Neuroinclusive employment

Knowledge synthesis

JUNE 26, 2024

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The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is a non-profit research organization, created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate new programs. SRDC's two-part mission is to help policy-makers and practitioners identify policies and programs that improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on the disadvantaged, and to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing these policies.

Since its establishment in December 1991, SRDC has conducted over 450 projects and studies for various federal and provincial departments, municipalities, as well as other public and non-profit organizations. SRDC has offices located in Ottawa and Vancouver, and satellite offices in Calgary, Hamilton, Montreal, Regina, Toronto, and Winnipeg.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Neuroinclusive Employment* project is a research and learning partnership between the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) and the Sinneave Family Foundation. Sinneave is an operating foundation that works with individuals, communities, and organizations across Canada to reduce barriers and enhance opportunities for Autistic youth and adults.

The project aims to summarize key characteristics and practices of inclusive employment through a knowledge synthesis and to explore where there might be opportunities to further strengthen employers' capacity to create inclusive workplaces through additional research with employers. With an emphasis on neuroinclusion, the *Neuroinclusive Employment* project aims to generate insights that can help the Sinneave Family Foundation, policymakers, employers, and other organizations strengthen employer-focused equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.

The project employs a learning partnership approach to the research. A learning partnership is a collaborative method of working with partners to enable learning and improvement through regular exchange, active learning, and reflection throughout the project. Rather than simply producing findings that document what inclusive employers do well and what the gaps might be, this project works with partners and Learning Circle collaborators (i.e., organizations, experts, and employers with an interest in inclusive workplaces). In a learning partnership, researchers, partners, and other collaborators discuss how to help make sense of the research by grounding evidence in practice.

The research is organized according to two connected activities:

1. Establishing a common understanding of the requirements for employers to build inclusive workplaces and support diverse workforces in the long-term through a knowledge synthesis, and

2. Conducting research with employers to identify employer needs, promising practices, potential gaps, and opportunities to enhance support for inclusive workplaces.

This report presents the first phase of the research, summarizing existing applied research findings related to approaches demonstrated to be effective in increasing the diversity, inclusion, and accessibility of workplaces.

KNOWLEDGE SYNTHESIS

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

Neurodiversity is a concept that recognizes and respects neurological differences as any other human variation (Hutchison, 2023). Differences in how people think, understand information, interact, and communicate with others include, but are not limited to: Autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and Tourette syndrome (Weinberg & Doyle, 2017). The term neurodiversity is attributed to Judy Singer, an Australian sociologist who self-identifies on the Autism spectrum, to emphasize different ways of thinking and learning beyond a discourse focused on "disorder" or "impairment" (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.; Disabled World, 2023; Hutchison, 2023).

As many neurodivergent people may not be able to access a medical diagnosis of their conditions and experience these in different degrees of severity, the prevalence rate of neurodivergence in Canada is difficult to estimate. Nevertheless, current estimates place the rate of neurodivergence between 15 to 20 percent of the population (Cameron, 2021; Division of Cancer Epidemiology & Genetics, 2022). Disability as a social identity is also a fluid concept that will continue to evolve over time, according to different contexts, understandings, and individual preferences (Canning et al., 2022). As such, people may not recognize or wish to identify as neurodivergent.[1] Additionally, while some people encounter barriers in work and life that are unsupportive of their ability to thrive, others may have learned coping mechanisms to navigate neurotypical environments and mask, camouflage, or compensate for neurodivergence either intentionally or unintentionally. However, it is recognized that these coping mechanisms place pressure and have a detrimental impact on peoples' mental and physical health (One Mind at Work, 2022).

Neurodivergent Canadians continue to face barriers to employment and career progression. According to the Canadian Survey on Disability, in 2017, 33 per cent of Autistic adults were employed, compared with 79 per cent of adults with no disability (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020). Autistic adults also experience higher rates of underemployment, experience higher job precarity and extended periods of joblessness, experience a higher turnover rate, and tend to have fragmented job histories (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.; Hutchison & Robertson, 2022).

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[1]   Throughout this report, we have used the Sinneave Family Foundation's preferred approach to neuro-affirming language. Many people who identify as neurodivergent prefer identity-first language, i.e., "neurodivergent person" (Walker, n.d.). However, when speaking in general about disability, we have used person-first language. Guidance on inclusive language emphasizes that no standard approach exists, and preferences vary. Instead, it is important to ask the person or group what their preference is when possible (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2024).

In addition, new findings from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability indicate that the rate of people living with disabilities in Canada is increasing, with a large increase in mental health related disabilities among youth and working-age adults (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

Neuroinclusion and the social model of disability

There is a need to address the specific and significant barriers faced by neurodivergent people, as well as the need to understand how principles and practices of inclusion and neuroinclusion can apply to workplaces more broadly. Neuroinclusion may be thought of the practice of creating an inclusive environment that embraces and supports neurodivergence, grounded in a social model of disability. A social model of disability recognizes that people are 'disabled' not by their diverse cognitive or physical variations, but as the result of the interaction with physical, attitudinal, communication, and social barriers (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Both concepts take a non-deficit approach to the employment of people living with disabilities or neurodivergent people, by considering the barriers that people come up against, shifting the focus away from the idea that people lack the skills or abilities compared to neurotypical employees or those living without a disability (One Mind at Work, 2022; Paragg et al., 2022). There is growing recognition that people living with disabilities expend considerable effort navigating employment systems, structures, and environments that were not designed for them (One Mind at Work, 2022). Instead, a social model emphasizes that rather of requiring an individual to change or adapt to the work environment, employers need to make workplaces more inclusive and accessible to people living with disabilities (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Within this framing, the objectives of the knowledge synthesis are to review the evidence, primarily from the perspective of applied research studies with employers, to establish a common understanding of what employers need to do create inclusive employment and workplaces.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The knowledge synthesis consolidates findings from recently conducted SRDC studies (n=21) that explore the barriers experienced by people living with disabilities, as well as the conditions, strategies, and approaches taken up by employers to address those barriers. These studies have included primary data collection with employers and secondary analysis of academic and grey literature according to the parameters of each project's objectives.

To supplement SRDC applied research findings, targeted reviews of the academic and grey literature were also conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of known employment

practices and conditions to create inclusive workplaces for diverse workforces. Our steps included:

- An initial broad search was conducted to retrieve pertinent documents and literature from relevant organization websites, collaborators, and colleagues (n=62).

- A multi-step environmental scan (e-scan) using Google aimed to gather additional information, specifically targeting areas of employment where there were fewer initial resources (e.g., retention and job exit). Thirteen customized searches were performed to identify resources (n=91), and then further reviewed for extraction (n=24).

- Pertinent findings, practices, and/or strategies were extracted from all above sources, and organized into key themes which were then synthesized into the present report.

Neuroinclusion across the employee lifecycle

The knowledge synthesis is presented according to the employee lifecycle (also referred to as the *employment* lifecycle) – an organizing framework that describes the employer-employee relationships over time. This begins from the moment a prospective employee is attracted to a certain position in the labour market and is characterized by cycles of interaction and engagement with the employer, lasting through to the employee's exit from the relationship with that employer (Gladka et al., 2022). Within the employee lifecycle, there are key organizational conditions that determine employees' long-term engagement and success, as well as specific 'moments that matter' or moments of impact within the lifecycle (e.g., hiring, onboarding, job transitions, job exit, etc.). The lifecycle is also influenced by ongoing moments, which include employees' relationships with their direct supervisor and coworkers, as well as how the employer demonstrates inclusion in the day-to-day work environment (Celeste et al., 2023).

The employee lifecycle has proven to be an effective framework for understanding inclusion and neuroinclusion in various guidance documents to employers (The Sinneave Family Foundation, 2024) as well as employment standards currently under development as part of the *Accessible Canada Act, 2019* (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Notably, many of the supplementary resources consulted for this knowledge synthesis offered either general strategies or focused on the early stages of employment (e.g., recruitment and hiring). Other reviews have similarly noted the emphasis on the early stages of employment, likely driven by the need to address low employment rates among neurodivergent people, highlighting the need for future research to address this gap on the later stages of the employee lifecycle (Ezerins et al., 2024).

Figure 1   Employee lifecycle

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS FOR INCLUSION

Neurodivergent people encounter significant workplace barriers due to unchallenged neurotypical norms, including the physical environment, daily communication, conventional problem solving, and organization of job tasks (Hutchison, 2023). To foster inclusive employment and workplaces, employers must implement organizational changes, requiring commitment from leadership, but also ensuring awareness and buy-in from across the organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Leadership

A clearly expressed commitment to inclusion, which is endorsed by the leadership of an organization, is tied to improved outcomes for people living with disabilities (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Inclusive leaders not only set the "tone" for the organization, but have the power and influence to implement organizational policies and programs, ensure that there are adequate resources to do so, and are accountable for those outcomes (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Applied research with employers and people with lived and living experience of disabilities also highlights the importance of representation. When leaders of organizations are open and visible about their own lived experience, they can help normalize that people living with disabilities can hold positions in senior management. However, all leaders can demonstrate their commitment to inclusion by developing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes of inclusion, and model these within the workplace (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023).

Neuroinclusive leadership, which involves an understanding of how neural mechanisms influence opinions, judgements, behaviours, and decision-making styles, not only helps leaders comprehend and regulate their own emotions and learning but can also help leaders connect with employers faster and better (Saluja et al., 2024). Leaders also have the responsibility to ensure psychological safety at work, which is an important condition for neuroinclusive employment, given that many neurodivergent people may hide their conditions in the workplace, due to stigma and bias (Hutchison, 2023) . When employees feel that they can speak up, share ideas, ask questions, and express concerns without fear of negative consequences, they feel respected, valued, and confident that their contributions are welcome. This environment encourages open communication, risk-taking, and mutual support, fostering a collaborative and innovative organizational culture (Mission Possible, 2020). Employers may consider the

adoption of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, which is a voluntary set of guidelines, tools, and resources to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work (Celeste et al., 2022).

Organizational policies and strategies

At minimum, employers need to comply with employment and human rights legislation that protects people living with disabilities against discrimination. Depending on their jurisdiction, employers may also be required to have an accessibility policy or plan, as set out in some provinces and for federally regulated workplaces under the *Accessible Canada Act, 2019* (SRDC, 2022b). Additionally, organizational policies can help to establish expectations and help all employees understand their responsibilities with respect to inclusion, helping to reduce issues and create an inclusive workplace culture (Mission Possible, 2020). Workplace policies help to create standardized employment conditions, as well as set out processes for dispute resolution and consequences of unacceptable behaviour (Mission Possible, 2020). Some advice for employers also recommends a formalized equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility strategy, including designated a formal lead or champion for implementing the strategy, as well as applying a change management plan to ensure that this is adopted effectively throughout the organization (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023; Mission Possible, 2020; SRDC, 2022b).

However, it is important to note that many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may not have the human resources expertise – or see the need – for such formalized strategies, and research shows that the lack of strategy does not limit their capacity for inclusion. While policy can lay the foundation for inclusion, the trend is most noted in large organizations (SRDC, 2022a). Many SMEs do not have a formal policy, and many do not feel this is necessary pre-condition to practicing inclusion (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; SRDC, 2022a; Stainton et al., 2023). Instead, they feel that their organizational mission and values are organically aligned with inclusion, and this is brought to bear throughout their workplace culture (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; Stainton et al., 2023).

Spotlight: The Four Pillars of Accessible and Inclusive Employment

The 'Four Pillars' is a practice-based framework developed by BC Partners in Workforce Innovation (now CAN WiN – canadianpartnerswin.ca) that emerged through the initiative's work with employers, service providers, government, and educational organizations to identify results-based actions in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of people living with disabilities.

The Four Pillars framework emphasizes that prior to recruitment of people living with disabilities, employers need to undertake actions that create the necessary conditions for inclusion:

- **Commitment:** commitment as an inclusive employer emphasizes that full support is required by senior leaders, developing community partnerships, and making necessary investments to create employment opportunities for people living with disabilities.

- **Readiness:** prior to recruiting candidates living with disabilities, the Four Pillars recommends designating an equity, diversity, and inclusion lead to facilitate a strategic plan for inclusion, which also includes a change management plan, and preparing hiring managers and others across the organization to support a culture of inclusion.

- **Recruitment:** following a review and adaption of recruitment practices for people living with disabilities, the Four Pillars applies several inclusive recruitment strategies (e.g., alternative interview styles and approaches, actively screening in candidates, actively recruiting people living with disabilities).

- **Retention:** a general focus on maintaining a culture of inclusion to retain diverse talent is emphasized, including proactively and continually providing employees with appropriate supports and resources, as well as 'building momentum' through recognition and celebration of progress.

Source: https://www.canadianpartnerswin.ca/post/the-four-pillars-of-accessible-employment

Culture

Guidance for employers often suggests that they promote an inclusive culture that is built into organizations' mission, vision, and values, emphasizing curiosity, flexibility, and empathy for employees (Mission Possible, 2020). Employers who identify as disability-inclusive often cite these factors as critical pieces of inclusion, ensuring that mission and values are also communicated to all employees and prospective employees (Stainton et al., 2023). However, it is also important to highlight that people with lived experience may not agree that these workplace cultures are authentically inclusive, nor do they experience them to be (Celeste et al., 2022). Another study highlighted that while employers agreed that employees should be provided with workplace supports, neurodivergent *employees* reported that they were rarely provided with tools, training, and supports to help them in their day-to-day work lives, including communications with managers and coworkers (Hutchison & Robertson, 2022).

It is therefore essential to "unpack" organizational culture as not only stated values, but how those are expressed in employees' mindsets, behaviours, and practices every day (Brooks-Cleator

et al., 2023). Workplace culture is enacted through day-to-day work arrangements and routines, communications, team interactions, decision-making, incentives, and how valuing differences is expressed and celebrated at work (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023). One way to address culture is for employers to increase their "disability confidence," which is the suite of knowledge and skills employers require to effectively include people living with disabilities, going beyond statements of inclusion. Disability confidence requires a willingness by employers to engage in social change, commit to learning, try new ways of working, and reach beyond one's comfort zone (Celeste et al., 2022).

Considering the persistent barriers faced by people living with disabilities in employment, it is also important for employers to establish measures for shared responsibility and accountability for inclusion, integrating inclusion initiatives into everyday workflow, and measuring progress against stated goals (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

PREPARING THE ORGANIZATION FOR INCLUSION

Research has found that higher disability inclusion preparedness is related to lower levels of stigmatizing attitudes towards people living with disabilities in the workplace (Iwanaga et al., 2018). Prior to engaging in active recruitment of people living with disabilities, it is recommended that employers build their knowledge, skills, and dedicate resources to ensure that the employment experience is truly an inclusive one, and to ensure that employers are ready to address difficult or unexpected situations if they arise (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Organizational assessment

Organizational assessments have been recognized as a useful tool for employers to reflect on their strengths, opportunities for improvement, and to benchmark current practices of inclusion. They are often organized around a series of "best practice" statements or examples and can range from a handful of questions to more comprehensive assessments that require the employer to submit evidence to substantiate answers (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). While many assessment tools can be self-administered, applied research with employers has also found that employers benefit from accessibility and inclusion audits where they may engage with a third party to undertake a comprehensive gap analysis, review policies and processes, and consult with internal and external stakeholders (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Whether self-administered or with third party support, organizational assessments are a recommended practice to intentionally identify and remove barriers throughout the employee lifecycle (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Awareness training

While there is growing awareness of the significant talent and diversity of experience that people living with disabilities contribute to workplaces, there may still be a need to build awareness of the benefits of inclusion and neuroinclusion. An inclusive and neuroinclusive workplace not only benefits people living with disabilities but can also activate new possibilities and create value for all staff members, also generating a business advantage (Krzeminska et al., 2019; Mission Possible, 2020). Employers who have worked with Autistic employees have noted that they have contributed to enhanced productivity and unique problem-solving approaches that outweigh any comparatively insignificant costs associated with accommodating their needs (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.). While some sectors have recognized the competitive advantages and strengths of neurodivergent employees with respect to pattern recognition, memory, and mathematics, it is also important to emphasize that there is no one common experience of neurodivergence or disability, and that neuroinclusion initiatives need to extend beyond STEM-related fields (Hutchison, 2023).

To mitigate bias and to eliminate stereotypes, effective practices include learning directly from people with lived and living experience of disability and neurodivergence (Stainton et al., 2023). When including someone with living experience to lead the training, it is also important that they are fairly compensated for that expertise (Forman et al., 2023). Learning from people with lived and living experience can help build awareness and understanding of behaviours that are often misinterpreted from a neurotypical point of view. For example, if a neurodivergent person does not to make eye contact, has a direct response style, or does not socialize regularly with coworkers, people with limited awareness may misinterpret behaviours as "unprofessional" or "unsociable" (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.; Hutchison, 2023). Awareness building initiatives have been found to improve all employees' understanding of these differences, review employee rights and the employer's responsibility to accommodate them, and have explored the benefits of inclusive employment (Hutchison, 2023; Stainton et al., 2023).

Beyond building awareness, guidance for employers also highlights the role of inclusion training for staff, which may be role specific: e.g., hiring managers or HR staff conducting interviews vs. more extensive sessions for supervisors who work directly with Autistic employees, for example (Remington & Pellicano, 2019). Training also provides an opportunity for employers to learn more about service providers in their community, legal issues such as the duty to accommodate, and explore specific strategies for creating inclusive work conditions (SRDC, 2022a).

Partnerships

Many disability-inclusive employers highlight the importance of working with service and community organizations that act as trusted partners that bring expertise, advice, access to a

broader network of resources, as well as access to candidates living with disabilities (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; Celeste et al., 2022, 2023). Bringing in outside expertise on neurodivergence is also cited as an effective practice, including working with people with lived and living experiences to highlight the many overlooked barriers that people may face in the workplace (Hutchison, 2023; One Mind at Work, 2022).

Having a trusted partner specializing in disability inclusion also helps to reduce employers' (mis)perception of risk with respect to hiring people living with disabilities and tailoring supports to employers' specific business or hiring needs. Rather than simply accessing information resources, partnerships provide employers with the reassurance that they can contact someone to help them navigate any unanticipated issues. Employers have also noted that partnerships introduce a sense of security into new and uncertain situations that have helped them advance their inclusion efforts (Celeste et al., 2022, 2023).

DISCLOSURE AND ACCOMMODATIONS ACROSS THE EMPLOYEE LIFECYCLE

Employers in Canada have a duty to accommodate employees living with disabilities through human rights protections that oblige them to adjust rules, policies, or practices for people living with disabilities to participate fully in the workplace (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2021). However, the decision to self-identify or disclose a disability at work is a highly personal decision and employees are not required to disclose unless it interferes with a person's ability to carry out an essential function of the job (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Disclosure

In one study, many neurodivergent people felt that disclosing might limit opportunities for career progression or felt generally uncomfortable with sharing their neurodivergent status in the workplace (Hutchison, 2023). However, because disclosure and accommodations are often linked, nondisclosure can lead to unsafe working conditions, affect job performance, or come at a cost of the employee's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing (Lindsay et al., 2021).

Given the stigma and lack of awareness regarding neurodivergence, rates of disclosure are difficult to measure and are influenced by factors such as age (and age of diagnosis/lack of diagnosis), differences in job type, industry, and organizational size (Lindsay et al., 2021). Employees' decisions to disclose a disability also depends on their sense of safety and trust with their employer, which is often influenced by their perception of workplace inclusion. A strong sense of an inclusive environment can foster voluntary self-identification. However, employers

need to be transparent about collecting and using employee information and ensure privacy and confidentiality of their information (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Employers should offer confidential, positive, and voluntary disclosure opportunities across the employee lifecycle, since many employees may be particularly hesitant to disclose a disability in the hiring stage or may need to experience the benefits of disclosure in the workplace firsthand (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). It is important to highlight that even upon disclosure, the employee is viewed as any other employee, and not defined by their disability or neurodivergence (Remington & Pellicano, 2019). In one example, an employer found it helpful for employees to disclose confidentially to a person other than their direct supervisor, and that this was kept as private and confidential information (SRDC, 2022b).

There are also a range of tools, resources, and supports for people living with disabilities to navigate their decision to disclose to an employer, outlining their rights and the employer's responsibilities. Guidance also exists for employers on disclosure, which reviews the importance of ensuring that it is a voluntary and confidential process, as well as ensuring the employers are creating the safe and inclusive environments that support an employee's decision to disclose (David C. Onley Initiative for Employment & Enterprise Development, n.d.; The Inclusive Workplace, 2024). However, some research suggests that many employers are still unfamiliar with these practices, highlighting the need for training and awareness-building (SRDC, 2022b).

Accommodations

Despite evidence that demonstrates the cost of workplace accommodations to be low, misconceptions about accommodations persist, with many employers viewing them as high-cost, only necessary for physical disabilities, or as "exceptions" to the "norm" (Mission Possible, 2020; SRDC, 2022b). It may help employers to see accommodations as adjustments that enable employees to succeed. In fact, employers likely already have many everyday adjustments in place for their employees. Accommodations do not necessarily mean something onerous and complex for employers (Walker, n.d.). Many neurodivergent people require simple accommodations and adjustments that employers can implement at no or low-cost. These include providing extra breaks, dividing work assignments into smaller steps, maintaining a consistent schedule, reducing unstructured time, and ability to adjust sensory inputs such as lighting or noise (Lindsay et al., 2021; Remington & Pellicano, 2019). More generally, the most common requested types of accommodations for people living with disabilities are flexible work arrangements, followed by workstation modifications (SRDC, 2022b).

In many workplaces, disclosure is linked to receiving necessary accommodations, but can also lead to stigma, discrimination, and social isolation (Lindsay et al., 2021). When accommodations are linked to disclosure, it places the burden on the person with the disability to disclose their

condition as a prerequisite for receiving accommodations. This makes the accommodations process reactive, requiring the person to ask for help (Sukhai, 2024). It also arguably situates disability in a "medical model" that emphasizes a person's "impairment" that requires accommodating. Some employers also insist on having proof of a medical diagnosis prior to providing accommodations. This poses a significant barrier for some neurodivergent people, which include learning disabilities and ADHD, who are unable to access an assessment due to long wait times or because these are typically not required by public health insurance in Canada (Hutchison, 2023).

It is also important for employers to recognize the experience of a disability will not only change in different contexts, but disabilities may be episodic, be acquired at any stage in the employee lifecycle, and may simply change over time, making accommodations also context-dependent (Sukhai, 2024). For these reasons, accommodations should be individualized, regularly reviewed throughout employment, and the process should be standardized to avoid reliance on a single supervisor's interpretation (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023; SRDC, 2022b).

Rather than the typical approach of "accommodations will be provided upon request," employers should proactively offer accommodations to all employees, such as providing new hires with a checklist of available supports and adjustments (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023; Hutchison, 2023). Making accommodations universally available not only reduces the burden on the employee to self-identify a need, but also fosters a welcoming environment (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; One Mind at Work, 2022). Ultimately, the accommodations process should be flexible, easy to navigate and should not require additional medical documentation (Hutchison, 2023). Evidence also suggests that an approach that focuses on the functional impact and required adjustment leads to more positive experiences (Sukhai, 2024).

Universal and inclusive design approaches

Employers can enhance the practice of making accommodations universally available by integrating universal and inclusive design approaches throughout the employee lifecycle. Universal design is a concept that originates from the field of architecture but has been extended to include other aspects of the physical and social environment, including workplaces. It proposes that good design allows for all people to be able to access, understand and use a product or environment to the greatest extent possible, without the need for specialized adjustments. It is endorsed by the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as the preferred approach (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, n.d.). Taking this concept further, *inclusive* design centres the concept of human variation and emphasizes that design processes must be inclusive of people with lived and living experiences in the spirit of "nothing about us without us" (Inclusive Design Research Centre, n.d.).

Creating a neuroinclusive workplace by design requires that employers include neurodivergent people in the design process to identify and remove barriers in the physical work environment, as well as in daily work routines (Remington & Pellicano, 2019; Western Employee Well-being Office, 2023). Although specific strategies and practices for accommodations and neuroinclusion are important at different points in the employee lifecycle, incorporating inclusive design into all processes can enhance these efforts by ensuring accessibility and inclusion are integrated from the start, rather than added on later.

Spotlight: Universal Music UK's Creative Differences: A Handbook for Embracing Neurodiversity in the Creative Industries

The guide is the product of research with neurodivergent people in the creative industries and offers many actions that employers can take across the employee lifecycle to support them. It includes the following recommendations for designing the work environment to be neuroinclusive:

- **Discuss needs:** Consult each individual to tailor the working environment to their needs. Avoid imposing adjustments without discussion.

- **Provide a fixed workspace:** Offer a consistent work location where beneficial, as "hot desking" may not suit everyone.

- **Clearly define spaces:** Separate and clearly mark areas for working and socializing.

- **Make flexible work patterns the norm:** Offer flexible working hours or off-site options to help those who may need to adjust due to sensory inputs (e.g., noise and stress of rush hour commutes). Include hybrid options like video call links.

- **Personalize the environment:** Create adaptable environments considering:

  - Control over light and sound (e.g., dimmers, headphones).
  - Quiet spaces away from communal noise.
  - Work areas free from overpowering smells.
  - Private spaces for those feeling overwhelmed or stressed.

- **Team check-ins:** Ensure regular contact points and chat channels for work/projects, along with opportunities for in-person office time when applicable.

- **Provide a support system:** Appoint a designated buddy or "office manager" to identify and address issues, especially for those uncomfortable speaking up.

Source: Universal Music, n.d.

RECRUITMENT, HIRING, AND ONBOARDING

The first phase of employee lifecycle – recruitment, hiring, and onboarding – is where the employer and potential employee begin to interact and begin to lay the foundation for a bilateral relationship (Gladka et al., 2022). Neurodivergent people face a variety of barriers that inhibit their success at this stage. Many of these challenges stem from employers' lack of awareness and understanding of neurodivergence, and the associated stigma and bias (Hutchison, 2023). Employers may undervalue the strengths of neurodivergent people and thus not view them as being able to fulfill the job requirements (Hutchison, 2023). They may also lack an understanding of how to implement neuroinclusive hiring practices that lead to biases against how a neurodivergent person engages in the interview process (Hutchison, 2023).

At a more systemic level, traditional recruitment strategies are deeply rooted in "the idea of standardized job roles into which workers should 'fit'…[where] recruiters seek employees that best fit a checklist for a job that is already defined and assigned a position in an organizational hierarchy" (Krzeminska et al., 2019, p. 460). This in turn rules out people who do not "fit" due to differences in how they think, understand information, interact, and communicate with others – i.e., neurodivergent people. It is therefore crucial for employers to build their knowledge and awareness of neuroinclusive recruitment, hiring, and onboarding strategies to ensure that neurodivergent people do not encounter barriers in employment nor excluded during the hiring and onboarding processes.

ATTRACTION AND RECRUITMENT

Attracting candidates

Attracting neurodivergent people to apply for employment begins before they view a job posting. This stage addresses how the organization is generally perceived by potential candidates, as well as how they find out about employment opportunities.

There are a variety of ways that employers represent their business and their capacity for inclusion prior to posting a job opportunity. For example, what is said or included, who is visible on their website and social media, and the accessibility and inclusion of their storefront/office/worksite all signal inclusion to prospective employees. These signals also involve ways in which employees represent the organization and the organization's reputation in the community (Walker, n.d.). These can all attract or detract potential candidates and/or those who refer potential candidates to the organization (Walker, n.d.). It is important for employers

to make it clear and known outside of their organization that they have a positive and proactive approach to inclusion and that they are continually working to remove barriers and value employee diversity (Kaul, 2002). Employers can ask community members or an organization that supports people living with disabilities about the attractiveness of their organization to external candidates.

Another way to attract candidates to the organization is for employers to expand their recruitment networks to connect with groups that might be overlooked in traditional recruitment practices. This includes reaching out to local neurodivergence associations (e.g., a local autism association), disability employment services, and university/college career centres to inform them of employment opportunities (Flower et al., 2019; Mission Possible, 2020). Additionally, it is beneficial for employers to share employment opportunities where neurodivergent people are more likely to access this information (One Mind at Work, 2022) by advertising that job opportunities are available on a diversity of platforms and consider cross-posting job ads to social media or discussion boards (Mission Possible, 2020; Universal Music, n.d.).

Job postings

Once a potential candidate is attracted to an organization and curious about an employment opportunity, the job posting is the next opportunity for employers to ensure a neuroinclusive recruitment process. The job posting is also a way to attract or detract a candidate from applying. In general, the most important components of a neuroinclusive job posting are that it is accessible, it clearly outlines what is needed to be successful in the role, and it clearly and directly describes the application process (Everymind at Work, 2021; Kaul, 2002; Universal Music, n.d.).

More specifically, there are several strategies identified in the literature that employers can use to develop neuroinclusive job postings:

- Avoid excessive jargon (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023; Kaul, 2002);

- Make job postings clear and concise and only include necessary information (Everymind at Work, 2021; Universal Music, n.d.);

- Focus on the skills and experience that are necessary to be successful in the job and remove unnecessary training or education criteria and cultural fit, where appropriate, in favour of on-the-job learning (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; Everymind at Work, 2021; Kaul, 2002; Universal Music, n.d.);

- Share the organization's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (Mission Possible, 2020) and explain how the recruitment process is flexible and allows for individual needs (Kaul, 2002); and

- Include job specifics, such as type of job (e.g., part-time/full-time, contract/permanent) salary and benefits, location, options for in-person or remote working, and expectations on work hours and options for flexibility (Mission Possible, 2020).

Once developed, asking a diverse group of people to review the job posting and provide feedback on areas that are not accessible or inclusive also ensures accessibility (Mission Possible, 2020).

Job application process

Job application processes often include barriers for neurodivergent people that can go unrecognized by employers (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Traditional job applications often require a cover letter and resume; however, considering alternative application methods and flexible formats can encourage applications from potential neurodivergent candidates (Ready Willing & Able, 2024; Universal Music, n.d.). The following are strategies for employers to create a disability inclusive and neuroinclusive job application process:

- Consider alternatives to a cover letter and resume, such as providing question prompts and asking candidates to respond in video or audio format (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023);

- If a written application is required, ensure it can be spell-checked and grammar-checked (Universal Music, n.d.) and can be uploaded or entered manually online (Ready Willing & Able, 2024);

- Include a progress bar or visual indication of how far along the potential candidate is in the application process (Ready Willing & Able, 2024); and

- Provide options for candidates to add comments and explain their selections in online applications (Ready Willing & Able, 2024).

Guidance for employers also suggests encouraging and providing space for potential candidates to share what they need, which could mean including a question or open comment box on an application form, or inviting voluntary and confidential disclosure by assuring the candidate that as a neuroinclusive employer, applicants will be supported in their requests any additional supports or adjustments they need during the recruitment process (Everymind at Work, 2021).

Screening and assessment of candidates

Neuroinclusive employment considerations during the screening and assessment process primarily focus on identifying and removing barriers in pre-screening tools and decision-making processes. Many standardized screening tests, including personality assessments, often create additional barriers for neurodivergent people, as they do not consider diverse ways of thinking and communicating (Ready Willing & Able, 2024). An autistic individual described their frustrations and barriers experienced with standardized personality assessments: "online personality assessments for the purposes of finding employment should be immediately abolished. The questions asked are often far too vague to be properly interpreted by the autistic brain, which means they effectively (if not intentionally) weed out neurodivergent people before we can ever get our foot in the door" (Heidel, 2023, p. 2). Ready Willing & Able (2024) outlined several practices for employers to make the screening process more inclusive:

- Rather than calling a candidate to conduct an impromptu screening, provide screening questions in advance to give candidates more time to process and respond to questions;

- Provide options for candidates to respond to screening questions in alternative formats; and

- Provide other necessary accommodations, such as extra time or support from a job coach.

The most reasonable and inclusive option may be to remove any standardized screening from the application process, especially for neurodivergent people who are highly detail-oriented and can get overwhelmed with these types of assessments (Mission Possible, 2020). Alternatively, rather than using a "screen out" policy to identify candidates who do not fit, some employers use a "screen in" policy to help diversify their recruitment process. "A screen-in recruitment process may put greater emphasis on transferrable skills, experience, and knowledge, recognizing the candidates' strengths and potential to be trained on the job" (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023, p. 30).

When assessing a candidate's "fit" for the job, there are important considerations related to screening criteria. First, it is important to recognize that hobbies/interests are not a direct reflection of skills. Different physical abilities and access (e.g., due to socioeconomic status, caregiving responsibilities) influence the type of hobbies an individual may participate in (Mission Possible, 2020). For example, a candidate may not participate in team sports, but this does not mean that they lack teamwork skills. Instead, they may not have the opportunity to participate. Some guidance for employers also recommends avoiding screening out candidates based on spelling or grammatical errors unless the job specifically requires high quality writing skills (Mission Possible, 2020). Employers should not view gaps in employment or limited paid employment experience as a drawback in an application. Volunteering and internships are also valuable opportunities for the development of employment skills that can contribute to an application (Ready Willing & Able, 2024).

In the current context of recruitment, decision-making can involve both artificial intelligence (AI) and human input (Jetha, 2024). There are important considerations for both, particularly when it comes to neuroinclusion. When relying on human input, Universal Music (n.d.) suggests using a diverse panel of people to assess candidates and removing name, age, and gender from applications. Hiring panel diversity can help reduce unconscious bias where those selected are those who are "typically" hired within the organization (Mission Possible, 2020). When AI is used for HR decision-making, it is recommended to avoid exclusive reliance on AI, as it has been shown to lead to employment inequity (Jetha, 2024). When considering AI tools, it is important to balance them with human input and to be transparent in how it is used in the recruitment process (Jetha, 2024).

HIRING

Job interviews

The interview stage may pose the most significant barriers to obtaining employment for some neurodivergent people, as they may not have the ability to communicate or express themselves in neurotypical ways (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.). The sensory environment (e.g., harsh lighting or noise) can also pose a barrier to performing well (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Interviews can also provoke anxiety or feel intimidating for many candidates, especially if they have had previous negative experiences or faced discrimination (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Thus, employers should consider how the type of interview and specific interview questions can help neurodivergent candidates feel more confident throughout the interview process. Employers can foster a more neuroinclusive interview process by ensuring that the interviewers are trained in neurodivergence/inclusion (Everymind at Work, 2021). It is also important for employers to remember that the interview is only one opportunity for candidates to show their overall potential and to not rely on first impressions as the primary factor influencing their hiring decisions (Mission Possible, 2020).

There are a variety of interview formats, each with unique considerations, and advantages and disadvantages for neurodivergent people. These include in-person interviews, virtual interviews, and working interviews or work trials. Importantly, for each type of interview, employers should provide candidates with the available options, and ask what they would benefit from, instead of making assumptions about interview adjustments or alternatives (Universal Music, n.d.).

▪ **In-person interviews:** Neurodivergent people may benefit from a less structured in-person interview and one that is more conversational, such as a walking interview rather than a "boardroom" interview (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). A walking interview provides an opportunity for the employer to introduce the candidate to the workplace and learn about

the candidate in a less formal way. This can help the candidate relax and not have to worry about certain behaviours, such as fidgeting, reading body language, or eye contact (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023; Mission Possible, 2020). However, employers should ask candidates about their preferences for in-person interviews, as a walking interview may not be the best option for an individual who may be easily distracted by noise and harsh lighting (Mission Possible, 2020). Additional adjustments that they consider for in-person interviews may include allowing a job coach or support person to accompany the candidate to the interview; offering an interview time that does not require travel in peak traffic hours; providing an interview preparation call to outline the interview process, clarify the interview location, and identify any necessary adjustments; and inviting the candidate to visit the interview location in advance (Universal Music, n.d.).

- **Virtual interviews:** Virtual interviews can be a more neuroinclusive approach to interviewing, as they allow for participation from an environment of the candidate's choosing that addresses their needs (e.g., sensory needs, familiarity). They can also be more cost-effective than in-person interviews that require travel (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Virtual interviews can pose accessibility challenges, however, especially if there is lag time, internet connectivity issues, or poor lighting for the interviewer (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Strategies that can help address these issues include ensuring there is extra time built into the interview schedule, providing closed captions or enabling a live transcript, and providing interviewer contact information in case there are connectivity issues that cannot be resolved (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

- **Working interviews or work trials:** Working interviews or work trials are a skills-based type of interview that provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their skills and show if and how they can perform job-related tasks (Hutchison, 2023; One Mind at Work, 2022). They are also an opportunity for both the employer and employee to gauge whether the job is the right fit (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023). Importantly, if a candidate is performing actual job duties, they should be compensated for their time (Mission Possible, 2020). Employers should also make sure to review Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) regulations to identify whether the candidate would need to be covered under the employers' WCB for a work trial (Mission Possible, 2020).

Spotlight: SAP Labs Canada Autism at Work Program

The Presidents Group (found at Accessibleemployers.ca) – a network of 25 change-driven BC business leaders and champions of inclusive workplaces – presented the following case study of the Autism at Work program, highlighting the recruitment and selection process at SAP Labs Canada:

- **Partnering with Experts:** with the help of Specialisterne and Open Door Group in Vancouver, SAP reviewed recruitment practices for barriers faced by Autistic applicants.

- **Sourcing Candidates:** SAP further partnered with the Pacific Autism Family Network and Ready, Willing and Able to extend their reach to candidates, reviewed job descriptions and roles for accessibility, and ensured that job applications were accessible from a neuroinclusion perspective.

- **Replacing Interviews:** Instead of having candidates submit resumes and participate in standard interviews, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire that included experiences and interests outside of work, as well as inviting candidates to a 'discovery workshop' that consisted of several tasks that were designed to create a comfortable environment so that candidates' strengths could emerge.

- **Additional Training and Coaching:** selected candidates participated in a four-week classroom program to review routines of being in an office (e.g., email etiquette, dress code, commuting) and worked on projects provided by hiring managers to get comfortable with the environment prior to beginning their role. A job coach also worked with new employees over a transition period.

- **Employer Training:** SAP employees and managers participated in education sessions on tangible topics for inclusion (e.g., communication style, language, physical environment, and work process) and provided opportunities for building organization-wide awareness, acceptance and buy-in.

Source: Presidents Group, 2017.

Regardless of the type of interview, there are several neuroinclusive practices related to the format and wording of interview questions for employers to consider. They include the following:

- Provide core interview questions in advance of the interview to allow the candidate to prepare (Hutchison, 2023; Kaul, 2002; Universal Music, n.d.);

- Allow candidates to bring notes with them (Kaul, 2002);

- Avoid abstract questions (e.g., "if you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?") (Hutchison, 2023);

- Avoid double-barreled questions (e.g., in your past job, how well did you work with your colleagues and supervisor) (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023);

- Use the candidate's resume to build questions (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023);

- Ask clear, straightforward, and specific questions that are directly relevant to the job (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023; Kaul, 2002; Mission Possible, 2020). In addition, Walker (n.d.) shared the following examples of neuroinclusive interview questions:

  o What interests do you have that relate to this job?

  o Tell me about your previous related work/volunteer experiences.

  o Tell me one or two things that you are good at that will help you in this job.

  o In your last job, when you were challenged or not very good at something, what did you do to improve your skills in that area?

  o Aside from making money, what do you like about this job?

- If any of the questions require the candidate to read or write during the interview, ensure there is ample time provided (Universal Music, n.d.); and

- Do not ask for a diagnosis of a candidate's disability, their health status, or the cost of accommodations, if required (Mission Possible, 2020).

Finally, a key strategy that demonstrates an employer's commitment to fostering a neuroinclusive hiring stage is to continuously work to improve the interview process and assess whether it is the best way to assess a candidate's suitability for the role (Everymind at Work, 2021). This can be done by gathering and implementing feedback from candidates and current neurodivergent employees on the overall process and any changes that are made (Universal Music, n.d.).

Spotlight: Pre-employment checks

There are several types of pre-employment checks that an employer may conduct as part of the hiring process to support their decision-making, as well as considerations to enhance the neuroinclusion of these checks:

References check:

- Provide candidates with an overview of the type of people who they should provide as a reference and the information that will be collected.

- Consider broadening options for references, especially for candidates who have limited experience in the workforce or have recently had a gap in employment. References could include a supervisor from a volunteer position, an employment program manager, a job coach, or an instructor/teacher/professor.

- Ask references to describe how best to support the person should they be hired.

Credit report:

- Provide an opportunity for the candidate to self-disclose in advance any previous financial hardships that may appear in a credit report.

Criminal record check:

- Provide an opportunity for the candidate to self-disclose in advance any red flags or previous criminal charges that may appear in a criminal record check.

- When making decisions related to the results of a criminal record check, consider whether an offense is related to the job position, the length of time since the offense, and whether past offenses are still considered offenses as a result of updated laws (e.g., possession or use of cannabis).

Drug and alcohol testing:

- Clearly explain the purpose of the check, such as for a job within an industry that is highly safety conscious, such as aviation or transportation.

- Ensure that it is clearly articulated in the job positing that this check is required as part of the hiring process.

Education/certification check:

- Conduct these checks only if they are an essential occupational requirement (e.g., checking that a candidate is a certified electrician for an electrical journeyperson role).

- Consider whether certain educational requirements are necessary or whether the required skills could have been gained through practical job experience.

In general, to ensure that these checks are inclusive, it is important for employers to include what specific checks will be conducted in the job posting, obtain the individual's consent, explain the purpose of each pre-employment check, and cover any costs that are associated with the checks.

Source: Mission Possible, 2020.

Declining candidates

It is important for employers to notify all candidates who are not selected for a position. This notice can serve two important purposes: maintaining an employer's reputation and providing a learning opportunity for candidates. A professional, timely, and considerate notification is important for leaving the candidate with an overall positive impression of the organization (Mission Possible, 2020). This is particularly important for maintaining a good reputation as an employer, but also in case the candidate is suitable for a future opportunity within the organization and the employer wants to follow up. Additionally, employers should update any community partner or employment service provider who referred the candidate and share their reasons for declining the candidate. This can help organizations further support the candidate in their preparation for future applications and ensure that there is an alignment between the employer's requirements and the community partner/service provider's understanding of these requirements (Mission Possible, 2020).

Providing constructive feedback is also a valuable part of declining candidates, as it can be a learning experience for candidates and inform them on how they can improve and prepare for their next job application (Mission Possible, 2020). Feedback can include an example of why they were not selected for the position, a suggestion of a skill they can improve, or an additional training that may help them build their skills.

Offer of employment

Once employers have decided who they want to hire for a position, they will typically first provide a verbal offer of employment (Mission Possible, 2020). It is important to keep in mind that this verbal offer is clear and communicates only the necessary information as to not overwhelm the candidate. It is then important to quickly follow up with an official written letter of offer (i.e., an employment contract or employment agreement) that includes all necessary details of the employment offer. At this stage, if there were any accommodations or adjustments discussed during the recruitment process, they can be included in the written offer. This explicitly indicates to the candidate the employer's commitment to an inclusive workplace.

ONBOARDING

The purpose of onboarding is for new employees to acclimate and adapt to the new work environment and expectations, begin to build relationships with their coworkers, and become oriented to the organization and the job. This stage involves orientation, as well as the day-to-day work in the first few months of employment that builds socialization. A successful onboarding stage is a significant factor in whether an employee will continue in their role and

with the organization (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Research has shown that a negative onboarding experience can make the transition into employment particularly challenging for employees living with disabilities (SRDC, 2022b). The onboarding stage goes beyond the day the employee starts at an organization, including considerations regarding prior to starting the job, the first day, and the first three months:

Prior to start:

- Provide the employee with information about the work environment and what they can expect on their first day and in the first few months, such as an information package that includes a schedule, pictures of the work environment, information and pictures of their team, and a map with seating arrangements, if applicable (Everymind at Work, 2021);

- Ensure there is a quiet space and time for the employee to take a break if overwhelmed from the new environment (Kaul, 2002);

- Check-in with managers and supervisors to determine if there is any further support, information, or resources they need to welcome and onboard the new employee (Kaul, 2002); and

- Confirm agreed-upon adjustments with the employee and identify whether they will all be available the first day or if they will be introduced gradually as the employee becomes more familiar with the work environment and their role (Kaul, 2002).

The first day:

- Limit introductions to only close colleagues and the HR team to reduce the overwhelm for new employees (Kaul, 2002);

- Take a thorough, structured tour of the work environment, highlighting key areas, such as meeting rooms, workshops, the kitchen and bathrooms, main socializing areas, the individual's own workspace, and the supervisor's workspace (Kaul, 2002; Universal Music, n.d.); and

- Provide the employee with a handbook that includes any phrases, abbreviations, or acronyms that are regularly used in the organization. Also consider a culture handbook, if possible, to explain the norms and practices inherent within the organization that may not be part of the formalized training process (e.g., what days most people are in the office, if hybrid work is an option; if and how birthdays or other special events are celebrated) (Everymind at Work, 2021).

The first three months:

- Conduct a needs assessment to identify if any additional supports or adjustments are needed (Mission Possible, 2020) – this can be facilitated by a job coach with experience working with neurodivergent people who can provide recommendations for modifications (Kaul, 2002);

- Offer functional support, such as someone who can help the new employee set up their email, reminders, calendar, and other tools to help with organization and can catch them up on recent and relevant meetings and decisions (Universal Music, n.d.);

- Address emotional needs, such as a confidential record of conditions, prior triggers, and needs that can be shared if an employee wishes to self-disclose to their team (Universal Music, n.d.);

- If the employee wishes to self-disclose, provide them with support and encouragement to produce a voluntary description of their working preferences. For example, a person with ADHD may wish to note they need time to recover after an intense period of working (Universal Music, n.d.);

- Pair up the employee with a "buddy" who can be their "go-to" person to answer any questions and make introductions to coworkers (Universal Music, n.d.); and

- Provide the new employee with a transition to work course that includes strategies for good self-care, workplace communication, and other related workplace skills; is grounded in principles of neuroinclusion; and is provided by an internal or external job coach that has experience working with neurodivergent people (Flower et al., 2019).

In addition, there are also several neuroinclusive practices that are applicable to each onboarding phase:

- **Establish a culture of self-advocacy:** Ensure every new employee has the opportunity for a thorough initial discussion about their functional, emotional, and social needs and for a follow-up discussion to check-in on whether these needs are being met (Universal Music, n.d.);

- **Understand challenges and strengths:** Throughout the onboarding process, provide opportunities for the supervisor and employee to discuss the employee's challenges and strengths so that these can be supported and fostered (Universal Music, n.d.); and

- **Check-in regularly:** Establish a plan for a variety of touchpoints with the new employee during the onboarding stage to ensure there are no gaps in support (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Once a new employee has completed their onboarding process, inclusive employment practices and workplaces continue to be important for supporting the career development of neurodivergent people. At this stage of the employee lifecycle, neurodivergent people can encounter barriers as they adjust to the job and work environment due to changing routines, their supervisor's limited knowledge of disability inclusion practices, and communication challenges that lead to conflict with coworkers and/or supervisors (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.; Kaul, 2002; Lindsay et al., 2021). They also face barriers related to their development as an employee within the organization, such as a lack of available tools, training, and supports that are tailored to the specific needs of neurodivergence. To foster a neuroinclusive workplace that supports employees' career development, it is important for employers to adopt neuroinclusive approaches to communication, employee-supervisor relationships, team integration, working conditions, and training and professional development.

ADJUSTING TO THE JOB AND WORK ENVIRONMENT

Daily communication

Neuroinclusive employment practices often centre on the importance of good communication practices throughout the organization, which is particularly important as employees settle into their job, take on more responsibility, and engage more regularly with their coworkers. Research has indicated that neurodivergent employees would benefit from improved communication in the workplace (Hutchison, 2023).

It is for supervisors, coworkers, and others in the workplace to use clear and direct communication that is free of ambiguity, sarcasm, and colloquialisms (Hutchison, 2023). A characteristic of neurodivergence is the unique way information is consumed and processed (Siddall, 2024). When instructions, expectations, or feedback are unclear, inconsistent, or contain metaphors such as "learn the ropes" or "take the bull by the horns," this can lead to confusion for neurodivergent people. They may find it challenging to determine the specific actions they are supposed to take (Hutchison, 2023). Ambiguous communication can lead to misunderstandings with colleagues. Thus, it is important for employers to be clear, direct, and say what they mean in their communication and encourage other employees to do the same (Hutchison, 2023; Siddall, 2024).

These neuroinclusive communication practices apply to both dialogue between staff, as well as broader formal messaging at the organizational level related to policies, procedures, compensation and benefits, upcoming changes, etc. (Everymind at Work, 2021; Siddall, 2024). For example, developing a frequently asked questions document has been identified as a good practice for supporting neurodivergent employees through upcoming organizational changes or restructuring (Everymind at Work, 2021).

Another strategy for neuroinclusive workplace communication is to use different communication channels that meet the diverse needs and preferences of neurodivergent people (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; Everymind at Work, 2021; Universal Music, n.d.). For example, this could mean using a direct messaging application (e.g., Slack) to communicate rather than a phone call or in-person meeting. It could also include, in addition to detailed meeting minutes, providing a recording of staff meetings for employees to review at their own pace in their chosen environment (e.g., in a quiet location with minimal distractions).

Employee-supervisor relationships

Another critical factor for helping neurodivergent employees adjust to their job and work environment is the development of a strong, trusting relationship with their supervisor (Everymind at Work, 2021; Hutchison & Robertson, 2022). Creating a strong relationship requires the supervisor to have appropriate knowledge and skills related to disability inclusion and specifically, neuroinclusion. Hutchison & Robertson (2022) argued that "without the appropriate knowledge or skills, [supervisors] may be ill equipped to provide neurodivergent employees with the understanding and support that they need to succeed in the workplace" (p. 8). In fact, the relationships employees living with disabilities have with their supervisors play a significant role in employee satisfaction and retention (Celeste et al., 2023; de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). This research underscores the importance of employers ensuring that supervisors have access to support to build this capacity.

Supervisors' capacity can be developed through a combination of experience, training provided by the organization, or through the engagement of a job coach (Flower et al., 2019; Remington & Pellicano, 2019). While job coaches are typically thought of as a support for employees, they can also be a form of support for supervisors as they work to develop and maintain a strong relationship with their employee and help them navigate the workplace. Supervisor (and employee) access to a job coach can help supervisors best support neurodivergent employees by providing guidance, responding to questions, or addressing challenges (Flower et al., 2019; Remington & Pellicano, 2019). However, it is important that this access is ongoing and not just during the hiring and onboarding stages of the employee lifecycle.

Regular check-ins between supervisors and employees are also important for fostering strong relationships, particularly for neurodivergent employees. Discussing, and then reassessing after a few months time, the preferred and appropriate frequency, duration, and format of check-ins is important for helping neurodivergent employees feel supported (Universal Music, n.d.). Check-ins are an opportunity for employees to ask questions, seek clarification, gain reassurance, and raise their concerns, and for supervisors to provide guidance, adjust work tasks and the work environment as feasible, and provide constructive feedback – using neuroinclusive communication practices (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.). Touchpoints between an employee and their supportive, neuroinclusive supervisor are an important practice that enables supports to be proactive, rather than reactive (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.).

Team integration

Sufficient and appropriate team integration is also important for supporting neurodivergent employees as they adjust to their job and work environment. Team integration involves supports for the individual employee that address their social and emotional needs, as well as supports for the team that they will be working with.

To support an employee with their integration onto a new team, whether this is in a new workplace or due to a transfer to a new team in their existing workplace, peer support can be particularly beneficial (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.; Kaul, 2002; Remington & Pellicano, 2019). Beyond the initial onboarding stage, a trusted "buddy" or peer supporter in the first few months of new employment, or on an ongoing basis, can help neurodivergent employees navigate the social norms of the workplace, their team, and facilitate introductions to their coworkers (Remington & Pellicano, 2019; Universal Music, n.d.). Remington & Pellicano (2019) reported positive outcomes from an internship program for Autistic individuals when the "buddy" volunteered for the role by responding to an internal email that outlined the expectations and responsibilities of the role.

Leaders and managers in the organization play an important role in supporting the broader team to be inclusive. They can act as a role model with respect to their own behaviour and reemphasize basic behaviours to their team, such as giving clear guidance and instructions, following through on tasks and meetings, and communicating clearly and without jargon (Remington & Pellicano, 2019). Many of these behaviours are ones that employees would be regularly expected to do; however, having a manager underscore the importance of them can be beneficial as a new neurodivergent employee becomes part of the team. Managers can also play a role in supporting the broader team by responding to questions about how to support their new team member and sharing information with them about the employee's routine needs (Mission Possible, 2020). This can better equip the team with the knowledge to foster an inclusive environment (Universal Music, n.d.). It is important, however, that is done in a way that does

not violate the employee's confidentiality and privacy, including their decision to disclose or identify with a disability (Mission Possible, 2020; Universal Music, n.d.).

Additionally, leadership can work to support the social needs of neurodivergent employees as they navigate team integration. Social aspects of work, such as team lunches, activities outside of work, and events can be a significant source of pressure and overwhelm for some neurodivergent people (Universal Music, n.d.). A variety of options for social activities, and including employees in selecting those activities, can help to reduce this pressure and overwhelm (Universal Music, n.d.). It is also important that progression in an organization is not dependent on an employee's socializing skills or comfort engaging in these types of activities (Universal Music, n.d.).

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Flexible and individualized approaches to work

Employers can support the diverse and unique needs of neurodivergent employees by using flexible and individualized approaches to working conditions. These neuroinclusive approaches are employee-centred with the focus on adjusting work and work environments to people; not the other way around (Praslova, 2023).

Flexible approaches to work focus on the ability of employees to have control over, and make choices related to, the core aspects of their work, particularly when, where, for how long, and on what they work (Hill et al., 2008; Kröll et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2022), as well how they do their work (Praslova, 2023). They are often the most frequently requested accommodations among neurodivergent employees (Hutchison, 2023).

Spotlight: Flexible approaches to work for neuroinclusion

- **Spatial flexibility** is the control or choice regarding place of work (e.g., working from home to reduce challenges focusing due to sensory concerns) (Kalmanovich-Cohen & Stanton, 2023).

- **Temporal flexibility** is the choice regarding the distribution of worked hours (e.g., flexitime, where work schedules deviate from regular "office" hours so employees can choose when they complete their required hours, which can help to address difference in well-being and sleep patterns) (Praslova, 2023).

- **Contractual flexibility** is the fluidity and choice regarding employment contracts allowing for multiple points of partial or full entry and departure from full or part-time paid work (e.g., bouts of part-time work to manage needs outside of work or extended leave of absence to prevent or address autistic burnout) (Praslova, 2023).

- **Job crafting** is a strength-based approach that involves actively engaging employees in "shaping task, relational, and cognitive components of their jobs to maximize fit, meaning, and engagement" (Praslova et al., 2023, p. 68) (e.g., modifying an existing job description by reallocating, restructuring duties or tasks, or altering how tasks are performed to reflect employee's strengths; focusing on one task for long periods of time rather than multi-tasking) (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.).

Flexibility in the workplace is directly related to individual approaches to work, as flexibility is often addressed through a lens of individual need and preference (Hill et al., 2008). Neuroinclusion is not one-size-fits-all; however, some disability employment models "provide more generic, performance indicator-drive job matching [that] do not allow for individualized support that establishes long-term success" (SRDC, 2022b, p. 33). Thus, it is important for employers to recognize that successful employment journeys for neurodivergent people, or other disabilities, require an individualized approach that addresses the fit of their working conditions and job responsibilities (SRDC, 2022b). With individualized approaches to work, "by focusing on the different traits and characteristics people bring to the workplace, organizations can help these people to overcome their challenges and better utilize their unique capabilities to effectively perform their jobs" (Kalmanovich-Cohen & Stanton, 2023, p. 21).

Job crafting is another way employers can support neurodivergent people as it focuses on identifying ways to customize job roles around employee's unique strengths, skills, and needs (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; Hutchison & Robertson, 2022; Praslova, 2023; Siddall, 2024; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This can be done via discussions in the earlier stages of the employee lifecycle (i.e., hiring and onboarding), as well as through ongoing check-ins and discussions with employees about any changes in their needs or preferences (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.). It is important for managers and supervisors to learn about, understand, and respect the unique needs of neurodivergent employees, as this can ensure needs are met, that employees feel appreciated and supported, and that they are realizing their full potential in the workplace (Flower et al., 2019).

Individualized approaches to work also include addressing work environment needs that are specific to the individual employee (Universal Music, n.d.). Exploring and discussing options with the employee is a more effective way of tailoring the work environment than assuming certain adjustments suit all neurodivergent employees (Universal Music, n.d.). For example, not all neurodivergent employees have sensory challenges and require a quiet, low distraction environment to work in.

Individualizing approaches to work for neurodivergent employees can also be supported by a job coach who is internal or external to the organization. The job coach can help the employee identify their strengths and needs and communicate these to their supervisor (Flower et al., 2019). They can support discussions related to customizing job roles, as well as those related to tailoring the work environment. They can also facilitate these discussions between the employee and employer and offer recommendations to address individual employee strengths and needs.

Training and skills development

Access to opportunities for career development and training promotes retention of neurodivergent employees (Mission Possible, 2020). Supporting career development through training and skills development for neurodivergent employees is not a one-size-fits all approach. Additionally, viewing training through a strengths-based lens that situates it to support employee's goals and professional development is a more inclusive approach to employee development, compared to a deficit-based lens that views an employee's disability as a problem that needs to be fixed through training.

When planning training opportunities, it is important to discuss with neurodivergent employees what skills they would like to develop and why, rather than make assumptions about their career goals or reason for wanting to engage in training (Everymind at Work, 2021). Employees may want to participate in training to support their progression in the organization, but they may also want to build skills to perform their current job better (Mission Possible, 2020). For example, a neurodivergent employee may want to improve their organizational skills as they have difficulty in sequencing and prioritizing tasks (Universal Music, n.d.). Training that might seem unrelated to the employee's job could help them to build life skills which has indirect benefits for their job. For example, taking a course on mindfulness course can help employees be more productive and focused on job tasks as well (Mission Possible, 2020). This underscores the value in a strong relationship between an employee and their supervisor, as this can help to foster an environment where these conversations are encouraged and supported.

When considering training and skills development, it is also crucial to support diverse ways of learning (Universal Music, n.d.). Supporting diversity at work means that there is a diversity of learning within the organization as well (Mission Possible, 2020). There is a need for employers

to offer a variety of types of training, flexibility in learning formats, and addressing employees' unique barriers to training participation (Jetha, 2024). Even for trainings that are standardized within the organization, standard toolkits may not meet the needs of neurodivergent employees and may require enhancements (Everymind at Work, 2021). Examples of strategies to provide more neurocinclusive training include providing both online and in-person training, as well as synchronous and asynchronous training; offering part-time learning options; and implementing hands-on learning opportunities and opportunities to take in and process training through listening or reading (Mission Possible, 2020). This may include assistive technology and supports for diagnosed and undiagnosed learning disabilities as well.

Spotlight: Mentorship for neurodivergent employees

A common strategy to support employee career development is to provide mentorship opportunities in the workplace. There are a number of considerations for employers when designing and fostering mentorship opportunities for neurodivergent employees (Mission Possible, 2020; Siddall, 2024):

- **Employee engagement**: When making mentorship decisions, it is important to engage the employee, as they can share what they value in a mentor and how a mentor can best support them in the workplace. This can also be an opportunity for the employee to share if they are interested in a mentor who is also neurodivergent, if this is an option within the organization.

- **Mentor options**: It can be beneficial for an employee to have a mentor who is outside their immediate team, so it may be valuable to explore mentorship options throughout the organization.

- **Experience and skills:** Ensure that the individual selected as a mentor has the necessary knowledge and confidence to appropriately mentor a neurodivergent employee.

There are also a number of advantages to having a mentor for neurodivergent employees:

- **Role model and representation:** A neurodivergent mentor can serve as a role model for their mentee and share their direct experience working within the organization to guide their mentee as they navigate the workplace (Mission Possible, 2020).

- **Advocacy:** A mentor can be an advocate for their mentee and advocate for access to supports, promotions, and other workplace opportunities (Hutchison, 2023).

- **Connection with other employees:** Having a mentor who is not their direct supervisor or on their direct team provides an employee with an opportunity to learn from others, gain new perspectives, and build relationships with those who they may not otherwise have those opportunities with (Mission Possible, 2020).

RETENTION, PROMOTION, AND CAREER MOBILITY

Neurodivergent people are more likely to have shorter tenure in their jobs and face barriers with respect to career progression (Deloitte and auticon, n.d.; Hutchison, 2023), suggesting the importance of employers to understand retention from a neuroinclusive perspective. Interviews with people with lived and living experience have also suggested that conventional performance management approaches may not accurately assess the performance of neurodivergent employees, suggesting the need for further awareness and training for managers and supervisors (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; Celeste et al., 2022).

RETENTION

Retention involves systematic efforts by employers to create an environment that encourages employees to stay with the organization, benefitting both the employee and the employer with increased productivity and return on investment in developing staff (Ready Willing & Able, 2024). Retention is influenced by job demands, career development needs of a diverse workforce, as well as feelings of alignment with the organizational mission, values, and ability to contribute to decisions that impact them (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Employee engagement

An important way to foster employee engagement is by providing mechanisms for input and decision-making, which may include informal approaches or more formal committees and surveys, depending on the employer's size (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023). However, large employers often delegate formal employee engagement initiatives to HR departments or diversity specialists without providing the necessary commitment or resources (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023). For these initiatives to succeed, they need to be a shared responsibility across the organization, with clear lines of accountability to ensure that input received through these efforts is effectively addressed (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Several studies have highlighted the importance of involving people with lived experience of disability in decisions that impact them (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023; SRDC, 2022b; Stainton et al., 2023). From a neuroinclusive perspective, research has also highlighted the importance ensuring that Autistic people have a seat at the table for making informed and inclusive decisions that impact them (Krzeminska et al., 2019).

Spotlight: Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

A common strategy to promote employee engagement is to establish ERGs that provide a forum for people with lived and living experiences of diversity (including disability) to have a voice on organizational matters that impact them directly. Research suggests that employers should review a number of key considerations to ensure that the ERG is a meaningful forum, both to ensure initial uptake, as well as to sustain engagement over the longer term:

- **Voluntary and inclusive:** since ERGs may imply that people are self-identifying with a specific equity-deserving group, employers should consider building trust and an inclusive atmosphere more broadly, as well as highlighting the role of co-workers as allies.

- **Dedicated resources:** employers need to acknowledge the mental and emotional labour of participating in an ERG and consider dedicated resources, including compensation for ERG chairs or employee release time in unionized environments.

- **Clear terms of reference:** ERGs benefit from clear roles and responsibilities, including role clarity, their purpose, authority, and accountability for decisions, as well as how this will be used by the employer.

- **Involvement and commitment from leadership:** a successful ERG requires buy-in and commitment from senior management to ensure that the organization is incorporating people's living experience of disability into workplace inclusion efforts.

Source: de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023.

Employee benefits and compensation

Employees living with disabilities often experience health costs that exceed typical employee benefits coverage. Reviewing and extending workplace benefits is an important factor for retaining people living with disabilities (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). This may include more comprehensive health benefits and/or health spending accounts, personal days, extended leaves, and improved support for employee mental health (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023). Employers can also take steps to ensure their employee benefits coverage offers various types of support and access to different types of practitioners for neurodivergent people. For example, employers can test plans to check if yearly limits for psychological services are not quickly used up by costs for assessments of neurodivergence and include coverage for mental health support and coaching (Siddall, 2024). Additionally, many employers choose to implement an employee assistance program that addresses times when people may be in distress or require mental health support. These programs are employer-sponsored, work-based interventions designed to help employees navigate personal challenges (e.g., finances, substance use, relationships), which may also co-occur with conditions associated with neurodivergence (e.g., emotional or executive function dysregulation) (Fesseden, 2022).

Statistics Canada estimates that there is an approximate 21.4 percent pay gap between people living with and without disabilities, earing about 79 cents to every dollar (Statistics Canada, 2023b). While underemployment remains a persistent challenge (i.e., people hired into roles well below their education level and experience), employers should also consider whether their higher-paying job descriptions have unnecessary requirements or barriers to inclusion (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023). Employers should take steps to ensure that compensation is fair and equitable, providing equal pay for equal work. Employers that recruit specifically for neurodivergent people should ensure that compensation for those roles meets or exceeds minimum wage, provides benefits, and has equitable professional development and advancement opportunities (Azrieli Foundation, n.d.). Additionally, employers may consider performance bonuses and other forms of non-monetary compensation (Mission Possible, 2020).

Performance assessment and management

Feedback and learning are critical aspects of career development and retention. While feedback is often formalized in performance assessments or appraisals, employers can foster inclusion through daily opportunities for learning and feedback that is specific, constructive, and respectful (Mission Possible, 2020). In formal performance assessments that are designed to ensure employees are meeting individual and organizational goals effectively, it is important for the employer to ensure that appropriate and reasonable adjustments are in place before proceeding with any formal measurement of capability (Everymind at Work, 2021).

Performance assessments should also be reviewed by the employer for barriers and specifically for neurodivergent people, since managers or direct supervisors often misinterpret inability to adhere to neurotypical social norms as performance "issues" (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; Celeste et al., 2022; Heidel, 2022, 2023). Research also suggests that standardization and structure in performance assessments has been shown to assess people living with disabilities more fairly and reduce bias (de Raaf, Thackeray, et al., 2023). Inclusive performance assessments should create opportunities for the employee to share their views on their own performance, as well as set out clear and unambiguous expectations from the employer, with concrete examples, and an action plan for learning and improvement (Mission Possible, 2020).

While there may be instances where a neurodivergent employee does not meet expectations of the job role or the organization, managers and direct supervisors should seek to understand the situation and provide opportunities for learning or course correction prior to considering disciplinary action or termination (Bennett, 2024; Heidel, 2023; Mission Possible, 2020). For example, many neurodivergent people can find changes to work routines or environments challenging, so it is important to monitor changes in performance and check in regularly to see if the employee requires any additional support or accommodation (Everymind at Work, 2021). Guidance for providing inclusive feedback for neurodivergent people suggests that it should be

presented in a neutral way, providing the employee with enough space and time to process the information, and ensure that the feedback or the performance conversation is appropriately paced so that the employee is not overwhelmed (Machell, 2024). It is important the neurodivergent employees are not left to pick up on social cues, so constructive feedback should be explicit with supportive examples (Denvers, 2024). Some resources for employers also recommend implementing a performance tracker to keep a written record of performance management conversations to support a shared understanding, as well as undertaking a progressive discipline approach, where the first level is a verbal warning, second level is a written warning, through to termination, etc. (Mission Possible, 2020). Finally, employers need to carefully consider if lack of neuroinclusive accommodations and supports are the reason for the underperformance prior to considering any sanctions (Bennett, 2024).

Conversely, both formal and informal feedback on employee performance should include recognition and reward. While this may include symbolic forms of recognition by the employer such as thank you cards, celebratory events, and expressions of gratitude (Mission Possible, 2020), it's also important to recognize neurodivergent talent as talent (Everymind at Work, 2021). Many employee recognition programs fail when they are purely symbolic and not aligned with everyday employer behaviors of genuine reciprocity, appreciation, and trust; or at worst, are tokenistic (Hancock, 2024). For example, in one study, the highest rated items to support the retention of people living with disabilities were employees' alignment with the organization's mission, compensation levels, and the equitable treatment of employees; among those rated the lowest were rewarding employees for longevity (Habeck et al., 2010).

Career mobility and advancement

To effectively retain employees, it's essential they understand the potential career path within a specific organization. Senior staff members not only serve as examples of career advancement but also play a crucial role in helping others achieve their career development goals (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023). Employers should explore how sponsorship can support employees with disabilities, going beyond traditional mentoring to actively foster their development and inclusion in higher-level positions within the organization (de Raaf, Fraser, et al., 2023).

Consistent with inclusive approaches across the employee lifecycle, interventions to support career mobility and advancement for people living with disabilities should be tailored to the individual and foster both a self-directed and supportive environment (de Raaf, Thackeray, et al., 2023). Recommendations for neuroinclusive employer supports for career advancement highlight the importance of personal development plans that address both long-term career goals and life goals, as well as being supportive to employee's aspirations, which may not involve a "typical" career path (Everymind at Work, 2021; Universal Music, n.d.). Guidance for employers also emphasizes the importance of setting stretch goals with adequate support. While

neurodivergent people may be sensitive to change, this should not hinder their progress. Employers should ensure they feel supported when taking on new opportunities and avoid overwhelming them in the process (Everymind at Work, 2021).

JOB EXIT

Exiting the employee lifecycle can be employee-initiated (i.e., leaving a job for a better opportunity) or employer-initiated (i.e., termination). Research suggests that employer-initiated termination is not only higher for some neurodivergent people, but also has a higher negative impact on their financial and mental wellbeing, as well as their overall quality of life (Pezzimenti et al., 2024). As neurodivergent people experience higher employment precarity, they likely do not have a "savings cushion," putting them at higher risk to experience food and housing insecurity as well (Heidel, 2023). Research has found that employers are equally concerned about the risks associated with termination, both in terms of the negative impact on the employee and the potential damage to their reputation as an inclusive employer. Often, employers fear offending someone living with a disability and the risk that they will be charged with discrimination if the person does not work out. As a result, they may avoid hiring inclusively, or taking any action altogether (Mission Possible, 2020; SRDC, 2022b).

ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

As emphasized throughout this knowledge synthesis, people living with disabilities and especially neurodivergent individuals may experience physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion from working conditions and environments that have not been designed for them. In addition, people living with episodic disabilities, which are chronic conditions characterized by periods of wellness punctuated by intermittent periods of symptoms, may also require adjustments to their work and workplaces from time to time (Gignac et al., 2021). Traditional attendance management programs that flag higher than usual absenteeism can contribute to a situation of forced disclosure, where a person might be required to justify their attendance with health-related information that they preferred to keep private (Gignac et al., 2021). For these reasons, employers should consider taking a different approach to attendance or allow for personal days, extended sick days, or work from home arrangements (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2023; Mission Possible, 2020).

For employees who have been absent from their roles or from the workforce for an extended time, they may benefit from a gradual integration back into employment through a part-time or reduced schedule, allowing them to successfully resume employment at a pace that works for them (Mission Possible, 2020). A clear and sufficiently detailed return to work plan is recommended for any employee who has taken a leave of absence, to ensure that the employee knows what to expect and can re-engage successfully (Lieu et al., 2022).

TERMINATION AND JOB EXIT

Neurodivergent employees may leave their jobs for a variety of reasons, including finding other employment more aligned with their long-term career goals or working preferences, or are terminated for "situational" reasons, i.e., poor fit between the individual's skills, abilities, job role and environment (Pezzimenti et al., 2024). Research shows that during employer-initiated terminations, employers benefit from the additional expertise and support of a trusted partner to ensure a positive job exit process (Celeste et al., 2022).

Employers can also implement exit interviews and use the job exit process to reflect on the experiences of neurodivergent people within the organization. These should also be designed for neuroinclusion by offering interview alternatives such as written or audio feedback. Comprehensive reflections on exit benefit from a "360-degree" approach, incorporating feedback from peers, direct reports, and supervisors. Key insights from this feedback should be reviewed, and employers should implement necessary changes where appropriate (Universal Music, n.d.).

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