



SYDNEY
DANCE
COMPANY

actively including neurodiversity
in the workplace

Welcome to *Actively Including Neurodiversity in the Workplace*.

I'd like to acknowledge Wallumettagal people of the Eora nation, the traditional owners of the land I'm coming to you from today, and to pay respect to Elders past and present both here and where you are.

I'm Heath Wilder,

My preferred pronouns are *they/them/theirs*,

I've got dark hair, I'm wearing blue shirt and glasses and have a plain background behind me.

I'm proudly autistic ...



... which means that some of the qualities I share with Superman are

- 1. I have high sensitivity to sound and light,**
- 2. when I looked around me as a kid I was pretty sure that I was an alien on the wrong planet**
- 3. and in a lot of situations I have to take on a fake identity.**

(More on that soon).



So a bit about me ...

I've had a lot of careers over the years.

My first round of university was studying for a Masters Neuroscience.

I was an illustrator and had a restaurant as I got a degree in performance.

And was a theatre, film and television actor for about 20 years.

Eventually I opted for a steady job in boxoffice, ticketing and finally CRM guy in the arts for about 13 years.

So that's me.

What **is(n't)** this talk



Let's manage some expectations.

What I'm going to do is:

- **give you a quick run down of the breadth of neurodiversity.**
- **talk about some of the challenges and strengths of neurodivergent workers**
- **give some examples of making a more inclusive workplace.**

Deeper dives into specific neurotypes we can do another day.



I've also added all of the slides and speaker notes in case you want follow up some research later.

What is Neurodiversity?

Inclusivity that extends to neurological differences, including hiring and retaining talent



So let's talk about Neurodiversity - what the heck am I talking about.

Neurodiversity is a term originally coined by Australian sociologist, Judy Singer, in the late-1990s. *“Neurodiversity refers to the virtually infinite neuro-cognitive variability within Earth’s human population. It points to the fact that every human has a unique nervous system with a unique combination of abilities and needs.”*

Everybody - All of us, together.

<https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/what-is-neurodiversity>

An illustration on a light teal background. At the top, a dark grey cloud with three rounded humps is raining. Numerous light grey teardrop-shaped raindrops fall from the cloud. Below the rain, a dark grey umbrella is held open. Underneath the umbrella, two cartoon men stand side-by-side. The man on the left is wearing a white short-sleeved shirt and a dark tie. The man on the right is wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a dark tie. The word "NEURODIVERSE" is written in large, bold, white capital letters across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the umbrella.

NEURODIVERSE

NEUROTYPICAL

NEURODIVERGENT

I'm going to drop some terms on you here.

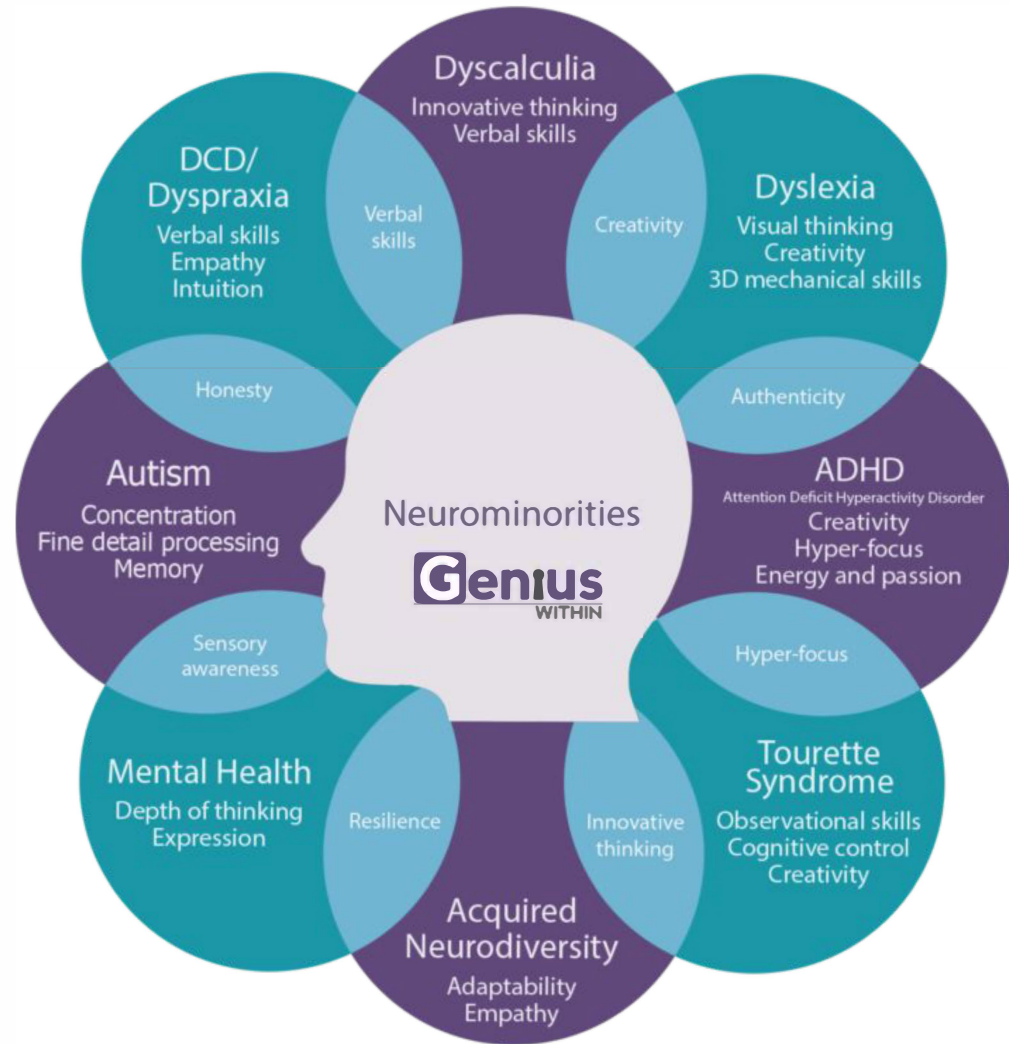
Neurotypical, means that way your brain is set up is within the dominant societal standards of what is "normal" or typical.

Individuals with a different way of thinking are **neurodivergent**, and have different **neurotypes** like dyslexia, autism, ADHD etc.

Neurodivergent individuals as a group are **neurominorities**,
And a good mix of everyone (like all of us in the Tessitura Community) would be called **Neurodiverse**

So a mixed group is **Neurodiverse** while Heath as an autistic individual is **neurodivergent**.

<https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/neurodiversity-some-basic-terms-definitions/>



Neurodiversity includes the common or average neurotype (which we'll call Neurotypical). But there are many different neurotypes that all have their advantages and their needs, and all are different a few which are the flower diagram from Genius Within. Some of those, like *dyslexia*, you might be more familiar with and others, like *dyspraxia*, you might not. Some common strengths are listed above but it's important to note that individual variations are common.

In the autistic community there is a common phrase - If you've met one autistic, you've met one autistic.

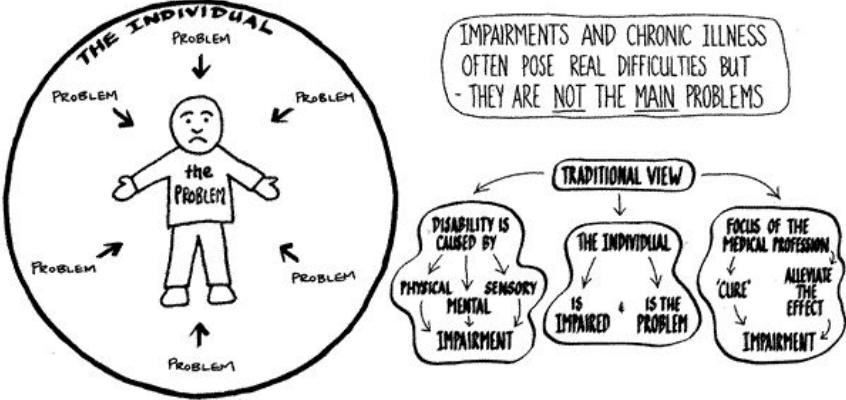
Today we'll focus on the broader range of neurotypes ...

Reason is that often as a society we stick to the most common, like when we are marketing to a lookalike audience. **But when we do that we leave out lots of the diversity to our detriment.**

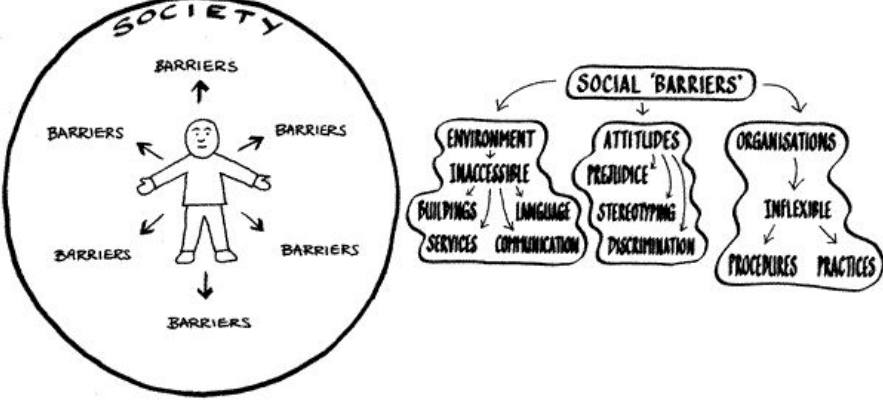
Me personally am *autistic* and *ADHD*. I love my brain and would not trade to be neurotypical for anything. I love the organisation and logic of my autistic self, and my innovation and drive from my ADHD. Of course there are things that I'd love to work on, like reigning in my attention at times when it wants to focus on everything.

Models of disability

THE MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



Before we get in too deep it's useful to give a context around what I'm going to talk to you about.

There are many models of disability, the one you are probably most familiar with is commonly called the medical model of disability, which looks at disability as a medical condition that a person has and seeks to cure or alleviate that in order to be closer to an imagined "normal". Now that is great if you have a broken leg or the flu or need medication to help with something.

But it's not really useful for us in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility work, because it puts barriers around a person by saying the problem is them. Let's take those barriers away.

Alternatively the social model of disability says that it's the way society is organised that causes disability. Our society needs to be more accessible and inclusive to ensure that people with disability can participate on their own terms.

I'm going to borrow an example from Organisation Psychologist Nancy Doyle. When Covid came in 2020 the world shut down and a lot of neurotypical folk found themselves in a difficult situation; if you had a NEED to socialise to feel stable and happy your environment had now disabled you.

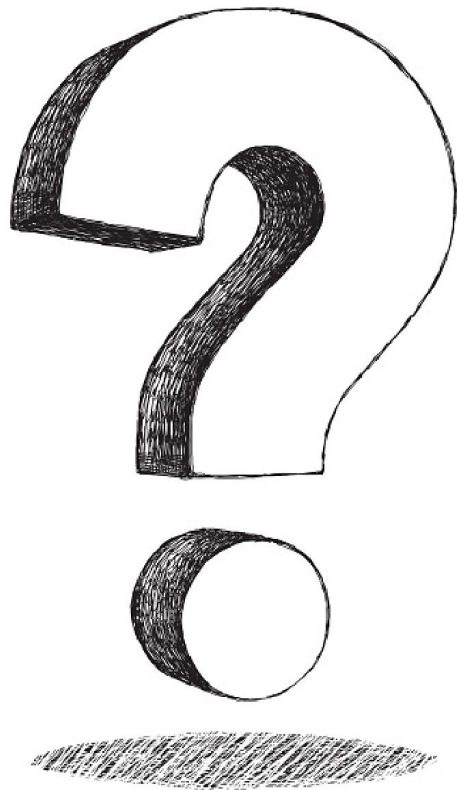
Now how did we deal with that issue? Not so much by medication but more by creating online Dance Classes, Virtual Zoos and Museums. We changed our society almost overnight.

Everyone has needs but society has been constructed to meet the needs of the majority.

So using the social model we are going to look at neurodiversity by setting people up for success

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/drnancydoyle/2020/04/29/we-have-been-disabled-how-the-pandemic-has-proven-the-social-model-of-disability/>

What can we achieve?

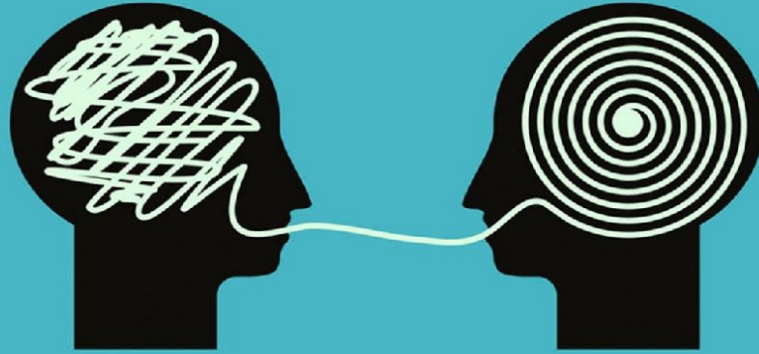


So what work can we do. Well among autistics alone I know writers, teachers, academics, bodybuilders, UX designers, journalists, comedians ... heck Anthony Hopkins just won an Oscar and Richard Branson went to space. So actually anything. We can do the job AND we bring a fresh viewpoint.

So what's the problem? Often it's "culture fit" or connection.

(Time to talk about the double empathy problem).

The double empathy problem



“when people with very different experiences of the world interact with one another, they will struggle to empathise with each other.”

Dr Damien Milton

For a lot of neurodivergent folks the biggest mental health struggle comes from isolation and exclusion. I'm talking things like impostor syndrome, loneliness and exhaustion. And bridging that gap in understanding – the gap between all of us – is the point of me talking to you today.

In psychology that gap is called the **Double Empathy Problem**.

It suggests that *when people with very different experiences of the world interact with one another, they will struggle to empathise with each other.*

As neurodivergent folk are in the minority it can be a solid burden when we need to do both sides of the empathy bridge.

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/double-empathy>

Not just kids

Neurodivergent kids grow up
to be neurodivergent adults



You've probably heard a lot about autistic kids or ADHD kids because that's where most of the media and research begin and end.

And you'd be forgiven for thinking that it was something that a person grows out of as they aged, but we're definitely still here.

Not just celebrity



You've probably also heard that quite a few of your favourite celebrities are neurodivergent. But that's not what I'm going to talk to you about today. I will point out three amazing people you may not know.

Pictured: Anthony Hopkins (Autism); Whoopi Goldberg (Dyslexia); Dan Ackroyd (Autism); Howie Mandel (ADHD OCD); Hannah Gadsby (Autism); Justin Timberlake (ADHD & OCD); Solange Knowles (ADHD); Daniel Radcliffe (Dyspraxia); Greta Thunberg (Autism); Octavia Spencer (Dyslexia); Billie Eilish (Tourettes); Daryl Hannah (Autism); Grace Tame (Autism);



Elisabeth Wiklander

Cellist With The London
Philharmonic Orchestra

Elisabeth Wiklander is a very gifted cellist for the *London Philharmonic Orchestra* crediting autism for her intense focus and analytical thinking. When I shared this on the Tessitura forums my good pal Maery Simmons pulled this quote out for me *“My current relationships are based on mutual respect; we are different and we need to understand each other’s neurological differences to fully appreciate each other”* Coming out as autistic saved a huge amount of energy for not having to mask so much, which was great for my mental health

We’ll talk about masking in a sec.

<https://the-art-of-autism.com/elisabeth-wiklander-cellist-with-the-london-philharmonic-orchestra-lpo-talks-about-her-autism-and-neurodiversity/>

Ryder Carroll

Digital product designer
inventor of
the Bullet Journal



Ryder Carroll was diagnosed with ADHD as a child, he wanted a system to help "move past his learning disabilities." By the time he graduated from college, he had devised the bullet journal method, a mindfulness practice disguised as a productivity system. A friend encouraged him to share his method, It attracted attention on social media and was the subject of over 3 million Instagram posts by December 2018. It's been used for School, Work, Finance and Mental Health.

This is an example of the kinds of alternative thinking that come up so often with neurodivergent workers

<https://bulletjournal.com/pages/about>



Sarah Firth

Eisner award-winning
cartoonist, writer and
animator

Sarah Firth is nothing short of a legend. She is a graphic recording artist of incredible skill with *dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD and autism*.

If Dyscalculia is new to you it's a difficulties with all areas of mathematics.

She says *"Drawing was and continues to be a tool I use for focusing my attention, listening, digesting information and engaging with the world."* Despite her accomplishments there are still a lot of barriers that exist. *"I still regularly face prejudice and mocking from people who do not understand these challenges and think I am 'stupid', 'distracted' or being 'too sensitive'. In video interviews sometimes, people will ask me to 'stop looking around, look into the camera' and 'stop fidgeting' and 'don't talk with your hands' which are so hard for me to do and come at a huge cognitive strain. I regularly have to explain that I can't and why. It still frustrates me, the expectations around this stuff."*

<https://blogs.slv.vic.gov.au/news/talks/sarah-firth-on-neurodivergence-and-creativity/>



JAX JACKI BROWN

CENTRE DISABILITIES
BETTER ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS



GALA VANTING

INDIGENOUS and ABORIGINAL are COLONIAL IDEAS! Learn your COUNTRY.



CAROLINE MARTIN



NICOLE KALMS

making WOMEN and PEOPLE of COLOUR INVISIBLE AND CONTROLLED



JAN FRAN

GRAPHIC RECORDING by SARAH FIRTH @sarahthefirth

THE SOCIAL model OF DISABILITY: SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED STRUCTURES CREATE the DISABILITY

A DEFICIT model
MORE DIVERSITY and UNIVERSAL DESIGN

CITIES BUILT WITH WHITE ABLE BODIED men AS THE DEFAULT
POVERTY

COLONISED
RACISM

POLICE VIOLENCE

UNEMPLOYMENT

ADDITIONAL work to know if I CAN GET IN?

DISABLED bodies SEGREGATED

WHO is CONSIDERED "A PERSON"?

UNCONSCIOUS BIASES and EXCLUSION OF MANY BODIES

WHO is CRIMINALISED?

ACCESS as a HUMAN RIGHTS issue

TAKING UP SPACE

BUILDING the city THAT WE DESERVE

BLACK INCARCERATION
TANYA DAY

UNSAFE in this COUNTRY AS FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE

HEAL by TELLING THE TRUTH

GET EDUCATED

GENDER and PLACE STUDY

ZONES of EXCLUSION

HARASSMENT
woot, woot!

REGULATED

PATHOLOGISED

I'M not A TEACHING moment ON WHEELS!

NORMATIVE discourse FORCED ON ME



SURVEILLANCE doesic HELP IF YOUR BODY IS CRIMINALISED

RESPECT

DON'T BE PATERNALISTIC ABOUT IT

IT'S NOT A MORAL QUESTION

AS a SEX WORKER I HAVE to REGISTER with the POLICE

MEDICAL SURVEILLANCE TOO

NO BAD whores ONLY BAD LAWS

And just so you understand a little of what Sarah Firths work as a graphic recording illustrator here is a piece from her website and a collab with the wonderful Tessitura Organisation *the Wheeler Centre*.

Quite a few neurodivergent people are visual thinkers and their alternative graphical representation of information can be a great benefit to your organisation.

Why talk inclusion ?

- Work Life Balance
- Health & wellbeing
- Work with a purpose

Identifying your employees wants and desires will greatly benefit your company and the bottom line.

So why do we want talk about inclusion and equity?

There are good reasons to take barriers out of the way of our staff. Alan Kohll in his Forbes article said *"Identifying your employees wants and desires will greatly benefit your company and the bottom line."*

It's our jobs as colleagues and managers to manage our relationships at work. By building those relationships we make both of us happier and we do better work. That includes showing recognition and gratitude. It's about protecting mental health and wellbeing, creative meaningful work, and respect as an individual.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alankohll/2018/07/10/what-employees-really-want-at-work/>

Benefits of Diversity

- Profitability
- Performance
- Innovation



We know the research that there are many benefits of a broadly diverse team

- 1. A study published in *Harvard Business Review* showed a significant correlation between high cognitive diversity and high performance.**
- 2. *McKinsey's* research has found that companies with more diverse top teams were also top financial performers.**
- 3. *Deloitte* found engagement at work is an outcome of diversity and inclusion**
- 4. A white paper from the online decision-making platform *Cloverpop* has found a direct link between workplace diversity and decision-making**

We know this is good for business and I'll leave that there for now

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/is-there-a-payoff-from-top-team-diversity>

<https://hbr.org/2017/03/teams-solve-problems-faster-when-theyre-more-cognitively-diverse>

<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/human-capital/deloitte-au-hc-diversity-inclusion-soup-0513.pdf>

<https://joshbersin.com/2015/12/why-diversity-and-inclusion-will-be-a-top-priority-for-2016/>

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/experts/research/diversity-drives-better-decisions>



IMPOSSIBLE

So in short ...

... we want to remove as many obstacles as we can.



**And just a bit of personal disclosure about what's really in it for me as summed up by the
incredible cartoonist *Beth Evans***

Masking

And the award for
"BEST DEPICTION OF A
NEUROTYPICAL IN A
SOCIAL SITUATION"
goes to ...



So on that ...

... remember when I talked about Superman and secret identities?

Let's talk about **masking (which we heard from Elisabeth Wiklander earlier).**

I've always thought that I deserved the oscar for this but the competition in the neurodivergent community is pretty strong.

Masking: What is it?

- Fitting in AT ALL COSTS
- Hiding your natural feelings and behaviours
- Creating a persona for acceptance and safety
- Safety mechanism

eg: Forcing eye contact

Pretending to understand



So what is it?

Masking is artificially performing social behavior that is deemed to be more socially acceptable (by neurotypical standards) or hiding behavior that might be viewed as socially unacceptable.

For example:

1. putting on a public face
2. carrying scripts for conversations
3. Or suppressing behaviours (often called stims) that help you focus (like fidgeting or hand flapping)

<https://soyoureautistic.com/masking-camouflaging-mimicking-2/>

<https://www.tiimoapp.com/blog/art-of-masking-women-with-autism>

HOW ARE YOU
DOING?

UM ... YEAH
GOOD
THANKS

I SHOULD
SMILE ... AM
I SMILING?

AM I STARING?
SHOULD I TALK MORE?
WAS I SUPPOSED TO
BE HONEST?

IT'S SO NOISY
HERE
I'M STRUGGLING

Just to give you an example – here is a simple conversation.

Someone meets you staff kitchen and asks you *“How are you doing?”*

Even before you respond you have to navigate a noisy or difficult environment that you are struggling in.

Next you have to create a response that is socially appropriate to appear more normal, like smiling, eye contact

And once you’ve delivered the right response you critique that response *“was it a casual greeting or a genuine enquiry into your mental health? Did you miss some subtext and they might need to talk about themselves?”*

And this repeats as you move through the conversation

It can become very overloading and distracting.

So why is masking bad. Well apart from the obvious ...

I WAS FOCUSING SO HARD ON
LOOKING LIKE I WAS LISTENING,



THAT I DIDN'T HEAR
WHAT YOU WERE SAYING.

@WORRY__LINES

Masking: Why is it bad?

- Effort to maintain (It's exhausting)
- Success reinforces that *you* are not valid
- Failure brings shame and punishment
- Depression/Suicidality/Burnout*



Masking is bad because it's exhausting.

It also means that folks are not at capacity if they have to cover themselves up all the time. Being successful reinforces that your natural self are not valid, but failing brings shame and punishment if you out yourself or are criticised

As a general rule, if a person has to hide fundamental truths about themselves to fit into the "work culture", that culture is broken.

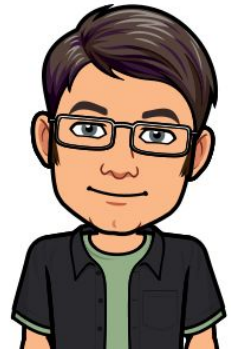
I want to point out though that as a white presenting and male presenting verbal autistic person it's a lot easier for me to choose to mask or not. The consequences are less. Some people don't have that privilege or option. For example the prejudice from being autistic while black is well talked about and we need to do better in intersectional spaces.

<https://www.healthline.com/health/autism/autism-masking>

<https://neuroclastic.com/category/culture-identity/people-of-color/black-autistic-lives-matter/>

Masking: Solutions

- Acceptance of identity without challenge
- Self learning
- Accept difference
- Fail forward:
 - Own your mistakes
 - Learn from them



Obviously we are here for solutions.

What makes it easier to drop the mask is acceptance, awareness and being ok for either of us to get it wrong.

I love the term **FAILING FORWARD** because means owning mistakes and using them to better the relationship through trust and growth.

I like to think of that growing towards the sun

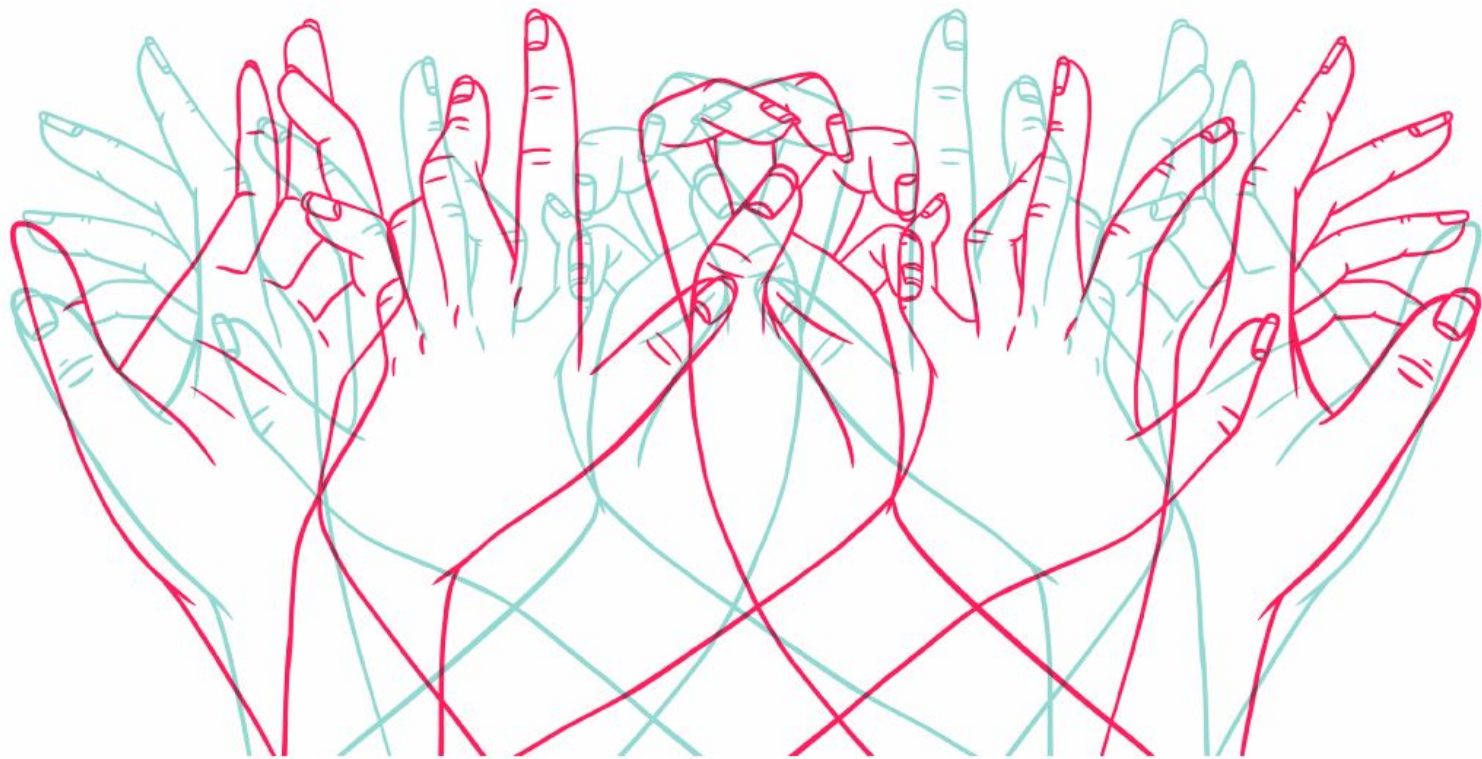
Make it ok

There are a lot of ways we can make the work environment easier by accepting difference.

Here are a couple of examples



Støttingst



Repetitive movements are used by a lot of neurodivergent folks to regulate our attention and energy. It can be vestibular like rocking back and forth, hand flapping, echolalia (repeating words and sounds), or even stuff like dancing, drumming or walking.

In the autistic community we call it “Stimming” Self stimulating behaviours

In ADHD it’s fidgeting which can look like doodling during a meeting, chewing gum or using a fidget device.

Also Tourettes as well has involuntary tics that need to come out and there are plenty of other movements that are essential for healthy living.

Telling someone to stop fidgeting can destroy their concentration and make it incredibly hard to regulate your emotions. Which is the opposite of what people telling you to do that want. We fidget IN ORDER TO pay attention.

But it’s also something that we do when we are happy.

Let’s make it OK to do them without judgment.

Eye contact

**The intensity and intimacy is
overwhelming**

**It feels intrusive and overly
intimate on both ends.**

it feels deeply personal and uncomfortable

how anyone is supposed to
know how much eye contact
is appropriate

**BECAUSE I CAN'T MAINTAIN BOTH
EYE CONTACT AND CONCENTRATION**

I MAY ENGAGE FOR A MILLISECOND HERE AND
THERE FOR YOUR SAKE, SO YOU DON'T FEEL
UNCOMFORTABLE

Eye CONTACT makes
me FEEL PHYSICALLY
OVERWHELMED.

Eye contact can be emotionally and
cognitively exhausting,
making conversation much harder

Because I can see the nakedness of you,
like I've walked in on you while you were undressing

**IT MAKES ME FORGET WHAT I'M
SAYING, OR STOP LISTENING TO YOU.**

I don't know why you want us to look you in the eyes all the time (other than the social convention)

For a lot of neurodivergent folk it's like this.

It's very intimate, distracting and personal. So we might look at you forehead or mouth or glance away a lot. But if you force eye contact you are not getting all of us.

These are from Terra Vance's poll on the website *neuroclastic*.

<https://neuroclastic.com/eye-contact/>

Barriers for Neurominorities

To come out
or not to come out
(That is the question)

Lack of understanding
by peers

Dismissed & excluded

Physical & sensory
barriers unaddressed

Anxiety & burnout

Executive function
challenges

You may have a lot of people in your team who are neurominorities and you don't know it. There are lots of reasons why that is the case.

In fact a lot of people will never pursue a formal diagnosis owing to the cost and lack of support. And even if they did a lot of people have reported to have lost jobs or not been hired on the basis of a disclosure as a neurominority.

One comment in ADHD magazine *ADDitude* about whether to be open about ADHD at work was really telling for me.

"I absolutely do not share my diagnosis ... I have found that most people at the top carry false, stereotypical beliefs about ADHD – ones that lead to bias, patronizing, and discrimination."

A lot of people have lost jobs or not been hired on the basis of a disclosure as a neurominority.

Jessica Dark via LinkedIn https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jessica-dark_disclosure-of-autism-at-work-holds-risks-activity-6750824994726522880-H6U4

***ADDitude: ADHD Stigma* <https://www.additudemag.com/talk-about-adhd-stigma>**

Microaggressions

Did you seriously just say you're autistic?!

How?! You're talking to me right now!

Why do you get special treatment?

You don't look autistic

Autism is nothing to be proud of.

You're not autistic.

Do you take medication for that?

I can't even tell - you're

hiding it so well!

Must be mild

I feel very sorry for you

How is it treated?

Autistic? No.

I think you mean 'person with autism'

I'm so glad I only got diagnosed with ADHD and not Aspergers!

We're all on the spectrum!

You're more than your impairment

You're a person with Aspergers and you're working on it

You inspire me because you've achieved so much in spite of your autism

Are you working on your autism?

I have a friend with autism and they're doing so well - they fit in and you can't even tell they have it!

Why are you being so difficult?

Can't you just be normal?

What's wrong with you?!

Microaggressions are a macro issue. Being corrected in your identity, criticised for accommodations, patronising backhanded compliments or even “jokes” are not OK.

The quotes here are from autistic DEAI advocate Ashlea McKay’s direct experience. and in her own words *“Hearing these things on a daily basis and being placed in a never ending position of having to smile politely and educate and explain and often endure more ableism, while crumbling on the inside, is exhausting and demoralising.”*

We are not a tragedy We are professionals working in suboptimal conditions.

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ashleamckay_actuallyautistic-microaggressions-autism-activity-6810787097193140224-Br9w

Problem Language



**We're all a little bit
autistic (ADHD etc)**

**I'm kind of OCD
sometimes, too**

**Impairment / disorder
/ suffering with**

High/Low functioning

A quick note on language and disability. It's always best to steer clear of euphemisms, such as 'handicapable' or 'differently-abled' or 'special needs' or 'living with disability'.

You are not a little bit OCD if you like a tidy desk - what that does is diminishes a struggle.

If everyone was a bit dyslexic or ADHD then neurominorities wouldn't experience the levels exclusion that we do. Same with functioning labels.

Same with functioning labels. High functioning and low functioning. How well we can function is entirely situational and changes. Calling someone High Functioning minimises their struggle and Low functioning minimises their strengths

It's usually meant as sympathy or empathy but unless you've walked a mile in someone's shoes it can come across as judgy rather than empathic.

Also never use the R word.

<https://pwd.org.au/resources/disability-info/language-guide/#>

A hand-drawn balance scale is sketched in white chalk on a dark chalkboard. The scale is perfectly balanced, with a horizontal beam supported by a central vertical post. Two pans hang from the beam, one on each side. The left pan is labeled 'PERSON-FIRST' and the right pan is labeled 'IDENTITY-FIRST'. A man with dark hair and a serious expression is looking up at the scale from the bottom center of the frame. The background is a dark, textured chalkboard.

PERSON-FIRST

IDENTITY-FIRST

Person first or Identity first language comes up a lot.

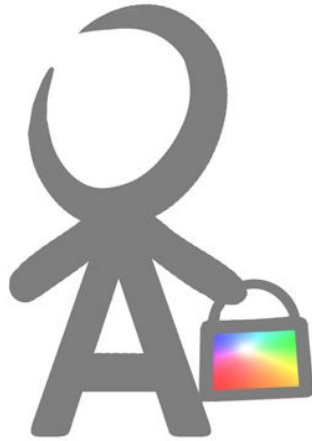
Am I a "*disabled person*" or a "*person with a disability*"?

Different people and communities will have very strong preferences for either identity-first, or person-first language.

As with everything follow the lead or ask.

eg: "Autism" and the autistic community

Person
with
autism



Autistic
person



Neurology is not an accessory

For me IDENTITY FIRST. My neurotype is not something that I can be separated from. I'm an Autistic Person. I'm Autistic.

It's important because it not something that I want take away or changed about myself, or feel I "suffer" from.

And it's CERTAINLY not something that I'd want "cured".

To go back to a quote from Elisabeth Wiklander *"If we need a cure for anything, it's not for autism. It's for ignorance and intolerance."*

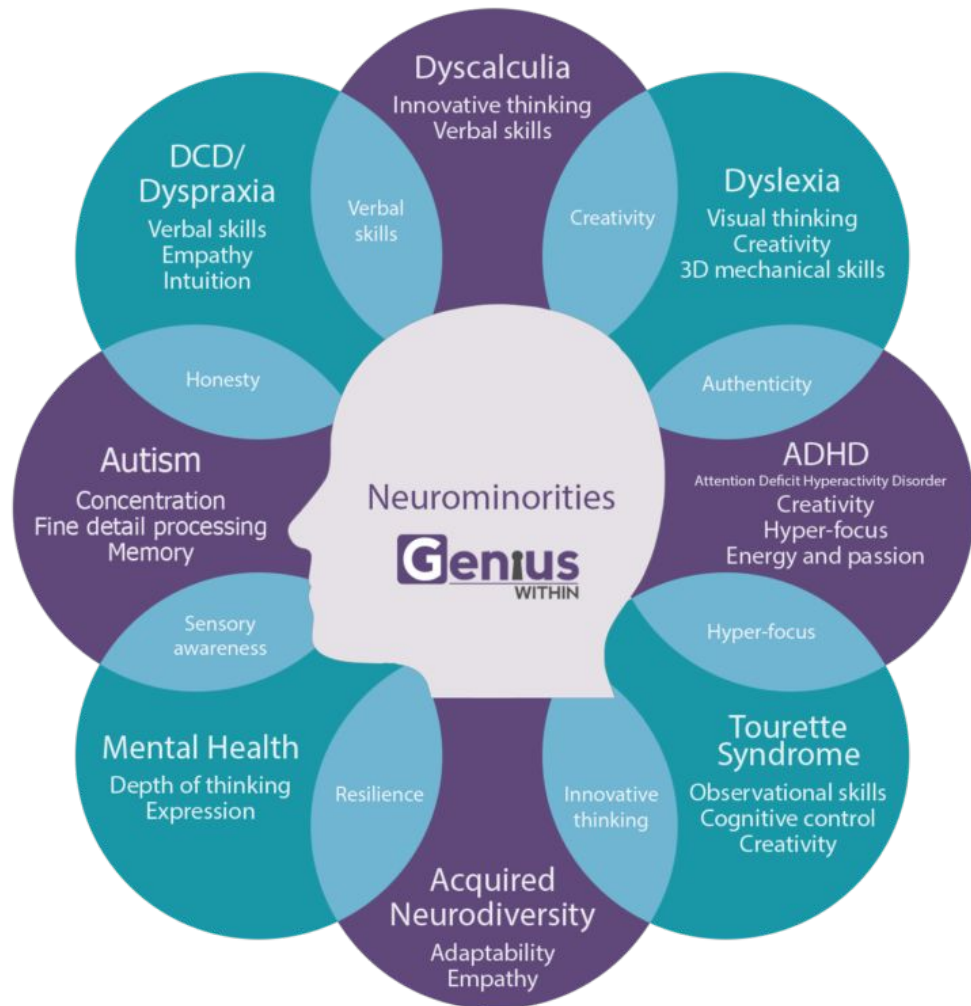
My neurodivergence
is *one* of my identities

So yes autism is one of my identities.

It DOES define me but it's not the sole thing about me.

And I wouldn't want to be any other way.

Why hire Neurominority



So why hire neurominorities? The image on the right is from *Genius Within*, a UK based neurominority work support organisation. It shows many of the skills that are commonly associated with particular neurominorities. From visual thinking to hyperfocus, from empathy to innovation, which we saw earlier in our case studies.

<https://www.geniuswithin.co.uk/>

Why hire Neurominority

Neurotypical folks about their autistic coworkers

CREATIVITY

Enthusiasm

Loyalty

LACK OF PREJUDICE

Lack of subtext or passive aggression

Honesty

Curiosity

Analytical skills

HUMOUR

Sense of justice

Up here are responses in a twitter thread aimed at **neurotypical** coworkers when asked what do they appreciate about about their **autistic** teammates.

So it's not just focus or attention to detail but also honesty, loyalty and creativity.

There is a lot to be gained in both soft skills as well as concrete skills.

<https://twitter.com/AutSciPerson/status/1331359148609560582>

Alternative thinking

"...we are the very people who are able to advance stalled businesses with brilliant out-of-the box ideas and run circles around neurotypicals in a crisis."

Covid has been a perfect example. This quote is from the reader survey in ADDitude magazine on coming out at work. Sydney said that she would never come out as ADHD at work due to stigma but ironically *"...we are the very people who are able to advance stalled businesses with brilliant out-of-the box ideas and run circles around neurotypicals in a crisis."*

And it's true ADHD folks are incredible in a crisis ADHD coach Laurie Dupar famously said ADHD *"Eats chaos for breakfast."*

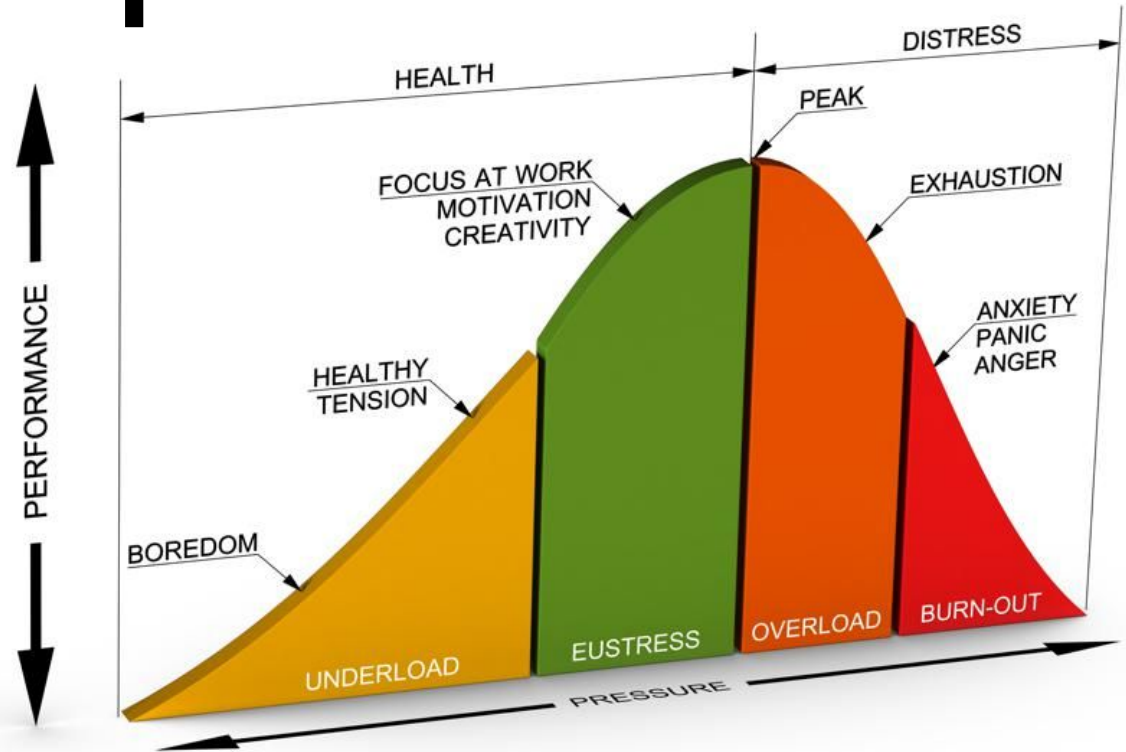
The same for other neurominorities with talent like visual thinking and hyperfocus - we can solve the problems that a homogeneous team can't

<https://www.additudemag.com/talk-about-adhd-stigma/>

Assume Competence

Optimising

- Processes
- Preparation
- Learning styles
- Environments



Nancy Doyle's Forbes article really nails down a great position to get the best out of neurodivergent workers by focusing on strengths.

For neurodivergent workers job stress can come from different places.

Noisy or overly social environments can add additional stress to a job and push people from optimal conditions into overload

Talking to us about the best processes, preparation, learning styles and environments are key to retaining neurodivergent staff and getting them to reach their full potential.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/drnancydoyle/2021/05/27/assume-competence-neurodivergent-staff-dont-need-kid-gloves>

Superpower Myth

The double edged sword



Whilst a different neurotype can come with helpful skills, the pressure to be a incredible can lead to marginalising people.

It's best to treat each other as individuals. We all have needs and bring valuable skills to the workplace.

Too much emphasis on neurodivergence as a tragedy or a superpower can alienate us and put on huge pressure.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/drnancydoyle/2021/03/04/from-deficit-to-superpowers-is-it-ableist-to-focus-on-neurodivergent-strengths>



*“he sees things and analyzes things in ways
... we can't even begin to understand”*

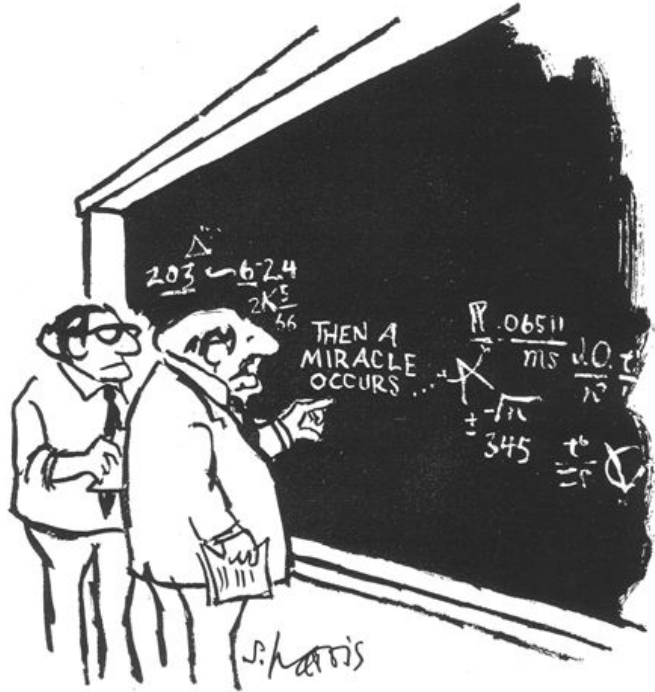
the **GoodDoctor**

Let's try to understand

Commercial Media is particularly fond of the Superpower myth - Neurodiverse super powers in the media is a double edged sword

**Lets not OTHER people by making them something people can't begin to understand.
YES WE CAN UNDERSTAND ... WE JUST NEED TO TRY**

What do solutions look like?



"I THINK YOU SHOULD BE MORE EXPLICIT HERE IN STEP TWO."

Issue:

Given vague instructions and no idea how to proceed.

Solution:

1. A quiet environment
2. Specific instructions
3. Step by step plan
4. Ask for questions/clarification

Many times I've been lost in tasks with vague instructions and no idea how to proceed. Clear, specific, instructions with context are a lifesaver. This is common feedback from neurodivergent folks

I needed this WAY before I knew I was autistic and a long time before I came out about it. And because of push back I thought that I was broken and it negatively affected my mental health.

Minimise Distractions



Meike Bliebenicht posted this on LinkedIn. On every desk we now have a sign allowing people to indicate whether they are 'Open to chat' or in 'Thinking mode'. A simple and yet efficient way to boost productivity, engagement and connection with colleagues!

Many neurodivergent folk benefit from hyperfocus, the ability to be extremely productive for long periods of time. Someone showing up at your desk and asking an unrelated question can bring hyperfocus mode to an abrupt end.

**Regaining focus after an interruption can be difficult and often requires additional energy (it's been likened to driving a Formula 1 car and suddenly having to stop at a red light...)
For me it's like doing your 99th turn at Jenga and someone bumps your elbow**

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6916672377544142848/>

Personal Example

Problem

- Noisy meeting
- Multiple conversations
- Noise pain
- Can't follow thread
- Limited participation

Solution

- Talking one at a time
- Breakouts for small groups
- Handouts/slides available
- Optional remote login
- *Inclusive Design*: Advantage for all



Here is a personal example. I attended a brainstorming workshop.

At one point in the discussion there were a few side conversations going on in addition to the main discussion. We've all been at a meeting like this.

Now in psychology circles focusing on one discussion in a noisy room is called the cocktail party phenomena - the ability to tune into one conversation among many.

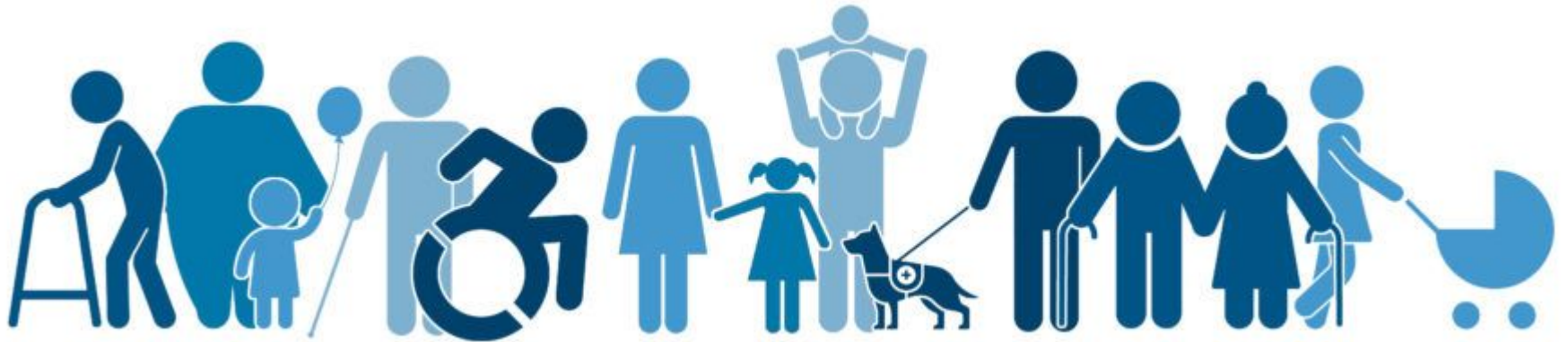
For me this is incredibly difficult and usually is not only painful but sounds like all the words are mixed together in one channel. It can cause a headache, poor work performance and irritability if it goes on for any length.

By keeping to one person talking at a time it makes my life a lot easier.

But the added BONUS is the respect and clarity of the discussion for all. - Which is a type of INCLUSIVE "SOCIAL" DESIGN

Inclusive design

inclusive design is a design process not restricted to interfaces or technologies in which a product, service, or environment is optimised for a specific person with specific needs



So what do I mean by Inclusive design?

I'm going to quote the wonderful Sina Bahram, founder of the inclusive design firm Prime Access Consulting "inclusive design is a design process not restricted to interfaces or technologies in which a product, service, or environment is optimised for a specific person with specific needs"

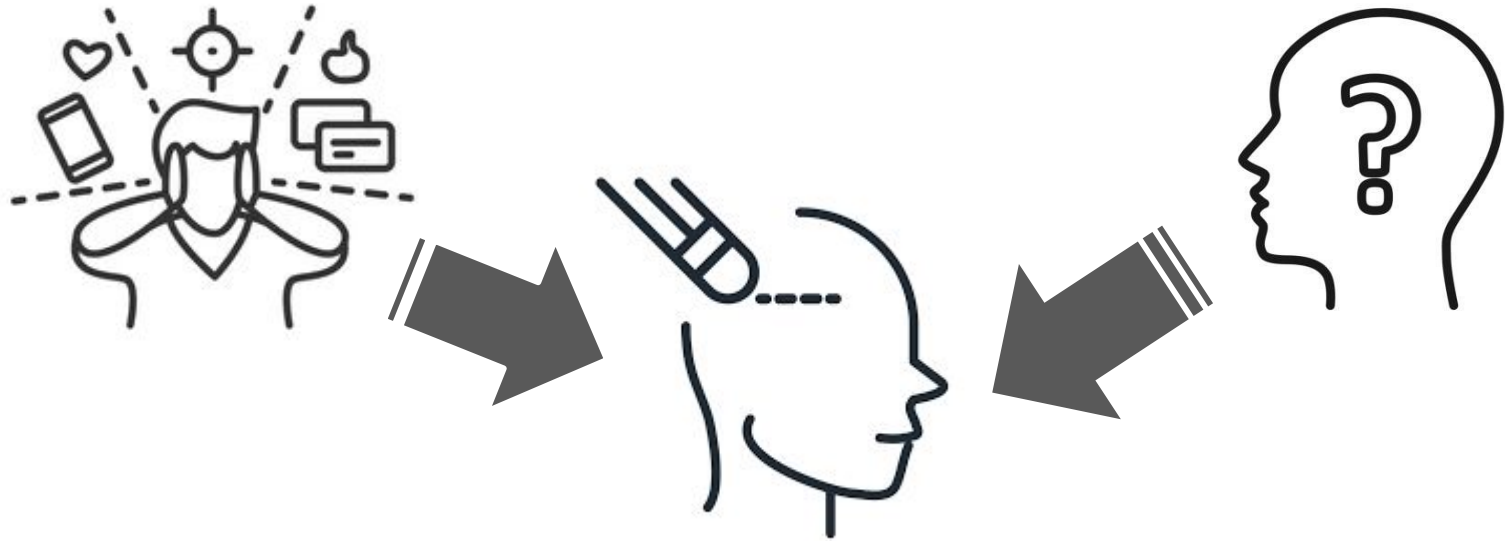
An often used example is a curb cut at traffic lights. It is meant to assist wheelchairs cross the street but is also useful for strollers and other people who have mobility needs.

Sina's keynote address from TLCC2019 is up on the Tessitura YouTube channel and I urge you to watch it. (Hopefully wait till after this is over)

<https://youtu.be/BMq6jpnRwlk>

Inclusive design

Project Management Software



Ever been to meeting where a lot was said but not much was followed up on or written down?

Combinations of barriers in these can be distractions & vague instructions which are especially unhelpful for working memory challenges like you may get with ADHD.

Project Management Software



This can easily be solved with some simple project management software to make tasks clear and simple to follow up on. There are plenty of these.

Inclusive design

Project Management Software

1. Project Management Software is a great way to assign clear tasks to your team
2. Set deadlines that everyone knows about and will be auto reminded of
3. And as a manager you can see who in your team might be being overwhelmed and popping up on too many projects

which is overall a win win.

Website Redesign

in list [In Progress](#)

MEMBERS



DUE DATE



May 29 at 3:43 PM



SUGGESTED



Join

[Feedback](#)

Description

Edit

We'll be launching a new website to coincide with our rebranding efforts.

Tasks

Delete

0%

Build wireframes



Finalize copy

May 11



Finish illustrations and graphics

May 15



Design review

May 19



Website development

May 21



QA and testing

May 25



Launch!

May 29



Add an item

ADD TO CARD

Members

Labels

Checklist

Due Date

Attachment

Cover

POWER-UPS

Assign

Butler Tips (2)

Remove Due Dates

Get More Power-Ups

August 24

Delete

0%

ACTIONS

Move



Feb 2021



Today



Month

Label

THU 28	FRI 29	SAT 30	SUN 31	MON Feb 1	TUE 2	WED 3	THU 4	FRI 5	SAT 6	SUN 7	MON 8	TUE 9	WED 10	THU 11	FRI 12	SAT 13	SUN 14	MON 15	TUE 16
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Phase 1
(2) Not Scheduled +

GTM Plan and Messaging
 4/4

Support Documentation

Updated Branding & Logos
 3/6

Phase 2
(3) Not Scheduled +

PR Outreach
 0/8

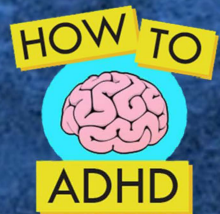
Partnerships/Community Content

Phase 3
(4) Not Scheduled +

In-App Anno
 0/4

Uplo

CARD	LIST	LABELS	MEMBERS	DUE DATE
The Invisible Problem Wrecking Your Productivity and	Editing	Blog		<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 4
Increase sales revenue by 30% in Q4	Done	Marketing		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Feb 4
GTM Plan and Messaging	Done	Phase 1		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Feb 4
Why Taking Breaks Is The Key To Productivity	Editing	Blog		<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 8
Launch International Expansion	Done	Product Sales		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Feb 8
Updated Branding & Logos	In Progress	Phase 1		<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 8
PR Outreach	In Progress	Phase 2		<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 9
How Your Environment Is Affecting Your Productivity	Making Graphics	Blog		<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 10
Video "commercial"	Ready For Launch	Marketing		<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 10
Productivity Pros	Making Graphics	Webinar		<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 11
5 Ways To Simplify Your Life, And Be More Productive	Making Graphics	Blog		<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 12
Equipment Update	Current Projects	IT		<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 12



Jessica McCabe of the YouTube Channel How to ADHD said it best *"like building a ramp for someone in a wheelchair, accommodations for those of us with executive functioning challenges are necessary if we want to get where we want to go."*

And like we just said - it's inclusive design - ALL of your team members will be thankful when everyone is clear on what is expected

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4YIHrEu-TU>

As simple as asking

Be a good ally

Play to your strengths

Give someone a fair go

Everyone is different so talk through the barriers

It's ok to make mistakes - they are the best teacher



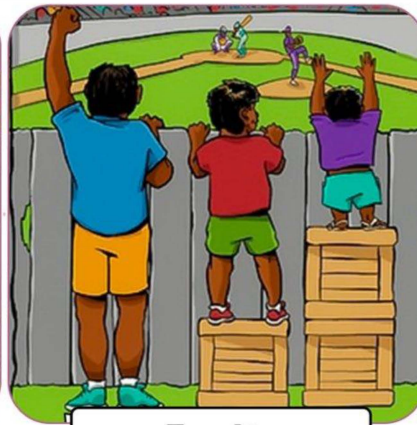
In summary finding out what your neurodiverse team need is simple as asking and listening.

Try new stuff - get it wrong - try again.

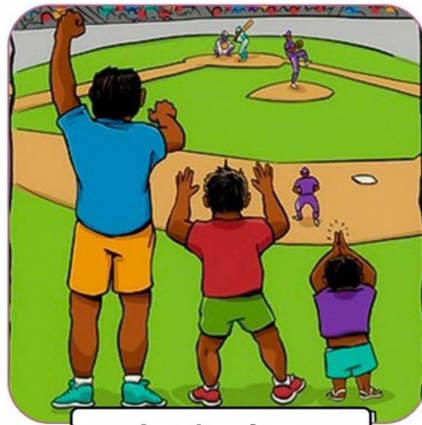
And remember to **fail forward** and be generous to each other when you make mistakes.



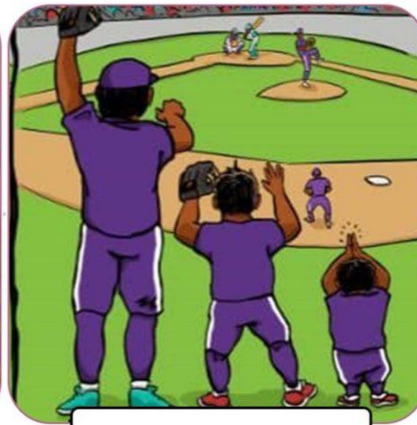
Equality



Equity



Inclusion



Belonging

Remember that Equity means providing accommodations to achieve a fair outcome for ALL those involved.

I'm modulating my voice and giving you eye contact to help you follow along (because apparently that's what neurotypicals need to function well).

I'm sure now that you have some ideas how to help me out in return.

Our end goal is to remove those systemic barriers altogether.

<https://interactioninstitute.org/illustrating-equality-vs-equity/> IISC engaged artist Angus Maguire

<http://madewithangus.com/portfolio/equality-vs-equity/>

Places to go for more



<https://www.neurodiversitymedia.com/>

- Resources in a variety of formats
- Crafted by lived experience
- Training and learning resources for work
- Toolkits for Employers



<https://www.geniuswithin.co.uk/>

- Workplace Needs Assessments
- Positive Assessments
- Awareness training
- Coaching

This talk has been from my experience, and there are plenty of other neurodivergent people with different things to say and need to be heard.

There are loads of great places to go for more information.

Here are two of those that are incredible resources for neurodiversity in the workplace.

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**SYDNEY
DANCE
COMPANY**