

# Neurodiversity in the Workplace:

from Awareness to Organisational Strategy



## Workplaces around the world are increasingly recognising the value of neurodiversity.

The idea is that differences in brain functioning are natural and beneficial. This includes individuals who are autistic, have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, and other cognitive variations. This is not only a global reality, but one that is also increasingly present within the Public Service in Malta.

These differences strengthen organisations through creativity, pattern recognition, analytical thinking, and problem-solving. Organisations should not only focus on awareness but also on **effective accommodations** and **inclusive practices** to retain this talent.

Meaningful inclusion requires an organisational strategy. Leaders should be committed to diversity and sustained implementation, rather than focusing solely on isolated accommodations.

### 1 Leadership and Culture

Inclusion must be embedded at leadership level. Organisations should embed neurodiversity into **diversity and inclusion policies, recruitment practices, and workforce development**. Within a genuinely inclusive workplace, individuals can speak openly about their disability without worrying about stigma or negative consequences. Training for managers should move away from deficit-based approaches and instead focus on strengths, environmental fit, and shared responsibility for creating inclusive workplaces.



## 2 Workplace Design and Systems

Barriers are often environmental rather than individual, as highlighted in the social model of disability. Organisations should ensure that systems are inclusive, including:

- ✔ **Recruitment processes**, which often rely on unstructured interviews that are not suitable for everyone.
- ✔ **Onboarding procedures**, which often lack clarity or predictability.

Some inclusive practices include the use of structured interviews, clear job descriptions, predictable onboarding plans, and clear performance criteria. This reduces ambiguity and stress among all employees, not only neurodivergent staff.

## 3 Reasonable Accommodations

Accommodations are adjustments that support employees to perform their duties effectively. These are not “*preferential treatment*” but reasonable modifications that **remove barriers** and **support equal participation**. Accommodations vary based on individual needs.

For example, for someone with ADHD, **flexible work schedules** and **structured routines** can improve focus and productivity. For individuals with dyslexia, providing documents in **accessible formats** or using **text-to-speech tools** can reduce processing challenges. Autistic employees may benefit from **sensory adjustments**, such as quieter workspaces, noise-reducing headphones, or natural lighting. Open-plan offices may be overstimulating for some employees; offering **quiet rooms** or **remote work** options can help individuals focus. **Providing choices**—for example, allowing employees to adjust their seating, lighting, or noise levels—respects individual sensory preferences. **Assistive tools** such as organisational apps, speech-to-text software, and task management systems can support executive functioning and workflow.

Importantly, individual needs may vary over time. These accommodations should be regularly reviewed and adjusted to adapt to changing needs, roles, and responsibilities.

## 4 Monitoring and Long-term Integration

Neurodiverse organisations adopt a long-term strategy for accommodating individual needs rather than relying on one-time initiatives. To demonstrate the value of inclusive practices, organisations should track outcomes such as **employee satisfaction, retention, and performance**.

Inclusion should not be limited to entry-level roles; neurodivergent employees should have equitable access to advancement. Neurodiversity should be integrated into career development pathways and leadership training.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, creating a neurodiverse environment requires **structural design, leadership accountability, and an inclusive culture**. Organisations that foster inclusion and accommodate individual needs not only comply with legal frameworks but also benefit from a diverse workforce. This approach strengthens employee wellbeing, innovation, and organisational success.



# Boosting Productivity:

## Designing Work for Neurodiverse Performance



### Neurodiversity recognises that every individual's brain processes information differently, shaping unique abilities, perspectives, and needs.

These differences can be more pronounced for individuals on the neurodiversity spectrum, whose cognitive processes may vary significantly from what is typically expected. This makes it essential for organisations to develop workplace practices that acknowledge these distinctions, provide appropriate support, and create a truly inclusive environment.

Ensuring that a workplace can offer appropriate accommodations not only benefits the individual employee but also strengthens overall team performance and organisational culture.

A key part of supporting neurodiverse employees is understanding their lived experience. By listening to the individual, employers can implement accommodations that genuinely make a difference. Neurodivergent individuals may experience sensory sensitivities; noise, smells, or movement can become distracting or overwhelming, depending on personal thresholds. A flexible and respectful approach allows each employee to work comfortably and productively.

The following practical strategies focus on enabling individuals to flourish in the workplace:

#### **Assigning tasks that align with individual strengths:**

This sets individuals up for success, increases confidence, and fosters positive engagement. When employees feel successful and valued, they are more likely to contribute effectively to their teams.

#### **Provide clear expectations:**

Clearly define responsibilities, deadlines, and quality standards.

#### **Break complex tasks into structured steps:**

This reduces cognitive overload and unnecessary stress.

#### **Use visual planning tools:**

Task boards, timelines, and workflow software improve prioritisation and transparency.

#### **Minimise unnecessary interruptions:**

This increases productivity and reduces error rates.

#### **Provide written follow-up:**

Supplement verbal instructions with written summaries to enhance clarity and recall. Where possible, use written communication if this is preferred by the individual.

#### **Allow flexible scheduling where feasible:**

Some employees perform better during specific times of the day.

#### **Offer environmental choice:**

Quiet areas, remote work options, or adjustable lighting can significantly improve concentration.

#### **Use assistive technology:**

Speech-to-text, text-to-speech, digital organisers, and reminder systems support efficiency.

When roles and responsibilities align with individual strengths, performance improves and friction among employees is reduced—not only for neurodivergent employees, but across teams.

# Improving Workplace Relationships:

## Collaborating Across Neurodiversity

Effective communication for neurodiverse individuals requires awareness, flexibility, and mutual respect. Workplace relationships are strengthened when staff understand that people think, communicate, and process information differently. The following practical tips outline simple strategies to improve collaboration across neurodiverse teams.

- Recognise that **neurodiversity reflects natural differences** in how people think, process information, and communicate, not deficits that need to be corrected.
- Use **clear, direct, and literal language** when giving instructions or feedback to avoid confusion. Some people may not understand jokes or sarcasm, so it is important to avoid it.
- Agree on **preferred communication methods** (for example email, written summaries, structured meetings) to support clarity and reduce anxiety. Many neurodiverse people prefer written communication because it helps them organise their thoughts, understand priorities, and feel more prepared.
- Be explicit about **social norms** rather than relying on unwritten rules. This helps reduce uncertainty and promotes more inclusive interactions.
- Plan meetings with a **clear agenda** and share it in advance so participants have time to prepare and know what to expect.
- Allow **processing time** during discussions, as neurodivergent individuals may need additional time to reflect. Pauses do not indicate disengagement or a lack of understanding.
- Respect **sensory differences** and **personal space preferences** in shared environments.
- Provide **clear, practical feedback** based on specific actions rather than personal traits.
- Work collaboratively to **identify solutions** and hold regular check-ins to address concerns. Avoid relying on informal social cues; instead, make workplace norms and expectations explicit.
- Promote an environment **where employees feel comfortable** expressing needs or asking for clarification.
- Recognise that some neurodiverse individuals may find social interaction challenging. They may benefit from **structured opportunities** to engage with colleagues rather than relying solely on informal interaction.
- When welcoming a new neurodivergent employee, it is helpful to provide colleagues with **awareness training**. This should offer insight into the individual's strengths and needs, communication preferences, and practical collaboration strategies.
- Rapport can be built through **shared professional interests** while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Successful collaboration across neurodiverse teams is strengthened through clear expectations, inclusive communication, and mutual respect.

As a final note, employees and management are reminded that the Employee Support Programme is available to provide confidential psychological support to public employees. We remain committed to promoting a supportive and inclusive work environment.

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### Contact Us

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