

# NEURODIVERGENCE AT WORK: UNDERSTANDING WHAT HELPS PEOPLE PERFORM AT THEIR BEST

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One of the things I think workplaces still underestimate about neurodivergence is its relationship with productivity. An employee can be highly capable and still lose a disproportionate amount of productive time because of the way the working day is structured.

Think about a fairly normal morning: A Teams message arrives while they are writing something. Someone stops by with a “quick question.”

A meeting runs over and produces four new priorities. An instruction that was given verbally changes later. Another message arrives marked urgent



Then we wonder why the work that required real concentration has barely moved by lunchtime. For some neurodivergent employees, repeated interruption, rapid task-switching, unclear priorities, sensory overload or having to hold too much information in working memory can carry a much greater cognitive cost.

And that can easily be misread. Someone who asks for written instructions may be seen as not listening. Someone who needs time before answering may be seen as unprepared.

Someone who struggles when priorities keep changing may be labelled inflexible.

Someone who uses headphones or protects periods of uninterrupted work may appear antisocial. Someone can be exceptional at solving a complex problem and still struggle enormously with a relatively simple administrative task. None of these examples tells us, by itself, how capable or committed that employee is.

Deloitte's 2024 global research involving 10,000 people with disabilities, chronic health conditions or neurodivergence found that 30% said people had made negative assumptions about their competence in the previous year. Among those who requested workplace accommodations, 74% had experienced at least one request being rejected. Some employees who did not ask for support said they feared being perceived negatively by their supervisors.

Having been diagnosed much later in life, I began to recognize patterns in how I work – what helps me think clearly, what creates unnecessary overload, and what allows me to do my best work.

I now consciously build some of those principles into my own working day: clearer priorities, protected focus, fewer unnecessary switches and a deliberate pause when everything starts competing for attention. For me, it is not about asking to be treated differently. It is about understanding how I work best and creating the conditions to work effectively. And many of the things that can make work easier are remarkably ordinary:

Clear priorities. Written follow-up after important conversations. Fewer unnecessary interruptions. Knowing what is genuinely urgent. Clear meeting outcomes. A little processing time before expecting an immediate response. Asking someone what helps them work effectively instead of assuming everyone works best in the same way.

This is where “neuroinclusion” becomes much more than an inclusion conversation. It becomes a work design, management and productivity conversation. Because if a capable employee spends a significant part of the day recovering their concentration, trying to interpret unclear instructions, constantly switching priorities or using enormous mental energy simply to work in the way everyone else is expected to work, that has a cost. Not only to the individual. To the work. Perhaps one of the most useful questions a manager can ask is not: “Why can’t this person work the way everyone else does?”

But: “Is there something about the way we are asking people to work that is making good work unnecessarily difficult?” Sometimes a very small change in how work is communicated, prioritized or organized can release ability that was there all along.

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