

GOOQUAL

The Neuroinclusion Imperative

Unlocking Untapped Potential

Neuroinclusion is a business imperative.

Amidst unprecedented technological disruption and economic uncertainty, fresh approaches will determine which businesses lead and which fall behind. Our research demonstrates that **neurodivergent professionals bring a wealth of sought-after skills and out-of-the-box brainpower**—yet most companies still run on **rigid ways of working** that bury these strengths, fuel attrition, and erode trust.

As neurodivergent visibility grows, **employers seem more interested than ever in leveraging these strengths**. Still, workplace reactions to neurodivergent traits remain stuck in the past. We heard story after story of **neurodivergent potential turning into friction and failure**: pattern recognition misread as naysaying, candor as insubordination, hyperfocus as disengagement, and so much more.

This talent remains overlooked and marginalized for reasons that are, at their core, superficial: differences in communication style, sensory needs, and working rhythms that have **little to do with actual performance and everything to do with perception**. As researchers who are neurodivergent ourselves, we are humbled and honored to share the insider's perspective that can bridge this perception gap at last.

Need-to-know terms

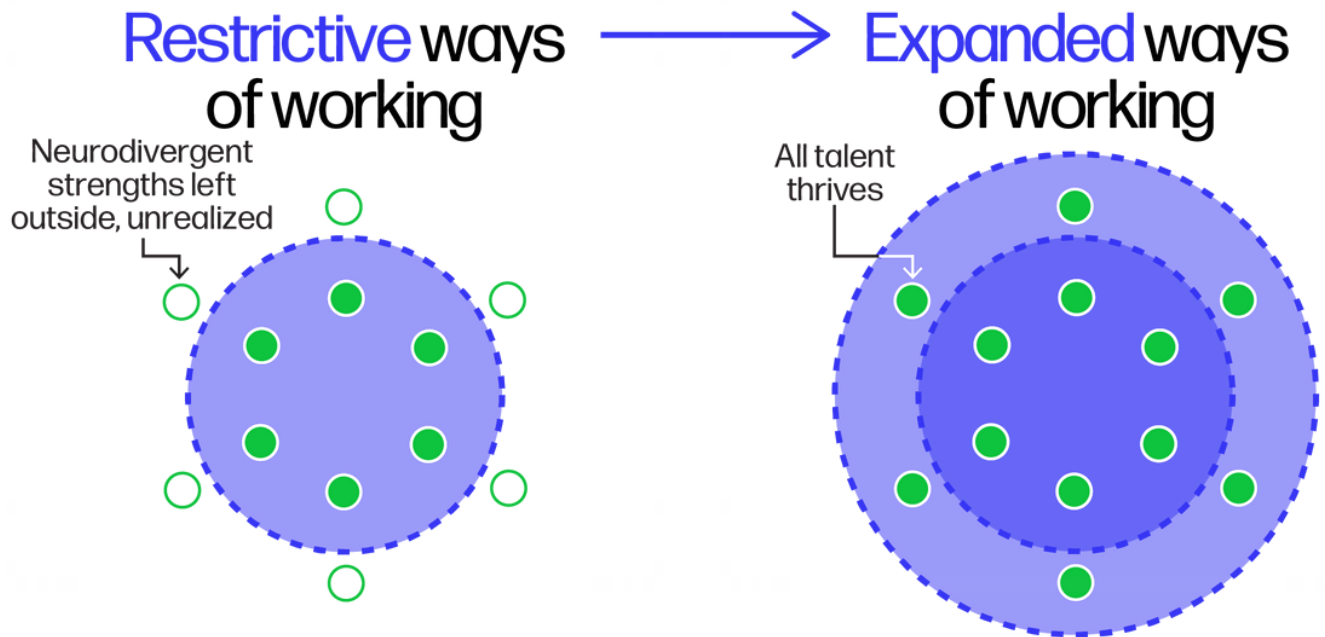
Neurodivergent describes someone whose brain processes, learns, and/or behaves differently from what is considered typical. By default, this includes anyone diagnosed with ASD, ADHD, or any other mental health condition or neurodevelopmental difference (see the full report for more detail).

Neurotypical describes someone whose brain processes, learns, and/or behaves in a way aligned with what is considered typical (i.e., not neurodivergent).

High / low support needs describes the varying levels of support neurodivergent people may require. Avoid “high-functioning” or “low-functioning,” which falsely assume needs based on projections by outside observers.

Masking is the act of suppressing or camouflaging neurodivergent traits. Masking can include imitating neurotypical social behaviors, hiding soothing repetitive movements (known as self-stimulating behaviors, or “stims”), or forcing facial expressions.

Neuroinclusion is the practice and policy of making workplaces adaptive enough to embrace and enable whatever talent walks in the door, expanding ways of working such that all participants in a given team or culture can contribute and co-create at their full potential.



We find neurodivergent professionals, far from lacking in capability, are too often locked out of full participation by invisible barriers, unspoken norms, and unquestioned expectations that undergird restrictive ways of working.

Neuroinclusion means making workplaces adaptive enough to embrace whatever talent walks in the door, and expanding ways of working so that all team members can contribute and co-create at their full potential.

We see tremendous business opportunity for organizations that pursue neuroinclusion. In the full report, we reveal and explore **six strategic advantages won through neuroinclusion**:

- 1 Neutralized risks and inefficiencies**
- 2 Undiscovered synergies**
- 3 Output beyond expectation**
- 4 Seamless project execution**
- 5 Kindness that outperforms niceness**
- 6 Next-level processing power**

In these **key findings**, we share highlights from our exploration of these advantages, the neurodivergent traits that enable them, and the conditions that help and hinder neurodivergent professionals as they strive to reach their full potential at work.

Unseen

83%

of our sample say aspects of their work style are repeatedly misperceived or misunderstood by neurotypical colleagues

“When I have a manager who sees my skills clearly and is not threatened by me, they automatically work to expand my scope of influence and smooth over the gaps in my soft skills. It's a really beautiful symbiosis.”

- Neurodivergent professional

Commonly misinterpreted actions

Action

What's really going on?

Asking a lot of questions

Anticipating pitfalls

Off-camera / no eye contact

Focusing on content of discussion instead of on facial performance

Doodling & fidgeting

Releasing energy in order to maintain focus

Blunt commentary

Naturally communicating in a literal and straightforward manner, prioritizing clarity over comfort

Wearing headphones, baggy clothes, sunglasses, etc.

Reducing sensory overload that otherwise significantly impacts productivity

Foresight misread as resistance: Alice sees failure before it happens, but because she's always raising concerns, she's labeled "inflexible" in her performance review. See page 16 of the full report for this story.

Empathy-activated kindness: Jamie's efficiency is second to none, and they care deeply about fairness and details. But, others are upset by their all-business style and expressionless face. See page 41 of the full report for this story.

Untapped

89%

of our sample say they possess **unique strengths or abilities** that they rarely see displayed by others

“ Sometimes you need one supercomputer to make things a lot more efficient. My ability to memorize and visualize many things at the same time kind of works like that big computer. ”

- Neurodivergent professional

Strengths we found

Systems thinking

Creativity

Pattern recognition

Memory

Information synthesis

Detail orientation

Hyperfocus

Performance under pressure

Novelty seeking

Altruism

Bottom-up processing

Candor

Independence

Healthy conflict

Productivity

Transparency

Creativity crushed by busy-ness: Alex comes up with the best solutions to the most challenging, unique business problems her firm faces—but without the mental space to think through them, she's on the road to burn out. *See page 21 of the full report for this story.*

Speed spoiled by mistrust: Max's fast thinking makes her colleagues' heads spin, but the gaps in her interpersonal skills are stifling her strengths and causing bigger problems the higher she climbs. *See page 49 of the full report for this story.*

Unmoored

82%

of our sample say there are aspects of workplace culture or unspoken expectations which **make no sense to them**

“My brain is wired for pattern recognition, big-picture thinking, and creative problem-solving, but when I’m pressured to fit a narrow mold of productivity or communication, it’s hard to tap into those strengths.”

- **Neurodivergent professional**

Ambiguous feedback doesn’t land

Certain terms or phrases often used in feedback to neurodivergent professionals lend themselves to being seriously misinterpreted:

“Be respectful” We heard that “respect,” for neurodivergent professionals, arises from regard for others’ abilities and contributions, so being told to “show respect” toward superiors who appear to lack essential skills or expertise may cause confusion. Clear and specific expectations should be communicated instead.

“Be a team player” Being told to be a better “team player” may lead neurodivergent professionals to advocate more for others, offer resources, and pitch in beyond their role. But this feedback often carries the opposite intent: a coded request to conform or avoid challenging the group.

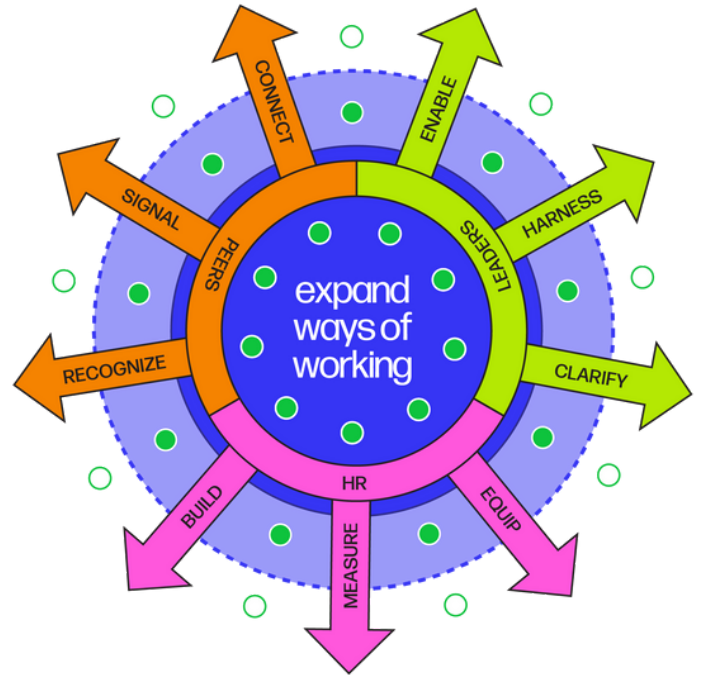
“Be engaged” For neurodivergent professionals we spoke to, engagement means focusing on the work and producing tangible outputs. Therefore, leaders asking for “more engagement” when they really want more visible participation in meetings or faster response times may generate the opposite effect.

Blunt affront: Aisling is a master project manager stuck between pressing deadlines and the inordinate time it takes them to rewrite messages so as not to offend specific team members. *See page 43 of the full report for this story.*

The cost of a voice: Claire is a senior leader now, but she started her life non-speaking and was fired three times early on in her career. She reflects on the pain she's inflicted on herself to succeed, and wonders how many like her never even got the chance. *See page 19 of the full report for this story.*

The Neuroinclusion Operating System

Through three playbooks, we deliver the practical actions for HR, leaders, and peers to **expand ways of working and capture the full spectrum of talent available to their organizations**. When each group applies this ethos, they together reshape and future-proof the organization into one that is dynamic, responsive, and positioned to thrive amid ambiguity and technological disruption. See page 55 of the full report for detailed playbooks.



HR

Neuroinclusive Infrastructure Playbook

- Build** operationalized choice & flexibility into employee experience
- Equip** teams & managers with tools, templates, & coaching resources
- Measure** what matters for equitable performance assessment & hiring

LEADERS

Neuroinclusive Management Playbook

- Enable** performance through optionality in how work gets done
- Harness** unique team strengths through a strengths-based approach
- Clarify** purpose & norms through psychological safety, feedback, & the “why”

PEERS

Neuroinclusive Teamwork Playbook

- Connect** through working relationships built on trust & authenticity
- Signal** communication preferences & working styles through user manuals
- Recognize** strengths & contributions to ensure visibility and collaboration

Output without support: In times of crisis, Thomas can do the work of three people. But when managers expect that same output day after day, he starts running on fumes and looking for the door. *See page 28 of the full report for this story.*

Neuroinclusion requires a broad transformation of workplaces to environments that flex, adapt, and expand to support the full range of human talent they contain. Discrete accommodations or goodwill gestures are simply not enough. Rather than trying to retrofit individuals into rigid systems, organizations must evolve their systems to unlock talent at the edges, where it too often goes unseen and untapped.

This transformation brings out the best in all workers, neurodivergent or not.

This research demonstrates how misperceptions about neurodivergent professionals block companies from strategic advantages that directly impact their bottom lines. **When colleagues mistake directness for rudeness, equate masking with professionalism, or see differences as deficiencies, talent is not only overlooked but actively constrained.** At the same time, when workplaces presume capability, measure what matters, default to flexibility, design for edge cases, and ensure adaptive systems, neurodivergent professionals can demonstrate the skills that are urgently needed in a world of rapid change and uncertainty.

“If there were more space for different ways of thinking and showing up, less emphasis on appearances, more curiosity and flexibility—I think I’d be able to deliver even more impact without burning myself out.”

- Neurodivergent professional

The question is no longer whether neurodivergent professionals have the ability to succeed. The evidence is clear that they can, and do. The real question is how much talent—and how much future advantage—is lost when organizations fail to embrace this dynamic talent pool. Organizations that design for the full spectrum of human potential will not only thrive in the present but also shape the resilient, innovative future of work.

Coqual CEO
Jennie Glazer

Sponsor Relations

Sandra Rice

Executive Vice President, Corporate
Strategy & Engagement

Peggy Shiller

Chief of Staff to the CEO

Allegra Varnadore

Vice President, Corporate Strategy &
Engagement

Research Team

Andy Chan

Senior Manager of Data & Analysis,
Coqual's Global Lab

Emily Gawlak

Executive Director, Coqual's Global Lab

Research Lead

Isis Fabian

Workplace Neurodiversity Expert and
Coach, Fellow at Coqual's Global Lab

Project Lead

Emilia Yu

Executive Director, Coqual's Global Lab

External Team

Jess Kuronen

Design and Data Visualization

Jill Merriman

Copyeditor

Chris Pollio

Accessibility Reader

Methodology

The primary sources of data for the full research report that these key findings are drawn from were a series of virtual focus groups and one-on-one interviews with neurodivergent professionals. Supplemental quantitative insights were gathered via a brief web-based survey fielded to qualitative research participants. In total, we collected qualitative insights from 60 neurodivergent focus group participants and interviewees, sourced from sponsoring companies and the professional networks of researchers. Qualitative insights were supplemented by interviews with subject-matter experts, an initial literature review, and desk research. Names of interviewees throughout were changed to protect the anonymity of participants.

To capture a full range of the neurodiversity present in organizations, participants did not require a formal diagnosis to identify as neurodivergent. For more details on the sample, please refer to the full report.

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