in children and the Twice Exceptional Movement is addressing this neurological profile through education, training, and legislative advocacy. However, even today twice exceptional education is defined differently depending on where you originate from - as each regional, national, and international system defines foundational terms differently (Davidson Institute, 2021). Further adding to this confusion is that labels naturally undergo transformations because of changing neurobiological and genetic theories (Ortega, 2009), and the rise of social justice models are quick to capitalize on terms that are accommodating to new definitions that offer more inclusivity towards marginalized groups (Strand, 2017), which is consistent with my own professional observations.

Just as Sir Ken Robinson (2010) spoke about our education system being designed, structured, and conceived for a different age, so too is the workplace paradigm (Lahey, 2020). The competitive advantage that 2e and neurodivergent adults bring to the corporate world is the answer to our advancement in future innovations across all domains and for connection and recognition of our authentic selves (Austin & Pisano, 2017). One of the biggest advantages includes bringing new perspectives to the table; being able to think differently and apply that thinking to creative problem solving (Austin & Pisano, 2017). Neurodivergent individuals are already in the workforce, but unless an organization is forward thinking and sees the importance of hiring, retaining, and advancing ND individuals then there are countless opportunities left on the table; an oversight that impacts the company's financial performance and everyone involved.

This capstone project was inspired by my work in the gifted and 2e field for the last 20+ years and seeing how honoring a child's strengths deepens their experience, creativity, innovation, and joy, not to mention the positive effects it has on their mental health wellbeing. As I experienced in the education field, understanding is the first step in making lasting change within a system. Understanding leads to awareness; awareness leads to acceptance; acceptance leads to inclusion; Inclusion leads to belonging; and once an individual belongs then the realm of human potentiality opens wide up (Streeby, n.d.). I began to wonder what would happen if adults were introduced to neurodiversity modules within a corporate setting. Could modules grounded in a strength-based approach impact a corporation's ability to accept neurodivergent individuals in the workplace? Could awareness and appreciation of neurodivergent traits create more inclusive recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention processes and improve the overall workplace culture? Could education play a part in breaking down systemic barriers for neurodivergent individuals?

This capstone project crystallizes in the creation of modules that highlight the unique variations of the neurodivergent mind. The goal is that through education and awareness, neurodivergent adults will have opportunities to share their strengths, be accepted for who they are, experience increased life satisfaction, and be part of a workplace culture of belonging. This will in turn lead them to contribute immensely to the business itself, optimizing the success for everyone involved. These modules 1) introduce accurate terminology, 2) share the strengths of various neurological profiles, and 3) build awareness and acceptance of the neurodivergent mind. Through a focused 5-step process of building understanding, creating awareness, providing a safe space for acceptance, fostering inclusivity, and establishing a culture of belonging, the stage is set to unlock human potential and create endless possibilities. As Robinson (2010) said, "We

have to think differently about human capacity,” (10:31) and once we do there is no limit to the possibilities.

Keywords: talent pool, workplace environment, strength-based approach, neurodistinct, neurodivergent, neurodiversity, barriers, awareness, terminology, learning culture, corporate environment, universal design, competitive advantage

Literature Review

To increase the impact of neurodiversity initiatives, a concerted effort towards developing a consensus on terminology would help communicate what can often feel like a complex concept. In my professional work, I have noticed that the fluidity and changing nature of terminology only serves to muddy the waters and hinders the advancement of neurodiversity initiatives from gaining momentum and acceptance in their respective fields, conclusions that have also been drawn in formal research (Walker, 2021; Craine, 2020). Additionally, too many organizations subscribe to a deficit-based model (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) & Uptimize, 2018). The effects of this type of thinking have seriously impacted the opportunities and successes of neurodivergent individuals. The following literature review expands upon my arguments and outlines the theoretical framework of positive psychology and its application through the strength-based approach.

Neurodiversity Initiatives

Neurodiversity initiatives are becoming increasingly popular in corporate America. There is a growing interest in the largely untapped talent pool within neurodiverse populations. Austin & Pisano (2017) point out how the neurodiverse population is often underemployed despite how highly capable they are, with unemployment rates running as high as 80% when compared to

neurotypical individuals. As organizations and DEIB leaders respond to this trend red flags, such as stereotyping and commodifying autism, are rising that have the potential to undermine the Neurodiversity Movement for true inclusion (M. Ciampi, personal communication, February 13, 2022). In the following pages, existing corporate neurodiversity programs are discussed and arguments raised about what is not working and how to cultivate stronger connections across movements in order to develop neurodiversity programs that have a stronger and lasting impact.

The Neurodiversity and Twice Exceptionality Movements

The Twice Exceptional Movement originated in education when teachers who worked with the gifted population took notice of a subset that presented differently in the classroom. These students had both diagnosed and undiagnosed learning differences in addition to their gifted label. Perceptive educators saw that children's gifts were being masked by their learning differences or their learning differences masked their giftedness (Baum et al., 2017b). Either way, these children presented differently in the classroom and required varied approaches in order to successfully connect with them on academic, social, and emotional levels. In many cases, these 2e children could also be called neurodivergent (ND). Similar to the Twice Exceptional Movement, neurodiversity comes with its own history and origin story and has both a paradigm and a movement associated with it. In an interview in *Autism in Adulthood*, Dr. Nick Walker (2010) stated:

The neurodiversity paradigm starts from the understanding that neurodiversity is an axis of human diversity, like ethnic diversity or diversity of gender and sexual orientation, and is subject to the same sorts of social dynamics as those other forms of diversity—including the dynamics of social power inequalities, privilege, and oppression. From this perspective, the pathologizing of neurominorities can be recognized as simply another

form of systemic oppression which functions similarly to the oppression of other types of minority groups. (Walker, 2021, para 10)

Looking at the Neurodiversity paradigm in this way it is easy to see the social justice movement's influence, especially when it comes to creating diversity and equity policies (Walker, 2021). The Neurodiversity Movement originated in the early 1990s within the autistic community (Hughes, n.d.). Autistics were diagnosed through a deficit-lens pathology model and there was quite a bit of stigma associated with the label. Some credit the term neurodivergent and neurodivergence as being coined by an outspoken, somewhat controversial, autistic activist and woman of color named Kassiane Asasumasu in the year 2000 (Walker, 2014). In an excerpt of her blog posting entitled PSA from the actual coiner of neurodivergent, Asasumasu wrote:

I coined neurodivergent before tumblr was even a thing, like a decade or more ago, because people were using 'neurodiverse' and 'neurodiversity' to just mean autistic, & possibly LDs. But there's more, like way more,...Neurodivergent refers to neurologically divergent from typical. That's ALL. I am multiply neurodivergent: I'm Autistic, epileptic, have PTSD, have cluster headaches, have a chiari malformation.

Neurodivergent just means a brain that diverges. Autistic people. ADHD people. People with learning disabilities. Epileptic people. People with mental illnesses. People with MS or Parkinsons or apraxia or cerebral palsy or dyspraxia or no specific diagnosis but wonky lateralization or something. That is all it means. It is not another damn tool of exclusion. It is specifically a tool of inclusion. ... Neurodivergent is for all of us.

(Asasumasu, 2015, paras. 2 - 7)

Kassiane is not widely credited with this contribution and instead the origin story that is more well-known is that of Judy Singer, an Australian sociologist who first used the term

neurodiversity in her honors thesis in 1998 (Singer, 2019). Singer and a journalist named Harvey Blume corresponded about their mutual interest in Autism. Harvey wrote an article in September 1998 discussing Jon Katz's columns on "Geek Force " in recent editions of *HotWired*. The article was about the rise of geekdom and how the internet, which became a global network in the 90s, provided space for IT geeks to shine (Blume, 1998, para 1). Jon alluded that these geeks were called autistics and made a joke about neurotypicals (NT) vs. Autistics and the battle over who would acclimate best in this new IT world.

This article set the stage for what is happening in the present day: a push and pull between neurotypicals and neurodivergent individuals; the united voice of the autistic community growing in its reach; the DEIB initiatives around IT and neurodivergent hiring programs. As the Neurodiversity Movement began to make waves, it became part of the Autistic and Aspergers' communities who took control of the disability motto "Nothing About Us Without Us" (Charlton, 1998, p. 3). Dr. Nick Walker (2021), a queer autistic professor of psychology, further defines the neurodiversity movement as:

the movement to shift the prevailing culture and discourse away from the pathology paradigm and toward the neurodiversity paradigm. The neurodiversity movement is by no means monolithic; there are a lot of different ways that people are working to bring about this shift in different realms and contexts, and of course there's some variation in how the neurodiversity paradigm is interpreted by different groups and individuals within the movement. (Walker, 2021, para 13)

Although this movement is connected to the Autism Rights Movement, they are not one and the same despite the overlap shared between them (Hughes, n.d.). The individuals who fall under its umbrella and identify with the label neurodivergent is expanding. This rapid growth allows for

the level of fluidity and variation Dr. Walker spoke about. The Twice Exceptional and Neurodivergent Movements have seen the positive effects of pulling away from a pathology paradigm and using a strength-based approach to understand the neurodivergent mind and tap into an individual's strengths in order to increase innovation, productivity, and engagement.

Another leader in the field of neurodiversity, Dr. Thomas Armstrong said,

The concept of neurodiversity provides a more balanced perspective. Instead of regarding traditionally pathologized populations as disabled or disordered, the emphasis in neurodiversity is placed on *differences*...In a sense, neurodiversity draws some of its vitality from the new movement in *positive psychology*... (Armstrong, 2010a, p. 5-6)

At the heart of both movements lies an appreciation of the diversity of human cognition and opens the door for quality partnerships between academia and the corporate world (Hughes, n.d.). What both have in common is a belief that neurological conditions should not be viewed through the medical model of disability. Any neurological profile that is not considered neurotypical should not be viewed as a disease in need of treatment and, if possible, cured, but instead be respected (Ortega, 2009). With two large movements sharing a similar journey cultivating a connection on a larger scale is a logical next step.

Fortunately, there are some corporations who have independently recognized this interconnectedness and are building the bridge between the two movements. Biogen is one such company. As part of their overall diversity and inclusion initiatives, they piloted a first-of-its kind internship program entitled *Limitless*. It is focused on “recruiting neurodiverse students” and defines neurodiversity as “the natural range of variation in human neurocognition and includes autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette syndrome, among others” (Biogen, 2021, p.11). Programs like *Limitless* can serve

as models for future collaborations between academic institutions and corporations. With more awareness, the impact for both movements have the potential to grow larger.

The Neurodiversity Movement has only started to gain momentum over the last couple of decades, its focus is mirrored to some extent in the Twice Exceptional Movement, which has its roots in the education field in the early 1970s with the term “gifted handicapped” (Grossi, 1978, p. n/a). By recognizing and acting on this connection, collaboration efforts between high schools, colleges, and corporate businesses can open up pipelines for 2e students, thereby granting them access to what can often feel like a closed system. Furthermore, as corporations seek to be more inclusive regarding workplace accommodations, innovative solutions can come from collaboration with educators who are involved in creating accommodations for 2e students through individualized educational plans (IEPs). An IEP is a legal document, usually created with all necessary stakeholders, that outlines a plan for how a child works and learns best. The idea behind an IEP is mirrored in workplace accommodation systems, but the potential exists to innovate this system in order to honor the dignity of those in need of small changes or tweaks to their environment.

Neurodiversity Hub, an organization working towards changing the narrative about autism and neurodiversity, recently touched on this potential partnership on their website. They called for a partnership to consult on the impact of design on an environment, specifically taking into consideration how small changes in the workplace can positively impact neurodivergent individuals (Neurodiversity Hub).

The Evolution of Words and Word Choice

Language evolves over time. Often, we think of William Shakespeare when the topic of language arises. However it would be a monumental, if not impossible task, to compile a list of

every word that Shakespeare invented. What scholars do recognize is how Shakespeare influenced the English language with his creativity, boldness, and how he shaped the language as a whole (Jovanovi, 2006). Shakespeare aside, the evolution of language continues and as of January 2021, 520 new words and definitions were added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (Beabout, 2021). Not only are new words created and added to our vocabulary, but other words change in their meaning (Ted Guest Author, 2014); such as nice, myriad, and clue. Still other words that were once used in society become offensive and inappropriate; such as spaz, retarded, and moron (Ulaby, 2009).

Positive framing of words is also on the rise with terms like handi-capable, but with a focused intention to not contribute to othering and separating people (Gernsbacher et al., 2016). Othering is a nuanced term that occurs when groups or individuals are labeled as falling outside of the norms of a dominant social group creating division amongst people. This is harmful because it essentially pits one group against another and results in discrimination against the very people one is trying to include (Mackenzie & Abad, 2021). In the field of education, this can be seen within special education and gifted education. These terms mean different things to different people and oftentimes special education is viewed as a negative term and gifted can give the impression of elitism.

Neurodiversity, as a term, has not escaped this iterative process as operational definitions are a constant work in progress. Judy Singer often writes that she “never defined it [*neurodiversity*] either, thinking its meaning self-evident” (Singer, 2020, para 4). As the field of neurodiversity evolves so do the diagnoses that fall under its umbrella, and leaders in the field are reworking terminology to be inclusive of this growing community. Some of these diagnoses are: ADHD, ADD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, sensory processing conditions, Tourette’s, mood

disorders, hyperlexia, dyscalculia, gifted intellect, Irlen condition, epilepsy, synesthesia, and acquired brain injury (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) & Uptimize, 2018).

A thorough examination of these conditions also highlights the sheer numbers of neurodiverse individuals in the world. Table 1 depicts the global snapshot of the individuals who identify with these various labels. Gauging percentages, however, is difficult to do for several reasons. The percentages shown are estimates of the global population (7.9 billion) taken from multiple sources and are rounded up to the nearest millionth. Often, individuals are under-diagnosed and even undiagnosed for some conditions, based on a lack of services or understanding in their communities. For some labels, like gifted intellect, the lack of a standard agreed upon definition makes it challenging to codify (Davidson Institute, 2021). Additionally it is not uncommon for someone to have multiple diagnoses, so the same person may be represented in multiple categories, which can muddy the data (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) & Uptimize, 2018). Regardless, the numbers are striking and most likely represent the low end of the population.

Diagnostic labels are also under scrutiny when it comes to language choice, especially when it comes to autism. In a (2022) Survey entitled *The Autistic Not Weird Autism Survey*, the attitudes and experiences of 11,212 respondents, 7,491 of whom were autistic, were recorded (Quirk, 2022). Out of them many questions asked, a subsection included word choice preference. Some prefer person first language (e.g. person with autism) and others prefer identity-first language (e.g. autistic person), however, the takeaway of this survey is that autistic people are choosing identity-first language (e.g. autistics and autists) as their preference (Quirk, 2022; Hughes, n.d.).

Table 1

Global Snapshot of Neurodiversity

| Global Snapshot of Neurodiversity | |
|--|----------------------------|
| <i>Diagnosis</i> | <i>Population Impacted</i> |
| ASC | 79,000,000 ^a |
| OCD | 158,000,000 ^b |
| Gifted Intellect | 395,000,000 ^c |
| Dyslexia | 395,000,000 ^d |
| Dyspraxia | 237,000,000 ^e |
| Dyscalculia | 474,000,000 ^f |
| Depression | 276,500,000 ^g |
| Anxiety Conditions | 316,000,000 ^h |
| ADHD | 237,000,000 ⁱ |
| Hyperlexia | 237,000,000 ⁱ |

NOTE: The data sources: (Elemy, 2020)^j; (Sasson et al., 1997)^k; (BBC, n.d.)^l; (European Dyslexia Association, n.d.)^m; Gibbs et al., 2007)ⁿ; (Singh, 2020)^o; (World Health Organization, 2021)^p; (Ritchie et al., 2018)^q; (Song et al., 2021)^r; (And Next Comes L - Hyperlexia Resources, 2020)^s

A search today of the term neurodivergent will yield multiple suggestions such as; neurominority, neurovariant, neurodistinct, neurodifferent, and neurodivergent (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) & Uptimize, 2018). Each term essentially means the same thing, but is personalized by leaders in the field who feel their word best reflects and captures the true nature of neurodiversity. Because neurodiversity is connected to a movement and paradigm, leaders diligently work to make sure that mainstream terms are not divisive (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) & Uptimize, 2018). To those in the

movement, the term they use serves to educate and communicate with others and represents the lived experiences, often quite challenging and traumatic, that have impacted individuals with a different neurological wiring. Despite the worthiness of this forethought, the revolving terminology door causes confusion and creates a barrier that hinders authentic discussions because it can quickly feel like a political correctness minefield; one misstep can either make others doubt your effectiveness or alienate you from a group who are offended that you did not choose the terminology they prefer (M. Ciampi, personal communication, February 13, 2022).

Marcelle Ciampi is an autistic author, ambassador, and worldwide consultant. She also serves as Senior Manager of DEI at Ultronauts, Inc. Marcelle Ciampi (2021) chooses the word *neurovariant* to use in her communications. In her LinkedIn article entitled 10 Makings of Highly Effective Neurodiversity Promoters she writes *neurovariant* is:

...when a person's brain and mind vary significantly from the typical mainstream brain and mind, e.g., process, perceive, and present differently [coined The 3 Ps] and that variance affects each and every day of the person's life in a significant way (e.g., executive functioning challenges, sensory overload leading to inertia, difficulty managing or navigating tasks that seem simple to the average person). In many cases, the variance is a disability to some degree. (Ciampi, 2021, para 4)

Jim Hogan, Vice President of Accessibility in Technology at Google and human rights activist, served as a keynote speaker at the Neurodiversity India Summit 2021. He encourages people to view neurodiversity as individuals with invisible distinctions, using the term *neurodistinct*, which impacts how they perceive the world (Hogan & Ireland, 2021, 3:46). *Neurodistinct* and *The Neuro Cloud™* was coined by Tim Goldstein, a neurodiverse communication specialist, because he felt calling someone divergent is more divisive than calling someone distinct (TedX Santa

Barbara, 2021, 4:39). Uptimize, a nonprofit organization that leads neurodiversity workshops, uses the term neurodiversity and defines it as the “...a biological fact of the infinite variety of human neurocognition” (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) & Uptimize, 2018, p.2).

How words are used can unite or divide; there is power in speech and meaning. But what happens when one word carries so much emotional fodder? Human beings are complicated, and rarely can something that is complicated be regulated to a single point of identification. In Renzulli’s theoretical framework for giftedness, he often refers to gifted behaviors being found "in certain people (not all people), at certain times (not all the time), and under certain circumstances (not all circumstances)" (Renzulli, 1978, p. n/a). Similarly, the spiky profile of a neurodivergent individual changes relative to the person, time of day, and circumstances. This profile refers to a visual representation of strengths and areas of weakness causing neurodivergent individuals to perform at high peaks and low valleys throughout a given day, rather than consistently experiencing a middle ground (Exceptional Individuals, 2019). Recognizing the complexity of a spiky profile and honoring the whole person is the first step towards having meaningful conversations that result in change and may help us when choosing a term that works best. While the term chosen is often an individual choice, it should be a choice that is well thought out and easily explained to others.

Terminology is only one piece of the puzzle that creates barriers for neurodivergent individuals to gain acceptance. Some argue that clinicians, researchers, social workers, public health officials, and others in the medical profession who assign diagnostic classifications may contribute to the public’s sense of groupness and differentness when perceiving people with

mental illness (Corrigan, 2007). Deficit language does impact stereotypes and creates bias (M. Ciampi, personal communication, February 13, 2022).

Unfortunately, the neurodiversity community is often riddled with negative connotations, such as neurodivergent individuals lack empathy. One way to overcome this challenge is to use a strength-based approach to discuss various neurological wirings and avoid stigmatization and generalizations (Priscott & Allen, 2021). A strength-based, talent-focused approach has proven to support the physical, intellectual, and emotional needs of individuals while addressing their areas of challenge, providing accommodations, and honoring the strengths they bring to the table (Baum et al., 2017a).

Strength-Based versus Deficit-Based Approaches

“The burden of mental disorders continues to grow with significant impacts on health and major social, human rights and economic consequences in all countries of the world” (World Health Organization (WHO), 2019, para 1). This burden stems from the overuse of a medical model, which tends to focus disproportionately on struggles and pathologize (Baron-Cohen, 2019). The detrimental effects of deficit-based thinking and the long term effects that masking and mental health stigmas have on neurodivergent individuals is astounding. Miller et al., (2021) conducted an online survey about experiences and views on masking. Participants reported the toll that masking takes on their mental health and self-identity. “Autistic participants also reported that masking can lead to increased suicidality...” (para 2, A Huge Emotional and Physical Toll: Masking as a Resource Drain section) and substance abuse. One of the largest resources for classification can be found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Originating in 1952, and now in its fifth edition, this is often the go-to manual

used by clinicians in the medical profession. The DSM-5-TR recently received an overhaul of diagnostic criteria and classification. As of March 2022,

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR) features the most current text updates based on scientific literature with contributions from more than 200 subject matter experts. The revised version includes a new diagnosis (prolonged grief disorder), clarifying modifications to the criteria sets for more than 70 disorders, addition of *International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-10-CM)* symptom codes for suicidal behavior and nonsuicidal self-injury, and updates to descriptive text for most disorders based on extensive review of the literature. In addition, *DSM-5-TR* includes a comprehensive review of the impact of racism and discrimination on the diagnosis and manifestations of mental disorders. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, para 1)

The other significant manual, in its eleventh year of revision, is the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11), put out by the World Health Organization (WHO). Together, the two organizations came together in the DSM-5-TR's latest revision process in an effort to enhance international compatibility and facilitate DSM-ICD harmonization (Regier et al., 2013). It cannot be overstated how much influence these manuals and deficit-based medical models of disability play a role in how the current perceptions around mental health and neurodiversity are formed (Priscott & Allen, 2021).

According to Corrigan (2007), research has suggested that many people choose not to pursue mental health services because they do not want to be labeled or suffer the prejudice that the label entails (Corrigan, 2007). Label avoidance is a byproduct when the perceived or real level of discrimination outweighs the benefit of treatment. Once we understand the

Neurodiversity Paradigm, it becomes clear that we cannot talk about neurodiversity without calling attention to the trauma and inequalities that neurodivergent individuals have experienced. These lived experiences impact how NDs integrate in the workforce and need to be understood before inclusion and belonging can be established.

Crisis episodes, which lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, confused, full of grief, anger, or guilt (National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 2018) related to mental health affect many people and there is good reason to believe that neurodivergent individuals are impacted more than most. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, the act of masking, something ND individuals do to hide aspects of themselves that might not be accepted within a neurotypical group or society increases levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Radulski, 2022). Accordingly to Leonard Mlodinow (2014), studies show that when you suppress, or mask, emotions “regularly and habitually...you end up with higher levels of cortisol, a hormone from stress, and when they (studies) look at people they find correlations between a lifespan and the practice of emotional suppression” (Harvard Science Book Talks and Research Lectures, 2014, 26:48). Unfortunately, the reality is that the neurodivergent population often experiences social pain and stress at higher rates. This could be in part due to some social and behavioral differences exhibited by ND individuals that are misunderstood by others. In this way, it is difficult to discuss neurodiversity initiatives without highlighting the stigma associated with mental health and how that stigma further muddles understanding and acceptance.

An alternative to viewing humans through a deficit-based model is applying the strength-based approach (Hiemstra & Van Yperen, 2015). This is particularly helpful when looking at conditions, learning differences, disorders, and syndromes. In an article entitled The Principles of

Strengths-Based Education (2009), Lopez and Luis dive further into the strengths perspective stating the

strengths perspective assumes that every individual has resources that can be mobilized toward success in many areas of life (Anderson, 2000; Saleebey, 2001) and is characterized by “efforts to label what is right” within people and organizations (Buckingham, 2007, p. 6). The strengths philosophy explores ways to empower individuals to flourish rather than simply survive (Liesveld & Miller, 2005) and presupposes that capitalizing on one’s best qualities is likely to lead to greater success than would be possible by making a comparable investment of effort into overcoming personal weaknesses or deficiencies (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Clifton & Nelson, 1992). (Lopez & Louis, 2009, p. 2)

A strength-based approach is built upon these assumptions and has been applied in a multitude of settings and it has a “strong theoretical foundation as an effective helping strategy that builds on a person's successes” (Brun & Rapp, 2001, p. 278). Its foundation is based on the theory that an individual possesses innate abilities that can be used when faced with difficult or challenging situations (Lopez & Louis, 2009). As opposed to pathologizing an individual which is defeating and unmotivating, the strength-based approach allows individuals to recognize their innate strengths and access them when needed.

The strength-based approach became popular in the early 1980s when it was introduced within the mental health centers (Brun & Rapp, 2001, p. 279). Steve Silberman, author of *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity*, wrote about the importance of a strength-based view to oppose those who believe autism is a disease that “needs prevention and cure,” and instead encouraged people to flip the script to see “autism as a

condition of human diversity in which differences and strengths are valued” (Odom, 2016, p.1885). Dr. Thomas Armstrong made the case to connect neurodiversity to biodiversity; we are all connected just like ecosystems and we need to be open and accepting of those who have neurological profiles that are different than our own (Armstrong, 2010a).

Various strength-based models exist that honor and acknowledge an individual’s strengths and often corporations use these to assess their employees and leverage their strengths in the workplace. One such popular model is the CliftonStrengths Finder 2.0. Don Clifton was interested in studying human development and spent his life researching and creating ways to help individuals maximize their full potential (Gallup, Inc. 2022). In 1988, Don Clifton merged with the polling site Gallup and since been conducting research on strengths and how their assessment tool identifies the way strengths impact team performance.

To examine the effect of strengths on team performance, Gallup workplace scientists looked at the composition of strengths on 11,441 teams, their engagement scores, and their performance outcomes. The data show that the strengths present on a team do impact performance -- but the effect is much stronger when team members know their CliftonStrengths. Teams where 90% of employees or more know their strengths have substantially higher engagement. (Asplund & Hickman, 2021, Strengths affect team performance, especially when they're coached section)

Educating individuals on what their strengths are and how to apply them in a workplace context is imperative. A strength is defined as “the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance in a specific activity” (Gallup, Inc., 2022, para 1). Strengths are considered different from talents, which are defined as “naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied” (Gallup Inc., 2022, Talent x Investment = Strength section).

However, the symbiotic relationship between the two must be taken in consideration as, “talents, knowledge, and skills -- along with the time spent (i.e., investment) practicing, developing your skills, and building your knowledge base -- combine to create your strengths” (Gallup Inc, 2022, para 1). A Gallup research paper published in the Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship states: "A strengths-based approach to management is the single best means of improving the employee-manager relationship that Gallup has observed over the years of working with organizations to improve employee engagement" (Gallup, 2022, Strengths-Based Development Boosts Business Performance section).

One important aspect of a strength-based model is its focus on flourishing and thriving; bringing out the innate gifts and strengths in an individual in order for them to perform at their optimal level. There are several theories and assessments that exist such as Dr. Seligman’s PERMA™ theory of well-being (University of Pennsylvania, 2013); Don Clifton’s CliftonStrengths assessment (Gallup, Inc, 2022); and the VIA Survey of character strengths (VIA Institute on Character, 2019). It is important that individuals understand their own unique strengths and/or talents in order to leverage their skills for development; optimize their productivity; engage more deeply with their work; collaborate better with group or team members; communicate more effectively; develop a stronger sense of self; discover and understand natural strengths and talents; build resilience; increase life satisfaction.

Institutions that embrace neurodiversity policies understand that a learning culture plays an important role in the success of such initiatives. Human resource policies and programs demand an inclusive focus that emphasizes “openness, creativity, and exploration” (Cheng & Groysberg, 2021, How Do Learning Cultures Promote Diversity and Inclusion section). However, before inclusivity can be reached successful corporations must prioritize educating

their staff so that all employees' strengths can be seen and when necessary, reasonable accommodations can be granted in order to provide the best possible environment for any employee to thrive. The strength-based approach is a vehicle that articulates what's at the heart of positive psychology, a field with a long history based in research (Stoerkel, 2019).

Positive Psychology

It is difficult to talk about positive psychology without giving credit to humanistic psychology, specifically Abraham Maslow (Cherry, 2020). Maslow, a leading 20th century humanistic psychologist, was one of the first people to study what human beings are capable of and coined the term Positive Psychology (Pursuit of Happiness, 2011). He presented his work as a hierarchy towards self-actualization, which is still discussed and utilized in the present day (Kaufman, 2021). Dr. Scott Barry Kaufmann, a 21st leader in positive psychology, recently proposed a reconceptualization of the pyramid-style hierarchy to challenge traditional understandings. He presents this in the form of a metaphor, a sailboat, to highlight the existence of two distinct categories of needs: those dealing with security and those pertaining to growth (Kaufman, 2021). The idea of growth and being the best version of ourselves that we can be through understanding and accessing our strengths is aligned with the Positive Psychology Movement.

Other names that are vital to understanding positive psychology are Martin E. P. Seligman (1942) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1934); these men are considered some of the founding leaders in the field of Positive Psychology. Seligman, often called the Father of the positive psychology movement (Pursuit of Happiness, 2011), served as the President of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1998 and vowed to address what he saw as a problem: psychologist should get back to the business of studying what makes people happy

(Pursuit of Happiness, 2011; Wong, 2011). In 2000, Seligman and his colleagues founded the Positive Psychology Movement.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is considered one of the co-founders of positive psychology and one of the pioneers of the study of happiness (Pursuit of Happiness, 2011). It was during a trip to Switzerland where Csikszentmihalyi heard Carl Jung speak and from then on was interested in psychology (Pursuit of Happiness, 2011). Of the many topics Mihaly is well-known for, one of his most prominent achievements is his research and theory on Flow, a state of consciousness experienced by those feeling genuine satisfaction (Pursuit of Happiness, 2011).

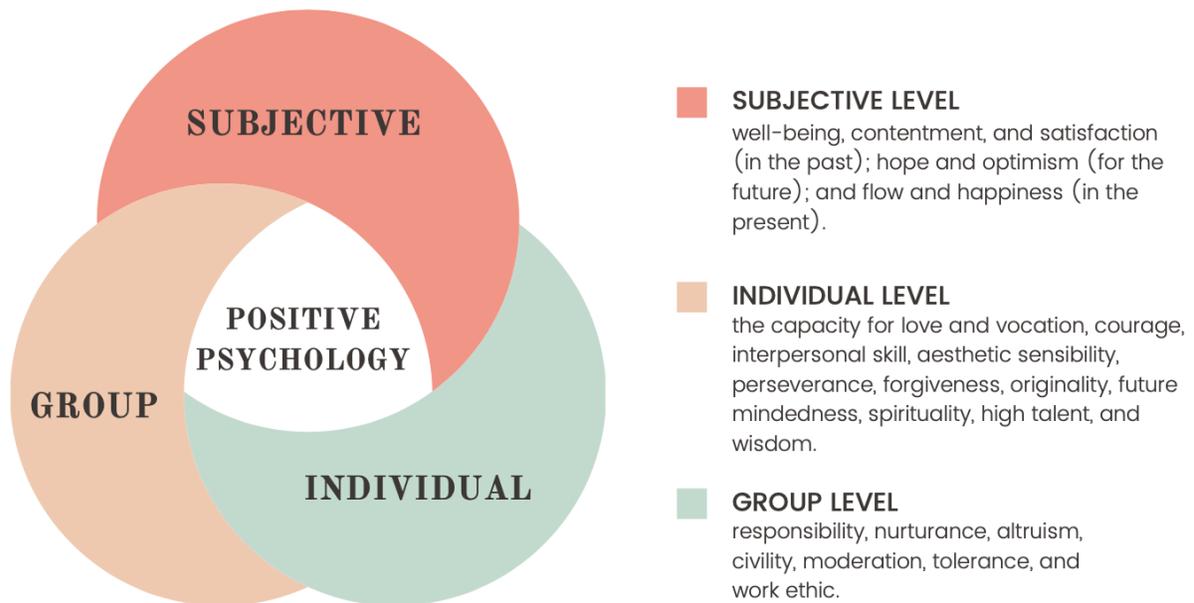
According to Shrestha (2019), the focus on positivity came after Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi argued that contemporary psychology was focused too narrowly on the deficit or medical-oriented model at the expense of the attributes related to positive emotions, virtues, character strengths, and flourishing (p. 83). At its foundation, the goals of positive psychology seek to identify and enhance the strengths and virtues that make life worth living and allow people to thrive (Froh, 2004). In Shrestha's article (2019), he traces the roots of positive psychology to "Aristotelian philosophy" (p. 84). This is an interesting connection to make as it highlights the view that character strengths and virtues are central concepts, transformation towards self-actualization is the goal, and the idea of "eudaimonia" is key (p.84). Eudaimonia is based on what it means to live a human life well or to experience human flourishing (Huta & Waterman, 2013).

Positive psychology came about when scholars became more interested in the strength-based approach than the deficit model, when the act of nurturing what is best in individuals yielded better results than focusing on what was damaged, and when scholars began adapting the scientific method to understand the human condition better. This is not to say that weaknesses

are swept under the rug; in fact proponents of positive psychology believe these areas are remedied by identifying what individuals do well and then the “negatives will go away if people simply focus on enhancing the positives” (Wong, 2011, p. 70). Another way of understanding this field is to separate its components into three distinct levels: subjective, individual, and group (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). These are presented in Figure 1, as all three have an impact on an individual's lived experiences and mindset. Through this lens, the core of positive psychology can be seen as amplifying the strengths across all levels instead of focusing on the weaknesses.

Figure 1

Levels of Positive Psychology



(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)

Some of the criticism of Positive Psychology according to Rios and Novo (2012) is that it is “recycled old ideologies and world views based on cultural anthropologies” (Fernández-Ríos

& Novo, 2012, p. 335). This criticism appears to be more focused around on the subjects of who came up with the original premise and the frustration over those who repackage ideologies as their own. Oftentimes, Martin E. P. Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi are accused of “not giving enough credit to ‘humanistic psychology’ for the origins of positive psychology (Rich, 2001; Taylor, 2001, as cited in Froh, 2004). A second criticism involves “vague discourse and theoretical confusion in the use of professional language by an ideology” (Fernández-Ríos & Novo, 2012, p. 338). Here, the argument appears sounder, as lacking consistent and agreed upon terminology does impact the effectiveness of any movement, theory, ideology, or paradigm being adopted and understood by the masses. A third criticism lies with the “dangers of unlimited positiveness” (Fernández-Ríos & Novo, 2012, p. 339). This is often restated as toxic positivity and can lead to unrealistic expectations and the inability to develop resilience or appreciate the growth that can happen during difficult times.

While this is not an exhaustive list, it highlights that positive psychology can be seen by some as lacking in rigor and not based on scientific methods. Positive psychologists have attempted to address the criticisms of their colleagues, however, because of the contextual nature of the field it has not overcome these barriers as of yet (Shrestha, 2019, p. 83). Despite this challenge, researchers, practitioners, and business leaders observe the connections between life satisfaction and work performance and are developing programs and initiatives that support optimal experiences in the workplace. Because our workforce is so diverse, and diversity breeds innovation, the focus on specific programs and initiatives around neurodiversity are on the rise in the global marketplace.

Neurodiversity Programs

A number of prominent companies are accessing neurodiverse talent. The result of such initiatives yields benefits for the company and its community. Managers cite “productivity gains, quality improvement, boosts in innovative capabilities, and broad increases in employee engagement” (Austin & Pisano, 2017, para. 8). Some of these original programs were coined *Autism at Work* and focused on bringing a competitive advantage by employing autistic individuals. While many organizations still use the title *Autism at Work* when touting their diversity programs, a broader neurodiversity-at-work inclusion focus is becoming more common as the neurodivergent label expands and includes more than just autistic individuals. In addition to autism, persons diagnosed with dyslexia, Tourette’s Syndrome, ADHD, PTSD, and other disabilities, disorders, and conditions which cause an individual's brain wiring to vary significantly from the mainstream are now included under the neurodiversity umbrella.

In addition to the work that organizations do internally there are external organizations that help develop neurodiversity programs or initiatives for corporations. One such company is Uptimize. The CEO and Co-Founder, Ed Thompson, is pioneering neurodiversity in the workplace through online learning and advising corporations through strategic planning. Mr. Thompson has seen over the past five years that companies are starting their own neurodiversity programs with a focus on understanding, respecting, and valuing individuals' thinking processes in order to increase talent management (Uptimize, n.d.). Uptimize estimates that neurodivergent groups account for “10% of the population” (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) & Uptimize, 2018, p.2). Others point to higher numbers due to the fact that many people are undiagnosed, due to the stigma surrounding mental health and illness. Table 2 is a non-exhaustive list that highlights some corporations embracing neurodiversity and a short summary

of their inclusive programs. All have varied inception dates and continue to evolve as research and data guides the direction of each program and how it aligns with the organization’s mission.

Table 2

Corporate Neurodiversity Programs

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Aspiritech | “Embracing Neurodiversity. Aspiritech provides the highest quality QA service through hiring and training individuals on the autism spectrum, people who are uniquely qualified to excel in this field” (Aspiritech, n.d., Embracing Neurodiversity section). |
| CAI | CAI Neurodiverse Solutions helps private and public organizations drive value, improve productivity, and enhance customer experience by realizing the benefits of neurodiversity. It is built on our expertise in strategy and consulting, application management, contingent workforce solutions, IT service management, and business best practices. (CAI, 2022, Why CAI Neurodiverse Solutions section) |
| Chevron | Chevron’s Neurodiversity Program is one of the company’s diversity-focused recruiting initiatives that targets neurodiverse individuals, a largely underrepresented spectrum of talent, to bring diverse perspectives and skillsets into the workforce. Neurodiversity refers to the different ways people think, process information and see the world. (Chevron, 2022, neurodiversity hiring program section) |
| Dell Technologies | At Dell, we believe that everyone has unique strengths and skills to contribute in the workplace. We strive to create an environment that is inclusive and accessible for all. As neurodiversity is a broad category, we first set our sights on tapping autistic talent, rethinking the traditional interview process and removing barriers that may limit an individual from fully showcasing their true abilities and potential. The Dell Autism Hiring Program was launched with the intent to provide career readiness training and possible full-time career opportunities for neurodivergent job seekers. (Dell Technologies, 2022, Empowering People section) |
| Deloitte | “Deloitte’s Neurodiversity@Deloitte program consists of a three-month apprenticeship with an opportunity for full-time employment upon successful completion of the three-month apprenticeship “(Deloitte, 2022, About Neurodiversity@Deloitte section). |
| DXC Technology | The DXC Dandelion Program, part of DXC Technology’s Social Impact Practice, is a holistic employment experience that prepares people with autism, ADHD, and dyslexia for future careers within IT. The primary aim of the program is to create the right environment, with the right support structure, to ensure that neurodiverse individuals are able to build valuable information technology, life, and executive functioning skills, and to learn and grow as employees and as individuals. (DXC technology, 2021, Program Overview section) |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| HP Inc. | At HP, talent is our only criteria. We recognize that traditional hiring practices can screen out qualified and talented applicants with autism, and we do not want to miss out on top talent. In partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation and PROVAIL, HP is offering a program focused on recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified candidates with autism. (HP, 2022, HP Spectrum Success Program section) |
| IBM | We champion people with diverse abilities and the previously untapped potential they bring to the workplace. This includes neurodiversity, a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. This includes Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity, Dyscalculia, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Tourette’s Syndrome, and many other neurological differences. We are dedicated to hiring, supporting, educating and embracing people of all abilities. (IBM, 2022, DiverAbility section) |
| Salesforce | Autism@Work began in early 2019 as a collaborative effort across Salesforce and community agency Specialisterne with the goal of developing a program that would identify, recruit, assess, hire, support and retain people from within the ASD population. Initially sparked by Salesforce’s Equality group, Abilityforce, the program focuses on an iterative approach to improving an onboarding experience specifically tailored to the neurodiverse population. Abilityforce members recognized that traditional hiring programs often failed talented candidates with ASD and felt a bespoke approach could better support this population, in turn contributing to company goals. (Salesforce, 2020, The Birth of Autism@Work at Salesforce section) |
| SAP | SAP’s groundbreaking Autism at Work program, launched in 2013, leverages the unique abilities and perspectives of people with autism to foster innovation as we help customers become intelligent enterprises. The program taps into an underutilized talent source, reducing barriers of entry so qualified individuals can fully develop their potential. (SAP, 2022) |
| SAS | Too often, people with autism have a difficult time making it through a neurotypical hiring process due to struggles with communication skills, sensory issues, executive functioning or lack of confidence. The Autism Spectrum Internship Program provides a unique interviewing process and training program to help address these challenges – and bridge the gap between academic and on-the-job learning to aid in obtaining meaningful employment (SAS, 2022, SAS Autism Spectrum Internship Program section) |
| Spectrum Designs | Spectrum Designs Foundation was founded with the mission to create meaningful and inclusive employment opportunities for people on the Autism Spectrum...Through its three separate enterprises we create opportunities for employment, empowerment, and growth to this under-served population. At Spectrum, 75% of the workforce is comprised of New Yorkers with disabilities - a group that faces an estimated 90% under-employment rate in America (Spectrum Designs Foundation, n.d., Our vision: a World That Only Sees Ability section) |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| <p>Ultranauts Inc.</p> | <p>Traditional HR policies, management practices, and approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion, tend to focus on the needs of some groups but not others, which is wholly inadequate for a group as diverse as Ultranauts. Our team represents a wide range of information processing models, learning styles, problem solving approaches, communication preferences, lived experiences, strengths, and challenges, and our needs can't be met through group-centric initiatives or individual accommodations. As a result, what has emerged at Ultranauts is a work environment that is intentionally designed to be inclusive of everyone. When each of us can leverage our unique strengths and collaborate effectively with colleagues who are different, we achieve greater results together than any of us could on our own. This is what we call a Universal Workplace. (Ultranauts, 2022, Universal Workplace section)</p> |
| <p>VMware Inc.</p> | <p>VMware's Neurodiversity Inclusion Program is a hiring initiative tailored towards individuals with autism. Here at VMware, we encourage every person to bring their authentic selves to work, and we promote an inclusive company culture. We work to make sure our application, interview and onboarding processes as well as our workplace cultures are inclusive and engaging for every individual. The Neurodiversity Inclusion Program includes enablement for recruiters, hiring teams, and candidates to engage in an interview process that is inclusive of neurodiverse individuals. It also provides a recruiting and hiring process designed to remove unconscious bias. Candidates hired through this program will have access to mentorship and formal job coaching to ensure success and satisfaction in their new role. (VMware, 2022, What is the Neurodiversity Inclusion Program section)</p> |

While these initiatives align with strategic plans around diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) there are nuances to be aware of that, if not addressed, could derail even the best intentions. Firstly, many of these programs pigeon-hole neurodivergent individuals into the fields of science and technology. This behavior comes from a misunderstanding of neurodiverse minds and stereotyping neurodivergent individuals as tech-only savvy people. While some ND individuals are strong in math and technology, creating initiatives solely around these fields is similar to recruiting people of color to only athletic careers instead of opening the doors to any opportunity. A holistic approach where all fields are receptive to neurodiverse talent yields more promising results.

Secondly, once ND individuals are hired opportunities for leadership development and growth are lacking. Embedding opportunities for upskilling, a process where employees can receive on-the-job training that helps them progress and advance in their chosen field (Cohen

2019) can prove instrumental to staying current and earning more income. Additionally, those ND employees who seek leadership positions benefit from receiving support so that they can do what they do best. “The best way to enable a neurodiverse leadership team is to craft roles that suit a wider variety of minds and to then balance those across the piece (Doyle, 2021, When We All Do What We Uniquely Do section).

Finally, many of these so-called neurodivergent-friendly programs categorize individuals based on their symptomatology and diagnosis, which ultimately promotes exclusion and therefore works against DEI policies in the long run by promoting the illusion of inclusion. Traits that can be associated with ADHD, for example, like having high energy levels, are really human traits that anyone can possess. The reasons for these missteps could come from viewing the neurodiversity initiatives as tasks to check off in order to be compliant with strategic initiatives versus an investment or belief in the Neurodiversity Movement and Paradigm. According to Dr. Nick Walker (2014), “The Neurodiversity Movement is a social justice movement that seeks civil rights, equality, respect, and full societal inclusion for the neurodivergent ” (Walker, 2014, Neurodiversity Movement section).

Summary

How have we deviated so far from respecting the uniqueness of ourselves and others? A leader in the field of neurodiversity, Dr. Thomas Armstrong (2010) comments that “over the past sixty years, we’ve witnessed a phenomenal growth in the number of new psychiatric illnesses (Armstrong, 2010b, para 1). This deficit-lens is impacting how we view individuals and rethinking what diversity means. In the workplace, organizations that come to this same realization are looking for solutions to revamping their initiatives and celebrate the multiple

dimensions of diversity in a whole new way. Successful companies are moving past token neurodiversity at work programs and seeking to create initiatives around belonging.

According to Nancy Doyle, a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion contributor and CEO of Genius Within, integration of neurotypicals and neurodivergent individuals will be key as diverse minds work together. There will be a period of acculturation where all neurotypes collide with one another during the learning process (Doyle, 2022), but companies committed to inclusive neurodiversity practices will win out. Focusing on unique neurological wiring in diversity efforts will yield tremendous benefits. As individuals join an organization and acceptance increases, an inclusive environment will contribute to the overall corporate culture and boost retention of a diverse workforce (Cheng & Groyberg, 2021).

While the complexity and fluidity of the Neurodiversity Movement may ignite confusion around terminology, strong education that builds awareness and acceptance can address these challenges. Neurosmart organizations benefit from being clear about the terminology they choose to use and even, when appropriate, seek employees or Neurodiversity Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to contribute to the discussion or help make policy. One of the most exciting aspects in the field of neurodiversity is that it has the potential to revive and reorient positive psychology and bring back "...two neglected missions [from psychology] – making normal people stronger and more productive and making high human potential actual" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.8).

Through the creation of modules that introduce accurate terminology, present the strengths of various neurological profiles, advocate for a strength-based approach to company policies and practices, and build awareness and acceptance of the neurodivergent mind I hope to break down the systemic barriers that exist for neurodivergent adults. These barriers place ND

adults at a disadvantage within the workplace environment. Two (2) modules will be packaged and ready to share with organizations that are interested in finding untapped talent and building acceptance amongst their diverse staff. The final component consists of a structured template for organizations that are ready to be intentional and purposeful in bringing out the strengths of their employees. Through a survey, client input, and consultation, a customized neurodiversity program will be created. This strategic planning template is designed to clearly communicate a corporate initiative. Equity, ethics, and social justice are at the heart of promoting change in policy, fostering avenues of advocacy, and addressing issues of social justice for neurodivergent individuals.

Methodology for Problem of Practice Capstone Project

Purpose of the Project

For my Capstone project I created two (2) training modules with scripts, one (1) strategic planning template with surveys, and one (1) supplemental bid proposal that is created for companies that wish to embrace a learning culture, neurodiversity and support neurodivergent adults through inclusive programming and initiatives. The focal point of my problem of practice is to address the systemic barriers (e.g. entrance into the talent pool, interview process, onboarding and integration, and corporate culture) that exist for neurodivergent adults, which places them at a disadvantage within the workplace environment.

According to an email bulletin sent on January 7, 2022 by Uptimize entitled Neurodiversity at Work Trends in 2022, the trends in this field include, "...full scale, enterprise-wide neuroinclusion initiatives, the emergence of the 'Head of Neurodiversity' role, and greater upstream support for neurodistinct students" (Uptimize, personal communication, January 7,

2022). The need for these types of modules is growing and corporations are primed to provide education and enact policy that contributes to breaking down the systemic barriers that exist for neurodivergent adults in the workplace. This includes impacting the sourcing, recruiting, interviewing, and onboarding policies; creating easier access to reasonable accommodations that provide dignity for those in need of such supports; introducing training modules that bring understanding, awareness, and acceptance of those who are cognitively diverse; and supporting psychological safety in the workplace that universally support the majority of individuals.

Target Audience

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has traditionally been used in K-12 education, but similar concepts apply to a universal design inclusivity approach within the workplace (Gronseth & Hutchins, 2019). The modules and strategic planning template I have created will help me reach my goal. The potential target audiences and key groups, which will depend on the scope of the project, include the leadership team, human resource managers, employees, and specialized groups (e.g. affinity and employee resource groups).

The focus of each group is shaped on their needs and I foresee working with them in various capacities moving forward. For example, with the leadership team there is a focus on strategic planning, advisement, goal setting and coaching. Human Resource (HR) managers receive targeted training on recruitment, sourcing, interviewing, hiring and onboarding policies and procedures. General employees are given education training on awareness, appreciation, understanding, acceptance, inclusivity, and mentoring. Management is given communication strategies and organizational support to best meet the needs of ND employees and empower them to do as well as possible as work. Finally, specialized groups (e.g. interns, employee resource groups, and HR teams) receive specific programs targeted to their needs. This might include

developing a college internship program, lunch discussions, book clubs, and small group training sessions at a deep and personal level.

Additionally, I am open to collaborate with other consultants to partner on bigger projects that have the potential of reaching a wider audience. My community partner, NeuroGuides, is opening doors for me by allowing me to be part of corporate training sessions that share my same vision. NeuroGuides engages, consults, and trains corporate leadership worldwide in moving from a simple diversity model to universal design approaches. They are engaged daily in workplaces with all persons to build an understanding of true neurodiversity and are dedicated to changing the narrative for neurodivergent persons. Through my role as an observer and collaborator, I have been able to see firsthand the dynamics of working with individuals in a corporate environment and strategizing with leadership teams and managers. My community partner scheduled the following training sessions and discussions, presented in Table 3. I have observed and contributed in ways that have supported me in my capstone project and module creation.

Table 3

Corporate Training Observations & Collaboration Sessions Timeline

| Date | Company | Session Title |
|-------------------|----------|---|
| February 3, 2002 | Client A | Strategic Planning with leadership and HR Manager |
| February 8, 2022 | Client A | Introduction to Neurodiversity and Autism |
| February 16, 2022 | Client B | Introduction to Neurodiversity |
| March 16, 2022 | Client B | Best Practices in Talent Acquisition |
| April 13, 2022 | Client B | Retaining Top Talent and Being An Ally |
| April 26, 2022 | Client B | Q & A session with all employees |

Regarding the ultimate beneficiaries of my work, the project has the potential to change entire company cultures, increase innovation, and establish psychological safety. In a survey of Harvard Business Review readers, it revealed that “65% of respondents did not think that their organizations are diverse and inclusive...Among organizations rated as very or extremely diverse and inclusive, 14% had an organizational culture in which learning was the most salient culture style. In comparison, among organizations rated as not at all or not very diverse and inclusive, only 8% ranked learning as the most salient style” (Cheng & Groysberg, 2021, The Relationship Between Learning, Diversity, and Inclusion section).

In a recent LinkedIn post I shared an infographic that I designed on the importance of team culture and the five steps organizations can take that will help them move in the right direction: foster psychological safety; acknowledge and appreciate cultural and neurological diversity; create a sense of belonging and trust; provide regular check-ins, clear feedback, and active listening; demonstrate empathy. The modules I have created will help to establish this culture and capitalize on the importance of a learning-centered workplace culture.

Final Project

Figure 2 depicts how I addressed my problem of practice through the creation of training modules wherein I introduce accurate terminology, present the strengths of various neurological profiles, advocate for a strength-based approach to restructuring company policies and practices, and build awareness and acceptance of the neurodivergent mind. The theoretical framework that guides my work is based around positive psychology and I plan to apply this framework through a strength-based approach.

Figure 2*Overview of the Capstone Project*

This capstone project includes two (2) training modules (e.g. The Foundations of Neurodiversity and Flip the Script: Building Community Through Neurodivergent Talent Acquisition) with scripts, one (1) strategic planning template with surveys, and a supplemental bid proposal that is flexible for personalizing a long-term partnership to cover multiple areas of building neurodivergent-friendly programs. The strategic planning template must remain fluid, as different countries and organizations have different experiences and norms around topics of neurodiversity and have specific preferences for presentation formats. Table 4 provides an overview of the modules and agendas that are used for corporate training on neurodiversity and universal design practices.

Table 4*Module Overview*

| Module Name | Agenda | Description |
|--|---|---|
| The Foundations of Neurodiversity | Welcome / Introduction History of Neurodiversity Terminology Global and relational statistics Social model of disability Strength-based approach Neurological profiles Q & A | The purpose is to teach the history of the Neurodiversity Movement, introduce clear and accurate terminology, speak to how neurodiversity has been impacted by culture and the social model of disability, and establish the 5-step process that leads to innovation and unlocking human potential: understanding, awareness, acceptance, inclusion, and belonging. I also touch on the unique and complex profile of neurodivergent individuals. |
| Flip the Script: Building Community through Neurodivergent Talent | Foundation Review Best Practices: Neurodivergent Hiring ND Job Descriptions Sourcing / Acquiring Talent Interview Skills Building Teams Workplace Optimizers Q & A | The purpose is to directly impact sourcing, job descriptions, interviewing protocols, and reasonable accommodations. This is based in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and seeks to provide accommodations and processes that are available for all employees, it benefits the majority of employees, it infuses dignity in the process of seeking accommodations, and it incurs minimal costs for the employer. |
| Strategic Planning Template and surveys | Introduction Survey Results Where are we headed How do we get there Plans and next steps | The purpose is to assess where an organization is in their DEIB initiatives, understand where the organization wants to grow, and allows for the creation of a timeline and personalized program to meet this goal. Prior to using this template as a working document, I will have administered surveys and reviewed the results with leadership. This template doubles as the introduction presentation to be shared with employees at the very start of the neurodiversity program, so that all employees are on the same page and understand the neuroinclusion initiatives that are forthcoming. |
| Bid Proposal | n/a | The purpose is to outline the cost and details of a long-term project and partnership with a client. |

Equity, ethics, and social justice are guiding principles for my capstone design. Equity: when neurodivergent individuals are not understood or accepted then their access to reasonable accommodations is limited and difficult to obtain. Ethics: exploring ethical implications by destigmatizing neurodiversity and educating others that there is no one way to be ‘normal.’

Social Justice: advocating for those with uniquely wired brains who are often discriminated against and marginalized in their workplace community. Through my work with my community partner I received firsthand experience in these areas and had my work supervised by those who support positive psychology and utilize a strength-based approach in their work. This project's timeline, objectives, and deliverables are outlined in Table 4.

Table 5*Timeline, Objectives, and Deliverables*

| Date Assigned | Objectives | Goal Date Accomplished | Deliverables |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------------|--|
| January | | | |
| 1.31 | Defend Proposal | 1.31 | Pass defense, move forward |
| February | | | |
| <i>First week</i> | IRB approval, if needed | | Complete forms / paperwork and submit |
| 2.8 | Client A presentation (<i>Intro to Neurodiversity</i>). | 2.8 | Co-present with community partner |
| 2.16 | Observe and Support Client B training session (<i>Intro to Neurodiversity</i>). Consult with my community partner. | 2.16 | Create draft of Module 1, with script |
| | Observe and Support with Client A's strategic planning for their pilot neurodiversity program. Consult with my community partner. | End of February | Create draft of strategic planning template and bid proposal |
| | Work on Module 1, strategic planning template, surveys, bid proposal. Consult with my community partner. | End of February | Finalize Module 1 presentation and script, strategic planning template, bid proposal |
| March | | | |
| 3.16 | Observe Client B training session (<i>Best Practices in Talent Acquisition</i>) | 3.16 | Create draft of Module 2, with script |

| Date Assigned | Objectives | Goal Date Accomplished | Deliverables |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|
| March | Modules and planning template go through final round of editing | Mid-March | Finalize Module 2 presentation and script, |
| | Write up implications | End of March | Meet with committee and incorporate feedback. |
| April | | | |
| 4.13 | Observe and Support Client B training session (<i>Retaining Top Talent and Being an Ally</i>) | 4.13 | Revise components of Capstone |
| 4.26 | Participate in Q & A session – Client B | April 26 | |
| 5.1 | Finalize chapters 4 & 5 | Beginning of April | Finish writing portion of Capstone Project |
| | Prepare for final defense | Mid-April | Create poster and final defense presentation |
| June | | | |
| 6.1 | Final oral defense | June 3 | Revisions; submit final work and complete paperwork |

My work plan includes the creation and fine-tuning of two (2) modules with accompanied scripts, one (1) strategic plan template with surveys, and a supplemental bid proposal for larger projects that have the potential to go beyond a single training. The exposure I had through my community partner has been invaluable. They have allowed me to be an observer and co-presenter in similar trainings that they have created for clients. This experience influenced me as it allowed me to reflect on what worked and how I might tailor my training modules moving forward. Through my collaboration with my community partner, revisions have been made that reflect professional products.

Conclusions, Recommendations and Final Thoughts

Over the course of three (3) months, I gained valuable insights into how best to create training models and work with large organizations on their neurodiversity initiatives. During this process, I felt there were some limitations to my Capstone Project. Firstly, it was difficult not being able to survey the participants, post training, in order to gauge their thoughts and impressions. While there were positive messages typed in the chat box during and after our training sessions, it was not the same as a well-designed post-training survey. Secondly, the sessions I participated in were limited in scope, therefore, I am not able to see the impact that the training sessions had on policy or culture. Client A was initially slated to be a long-term client, which would have provided that level of insight, but the pilot program was canceled by the client and, therefore, I was unable to gather that data.

I conducted a critical analysis report with my community partner after each training presentation and client meeting. My partner and I reflected on how the trainings went, and from those discussions internalized the feedback and made necessary changes. We reflected on our communication style (e.g. did both parties appear to be on the same page and understand one another), content delivery (e.g. what was shared was understood and accepted by the majority), and what we could improve on (e.g. was there any point of the conversation, meeting, or training that caused confusion or felt clunky). Additionally, I kept notes on topics covered, length of presentation, number of participants, systemic barriers addressed, and responses from the participants. I have organized and summarized my conclusions from this experience into seven (7) sections.

The length is important

Time is a valuable commodity in the corporate world and both clients felt strongly about valuing the time of their employees. Client A is a large (i.e., 699,000 employees) Fortune 500 company, although we were only working with a small group (i.e., 15 individuals). Regardless, it was incredibly difficult to schedule a time that allowed all group members to attend meetings and live trainings. When we did settle on a time, inevitably something would come up between the moment the training was scheduled and the actual date. At least a fourth of the employees would not attend and several would drop off towards the end, before the training was officially over. Client A's employees were often distracted and it was difficult to hold their attention. With the exception of one employee, who identified as neurodivergent and was in charge of hiring, there was not a lot of engagement or conversation in the chat box.

Client B was considerably smaller as an organization (i.e., 15,000 employees), but more employees showed up to the scheduled trainings. The norm set by Client B was that they encouraged employees to attend the training sessions live, but if they were not able to do so they could watch the recording later. This freedom actually brought in more attendance; 300 participants for the first session, over 100 for the second session; over 100 for the third session; and close to 100 for the last question and answer tailored session. Additionally, I found the questions asked and engagement levels were much higher than Client A. It was still challenging to come up with a workable presentation length, and while we fluctuated between 75 and 90 minutes, including Q & A, I noticed that at about the 60-minute mark we lost participants and that number steadily increased as time went on.

Based on my experiences, I feel a 60-minute session is the ideal time to not only hold the attention of the participants, but also attract individuals to attend the training live, which is

imperative for quality engagement and discussion. Some companies may push for a shorter time and possibly even a longer one, however, based on my experiences with my community partner standing firm at a 60-minute, including teaching and discussion, yields the best results.

Do not underestimate the Q & A section

There are a lot of emotions, feelings, and questions around the topic of neurodiversity. Despite posting clear agendas and sharing talking points, many participants came to the training with burning questions that they wanted to ask (e.g. what do I do if I observe bullying against someone who is neurodivergent) and topics (e.g. advocacy) that they wanted to dive deeper into that were not part of the planned training. I often felt that some of the best learning came when participants asked questions that were directly related to something they were experiencing in the workplace; this provided a level of specificity that we could have never planned for. With Client A, we left 5-10 minutes for questions and it was not enough time. With Client B, we left 10-minutes for questions and that also was too short. While our goal was always to leave plenty of time for discussion, unless a time frame is reserved in advance there will always be a reason to pull extra presentation time from the discussion portion. It is my opinion that a 20-minute discussion time at the end of each training presentation is ideal. Additionally, the discussion time should factor into the entire length of a presentation so that participants are less likely to leave early and authentic discussions can happen at the end. This provides a powerful conclusion and can even spark ideas for future presentations or smaller workshops.

Record the training session

Since COVID, remote and hybrid working arrangements are becoming more popular. In many ways, this flexibility provides a freedom that many organizations have not previously experienced. Due to competing schedules, not all employees are able to attend live training

sessions, even when they happen in a virtual environment. I found that it is important to record the session so that employees can view it during a time that works best for them. However an organization tracks attendance internally is up to them, but as presenters we tried our best to be transparent about the topic, structure, and length of the presentation so that employees could prioritize each training as they saw fit. Additionally, we provided an opportunity, for those attending a recorded session, to email or connect with us via LinkedIn should they have any questions. I did receive a few LinkedIn messages from Client B employees who viewed the recorded presentation and wanted to share that they were appreciative of the content and looked forward to attending the next presentation live. Short recorded modules with live Q & A sessions may be a better route for engaging busy audiences in the corporate environment.

Understand the true goals of the organization

I noticed a difference of ethos between the two clients. The red tape and bureaucracy within Client A's organization made collaboration extremely difficult. Despite being consultants, they attempted, and sometimes succeeded, to dictate the content in a way that my community partner felt was not following best practices. Although initially they expressed excitement about the social justice focus, in the end they were not interested in that messaging. This impeded how deeply we were able to present on various subjects, such as allyship, bullying, and the disability model. There was always an impression with Client A that their mission and vision did not align with what was actually happening within the organization. In one of our first team meetings, an employee referenced this on a call by asking if this experience was going to be similar to a previous pilot program that she felt they never received support with or proper training. Ultimately, our contract with Client A was cut short due to budget concerns and hiring roadblocks on their end.

Client B, however, was very open and placed full trust within the consultants and trainers, understanding that they were the experts within the neurodiversity field. The end result was a more authentic and organic experience for both the presenter and the audience.

Have a Co-presenter

Neurodiversity can be quite complex and the concepts and terminology can feel overwhelming for those who are unfamiliar with the topic. The ability to switch between speakers, rest your voice, and most importantly come to the table with multiple perspectives was a wonderful experience. I feel my community partner and I were able to create more powerful and informational presentations due to our various experiences and perspectives. Having a co-presenter also allowed more flexibility and freedom when it came to reading chat messages, responding to comments, and providing a layer of extra security regarding displaying the presentations; we were each other's backup if one of us had any technical issues.

Share follow up Documents via LinkedIn Postings

It was inevitable that some question would come up in which we had information ready to share, but we just did not have time to fit it into our presentation. Client A was very careful about us not communicating with the employees after our presentation; everything had to go through an assigned liaison. However, Client B was very open and welcomed us forwarding various links, articles, and references for employees to learn more about neurodiversity on their own time. I found forming a connection with the employees via LinkedIn and other networks was meaningful as questions did come up and it was helpful to be able to share.

Personalization is key

When we first began creating content for Client A, we personalized the training very much in our style. One of the first pieces of constructive criticism we received back from the

Client was that the style was not right for their team. They were used to a basic, no frills slide deck. They preferred images to be deleted and colors limited to those that matched their branding. I found that Client A was highly micromanaging the content and presentation style, especially for work that they were contracting out. A reason for this strict oversight could have been that they were seeking consistency between their multiple pilot programs in three (3) different countries (e.g. United States, United Kingdom, and India) and with three (3) different consultant groups. Because of this I felt they were striving for an unrealistic level of consistency amongst all consultant teams, especially when the members of those teams were not given the opportunity to collaborate or discuss any part of their work together.

Client B, however, was different. While they did have a preference for not allowing their employees to take planned breaks during the training, they allowed us to choose the colors and formats that we felt was best. We collaborated regarding the topic and structure of the trainings, but then we were left to our own devices. Ultimately, this taught me that content is where I need to invest my time, as each client will have their own preference on colors, fonts, formats, and community builders.

Summary

Based on the feedback I received and the experiences I had, I was able to successfully develop all the components of my Capstone Project under the guidance of my community partner. When presenting for a neurodiverse audience it is important to deliver information in a way that can be accessed by the majority of individuals, regardless of their disability, condition, or disorder. Accessibility, in terms of presentation design, usually references planning for those people with color blindness or other visual impairments, but it can also be utilized to benefit dyslexics. To that end, there are best practice guidelines that assist individuals in creating

presentations that are visually appealing and accessible. Best practices around presentation creation for dyslexia comes from Keri Buckland (2017). In order to make slides more accessible Buckland recommends to avoid big block text, consider the layout, choose a simple font, pick a background color that is creme-based or soft pastel in order for the text contrast to be seen and avoid bright white, and use lower case lettering and bold text to emphasis ideas (Buckland, 2017). Accessible U, a division of The University of Minnesota, references accessible slide design, the use of preset layouts, readable fonts, descriptive links, and alternative text (University of Minnesota, 2022). Alternative text should be clear and precise and is easily accessed within PowerPoint slides (Stinson Design, 2020). Without this awareness it makes it difficult, and in some cases impossible, for neurodiverse individuals to engage with and understand the content presented.

I succeeded in my goal of creating two (2) training modules with accompanied scripts, one (1) strategic plan template with surveys, and one (1) supplemental bid proposal for larger projects that have the potential to go beyond a single training. The modules introduce accurate terminology, share the strengths of various neurological profiles, and build awareness and acceptance of the neurodivergent mind. Next steps include securing clients and training employees via the modules to further the long-term goal of impacting policy by addressing the systemic barriers (e.g. entrance into the talent pool, interview process, onboarding and integration, and corporate culture) that exist for neurodivergent adults. The components of this Capstone Project are the proprietary property of the author and while they will not be attached to this project they have been reviewed in depth by the doctoral committee.

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