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Neurodiverse Perceptions of Inclusivity in the Workplace

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Abstract

The increase in neurodivergent professionals in the workplace has led to a significant need for researchers to examine neurodiversity inclusion in the workplace. Research has portrayed workplace inclusion as the perception that the individual is a valued member of a workgroup through satisfactory experiences of belongingness and uniqueness. Through semi-structured interviews with 20 neurodivergent professionals, this study examined how they view inclusion, exclusion, and cope with exclusion in the workplace. The neurodivergent participants identified six inclusion and six exclusion categories. Results were largely consistent with previous inclusion research, however, one novel category, flexible accommodations, suggests the importance of considerate accommodations that are easy to implement, low cost, and significantly matter to neurodivergent employees. Participants also identified six coping strategies that provide insight into how they cope with exclusion which vary from masking to educating others on their strengths and needs. These results underscore the importance of neurodiversity awareness, and intentional and informed neurodiversity inclusive practices. This research adds to both the theoretical and practical application of neurodiversity inclusion. Practitioners can utilize this research to progress their culture to improve the inclusion of neurodivergent employees, which previous research shows that inclusion practices improve firm performance and provides neurodivergent individuals a pathway to success in their work.

Keywords: neurodiversity, inclusion, exclusion, workplace, autism, ASD, dyslexia, attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder, ADHD, coping

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"If you decide that you're going to do only the things you know are going to work, you're going to leave a lot of opportunity on the table." — Jeff Bezos

Companies are increasingly struggling to attract and retain top talent (De Smet et al., 2021). While at the same time, we have a talented and capable talent supply sitting on the sidelines, ready for the opportunity to demonstrate their unique skills. Neurodivergent individuals (e.g., with autism, attention deficit disorder, and dyslexia) represent a significant proportion of the population. Approximately 15% are actively seeking employment and 75% are either unemployed or underemployed underrepresented (Kaufman, 2021; Thibodeau, 2022). Neurodiversity refers to the neurological differences which occur as normal variations in a human (Gupta, 2021). These neurological variations include autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and Tourette syndrome (Brinzea, 2019). A sociologist diagnosed with autism, Judy Singer (1998), coined the term "neurodiversity." This label refers to normal brain function variations that contain certain developmental disorders (Gupta, 2021).

There is undoubtedly a competitive talent advantage for companies that adopt "inclusion," which is perceived belongingness and respect for uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011). Therefore, company board of directors, CEOs, human resource managers, and leaders can benefit from this research.

The Great Resignation and the need for inclusion

Companies have long sought to gain a competitive advantage through attracting and retaining workforce talent. Unfortunately, the U.S. and other countries are seeing

demand outstrip the supply of workforce talent. Employees have been leaving their jobs at a record pace since April 2021, with McKinsey estimating this number to be 19 million in the United States (De Smet et al., 2021). All business sectors recognize the phenomenon's impact known as "The Great Resignation." The gist of it is relatively simple: through 2021, a significant record of U.S. workers have resigned, approximately 47 million over a 12-month period (Scalerandi, 2022). The great resignation started in April 2021 primarily due to an economic rebound from COVID and continues today, with many firms lacking explicit knowledge of why employees are resigning, despite the efforts to improve (De Smet et al., 2021).

In a recent McKinsey survey, over 40% of employees said they were likely to resign over the next six months, with 18% stating with certainty (De Smet et al., 2021). According to Gartner, outsourcing talent from consulting firms is not a long-term solution, but improvements in how companies retain and attract top talent is the solution (Goasduff, 2021).

Senior executives across a broad array of industries are trying to understand the reasoning behind this phenomenon. A survey of 5,774 people, including employers and employees, was conducted by McKinsey Research (De Smet et al., 2021). This research found that management (employers) cited compensation, work-life balance, and health as top reasons for resignation. In contrast, employees either leaving or planning on leaving indicated that the reasons for resigning were a) the organization did not value them, b) their managers did not value them, or c) they sensed exclusion in the workplace (De Smet et al., 2021). Employee retention is not only useful during extreme tightness in the labor

market, but companies also view employee retention and inclusivity as important even when there is slack in the labor market as a competitive advantage.

For an inclusive workplace to be effective and provide value to the firm, it will require confidence to be yourself without punishment or fear (Edmondson, 2004).

Inclusive leadership allows workers to perceive that they belong to the team or organization and make a unique contribution (Randel et al., 2018). Research indicates workplace inclusion is essential to workers, and lack of inclusion could jeopardize their loyalty to the company.

Inclusive companies are 200% more likely to meet financial goals and 600% more innovative than non-inclusive companies (Hamill, 2019). In addition, employees who perceive inclusion are 42% less likely to resign for another job. Higher inclusion levels provide better employee engagement and well-being, which may lead to improved financial results (Hamill, 2019). The indicators of inclusion are a sense of belonging, improved connections, and teamwork. When people perceive they can be themselves at work, a firm has developed inclusion (Hamill, 2019).

Neurodiversity approach

The neurodiversity approach, which is partially aligned with the social model of disabilities, could inform workplace inclusion for neurodivergent employees. The neurodiversity model (Chapman, 2021) suggests that 1) the disability is the product of neurodivergent characteristics of the environment and the individual. 2) the debility addressed by restructuring the environment and cultural understandings. 3) fixing or controlling the disabled individual should not be the goal. 4) the diversity of cognitive abilities should be valued and accepted as individuals. The social model of disabilities

(Shakespeare, 2006) suggests that 1) impairment is different than disability, 2) defines disability as socially created barriers as opposed to individual deficits, and 3) disabled individuals are an oppressed group.

Person-environment (PE) fit theory

While the neurodiversity approach is rather new, person-environment fit has been studied for many decades. Person-environment fit (PE) occurs when requirements are met for each, and they share essential values providing a fit or match between people and the environment or organization (Kristof, 1996). PE fit perception is defined as the compatibility between an employee and specific characteristics of the work environment (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006). Therefore, PE fit will inform this research for neurodiversity fit inside an organization.

Although PE fit theory will provide the theoretical foundation for this study, we will also adopt a co-evolutionary perspective since the reality is that a permanent and flawless fitting seldom exists, and both people and settings change over time (Van Vianen, 2018).

Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage

The importance of thinking differently and different experiences for increased innovation is widely recognized (Oesh, 2019). The diversity of cognition and skills is attributed to neurodivergent individuals, contributing significantly to the innovative process (Oesh, 2019). While most companies in the U.S. desire to grow through innovation and improve quality and productivity, attracting and retaining top talent is always a difficult challenge (Oesh, 2019).

Neurodivergent individuals comprise approximately 15-20% of the global population (Moeller et al., 2021). With neurodiversity described as a normal variation to the human genome, there is no need to "fix" these individuals; instead, they should be accommodated and better understood (Moeller et al., 2021). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2021), one in 44 adults has ASD, or 2.2% of the population in the U.S. The year-over-year growth rate for those diagnosed with ASD increased from 6% to 15% between 2002 and 2010 (Johnson et al., 2020). Employment participation for individuals without disabilities is 83%, and 54% for those with both mental and physical disabilities, including those that are physically disabled and diagnosed with neurological disorders (Scott et al., 2015). Unfortunately, ASD adult employee participation rate is approximately 34% (Scott et al., 2015). In 2021, a majority (85%) of college-educated adults with ASD were not employed (Society, 2022). With health experts projecting that adults with ASD increasing two-fold over the next decade, companies can expect demands for additional job opportunities for neurodiverse talent (Hensel, 2017). Moreover, neurodivergent individuals have specific strengths and weaknesses that need to be understood (Wiginton, 2021).

Based on Gartner, by encouraging neurodiversity, organizations can reap considerable benefits in innovation, creativity, and an abundance of solution possibilities (Gupta, 2021). According to Ernst and Young, firms that provide inclusiveness to top neurodivergent employees gain an advantage in productivity and innovation with increased talent retention (Hofman, 2020).

Research has shown that neurodivergent individuals possess exceptional strengths in information technology and data sciences (Remington & Fairnie, 2017). While these

domains offer opportunities for many on the neurodiverse spectrum, many others offer a better fit. Other strengths include increased productivity or quality of work. JP Morgan Chase, through their neurodiversity program, hired over 155 neurodivergent adults in 40 roles from technology, engineering, and quality assurance with a 95% retention rate (Scheiner, 2020). J.P. Morgan Chase reports that neurodivergent professionals are 40% more productive and make fewer errors than their neurotypical counterparts (Hofman, 2020). Microsoft started its neurodiversity program in 2015 with over 100 neurodivergent hires, primarily in technology roles, with a 92% retention rate (Scheiner, 2020). At Ernst and Young, a top four accounting firm with 700 offices in over 150 countries, their neurodiverse hiring initiative has tracked better productivity of these individuals while sparking innovation with their unique way of thinking (Hofman, 2020). Most of the roles filled by the neurodiversity programs are in technology, limiting long-term growth. At the same time, neurodivergent adult participants college graduates range from humanities, communication, business, and the arts (Scheiner, 2020).

Many neurodivergent individuals have higher cognitive recall, mathematical skills, pattern detection, and spatial perception (Haynes, 2022). For example, JetBlue founder David Neeleman attributes his contribution to ADHD. Temple Grandin, an author, animal sciences professor, and advocate for ASD, also assigns successes to her ASD. The inclusion of neurodiversity acknowledges that accommodations are not the only issue; instead, the process should recognize the strengths and skills of those that process, absorb content, and think differently (Haynes, 2022).

Neurodiverse employment barriers

Finding and keeping a job is a significant barrier for the disabled. In the United States (U.S.), only one-third of disabled people are active labor participants (Bonaccio et al., 2020). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, disabled individuals are less likely to attend college and earn a degree than those without (Statistics, 2021). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicates that only 22% of adults with ASD are actively employed (Society, 2021). The degree of unemployment among those with ASD is around 80%, and 46% of those employed are overqualified for the job (Society, 2021).

One reason for the low employment rate for neurodiverse adults is the perceived lack of organizational fit or lack of obedience to social norms rather than work effort or skill (Haynes, 2022). Even when employed, research shows that Neurodivergent employees are paid below average for the same job function (Haynes, 2022). A neurodiverse individual's contribution to an organization is not only their skillset but depends on environmental factors such as attitudes, availability of support, and organizational understanding (Bölte et al., 2014). Negative views about the abilities of neurodivergent adults are one of the primary reasons for the lower participation rates and underemployment (Bonaccio et al., 2020). Employment challenges are due to organizational prejudice, inflexibility, and lack of accommodations (Anderson et al., 2021). Individuals with autism see the world differently from the majority and have exceptional talents, perspectives, and skills that can benefit the organization (Bonaccio et al., 2020). Autistic individuals often lack social skills and behaviors and may have sensory intolerance issues, which is problematic when encountering stigma inside the organization rooted in unawareness (Bonaccio et al., 2020). Neurodiversity behaviors can

counter what some organizations consider a good employee, such as solid communication skills, networking skills, persuasiveness, and extravertive behaviors (Haynes, 2022).

Typically because of traits such as social blindness, unusual tone of voice, and lack of eye contact, these individuals encounter barriers in the interview process or sustaining the position once employed (Bonaccio et al., 2020). Therefore, educating the workforce on neurodiversity traits will provide a clear competitive advantage in attracting and retaining these individuals with unique skills and talents (Anderson et al., 2021).

While many universities are comfortable providing accommodations to undergraduate neurodivergent students, the modern workplace is still ill-prepared for neurodivergent individuals and, in numerous instances, is unreceptive to these individuals (Patton, 2019). This is somewhat surprising because under the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008, employers who overlook prejudice against neurodivergent adults could be exposed to legal liability (Hensel, 2017).

What are successful companies doing to improve neurodiversity inclusion?

"Neurodiversity @ Work Roundtable," which includes large corporations such as Microsoft, JPMorgan Chase, SAP, and Ford, allows leaders to discuss, develop, and implement neurodiversity hiring programs (Bernick, 2022). Although most programs are new, SAP's autism initiatives are reaping benefits beyond improving their reputation and are already paying off beyond character enhancement (Austin & Pisano, 2017). The benefits include better quality, innovation, productivity, and engagement (Austin & Pisano, 2017). Another benefit of the neurodiversity program is the understanding that all employees have different needs, and managers are now recognizing this opportunity (Austin & Pisano, 2017). SAP's neurodiversity program allows management to know

neurodivergent employees and improves the management process (Austin & Pisano, 2017). The pace of hiring neurodivergent individuals increases as more employers learn from these programs (Bernick, 2022).

An inclusive workplace is accommodating, cooperative, accessible, just, courteous, and responsible (Hofman, 2020). The seven components of employee inclusion are access to resources, allowing an employee's voice in work-related decisions, valued for their uniqueness and talent, an opportunity to develop, a strong sense of connection within the team, promotion of diverse ideas, and a sense of belonging (Hofman, 2020). The cost of training and supervising neurodiverse employees are reaped by tapping into the unique skills of these employees and the positive impact on their co-workers and those outside the organization (Martin et al., 2022). To gain the advantages of a diverse team, companies must recognize that people naturally differ in decision-making, relationships, and skills (Haynes, 2022). Therefore, companies need to understand the importance of inclusiveness and perspectives from diverse communities. Neurodiversity programs provide a valuable practical contribution and an opportunity to advance theoretical management research value (Krzeminska et al., 2019).

Another contribution to inclusion relies heavily on the job coach, which helps managers understand, communicate and support the worker (Martin et al., 2022). This coach acts as a buffer between the manager and the neurodivergent employee, providing feedback and constructive methods to both parties (Martin et al., 2022).

Purpose and contribution of this research

The inclusion of neurodivergent adults can infuse talent that has been untapped for generations. Moreover, companies can utilize an inclusive culture throughout talent

management. Thus, companies that adopt a culture of neurodiversity inclusion may successfully create a significant competitive advantage.

Since there have been few organizational research studies on neurodiversity in the workplace, there is a significant opportunity to understand existing concepts and theories related to a neurodiversity boundary condition (Vogus & Taylor, 2018). Therefore, developing novel research in neurodiverse inclusion should lead to new insights that would benefit companies seeking to draw and keep top talent, government policy decisions, the neurodiverse community, and the entire workforce. This research will explore the elements of inclusion from the perspective of the neurodiverse community. This research will extend the recent work of Burton et al. (2022) in the United Kingdom by studying the perceptions of neurodivergent working adults outside the UK.

This research aims to understand workplace inclusion better and provide insight into attracting and retaining top talent through neurodiversity inclusion. This research intends to build on the research surrounding both person-environment (PE) fit and the neurodiversity approach. The neurodiversity programs raise important questions about how firms organize to create better value, such as hiring, developing, and converting employee talent into value as competitive conditions evolve from production to innovation (Krzeminska et al., 2019). Since approximately 15-20% of the global population is neurodiverse, research into inclusion from their perspective is valuable and worth integrating with inclusivity theories. Therefore, understanding how neurodivergent people experience inclusion at work is essential for theory advancement and building a more inclusive workplace.

Research impacting public policies for neurodivergent employees should recognize the importance of inclusion and fit between the workplace, work teams, management, and the neurodivergent employee. Research into the perceptions of neurodivergent professions may inform policymakers and bring more attention to the importance of neurodiversity inclusion.

Research questions

1. How do neurodivergent professionals experience inclusion at work?
2. How do neurodivergent professionals experience exclusion at work?
3. How do neurodivergent professionals cope with exclusion at work?

Using the theories of PE and the neurodiversity approach, this research seeks to understand what takes place in the workplace in which neurodivergent employees find inclusive and feel they are a good fit. Conversely, our research should provide insight into how a neurodivergent employee is not fitting in or rather a “misfit” and how they cope with exclusion. Utilizing PE fit theory will enhance this understanding.

PE fit theory provides a real-world theoretical background for comprehending how person and environment interactions that do not fit produce tension or stress, and resolving the misfit condition may involve coping strategies, defensive strategies, or finding a new environment (Edwards et al., 2002). Therefore, a better understanding of this construct is important not only to companies hiring neurodiverse employees but also to the research surrounding PE fit and the neurodiversity approach.

Summary

Many companies attempt to attract and retain neurodivergent individuals by implementing basic accommodations prescribed by law. However, low employment rates

still exist for neurodivergent individuals, even with these measures, while companies today struggle to find top-tier talent. This study expands research on workplace inclusion, neurodiversity, and PE fit to provide insight to companies seeking top neurodiverse talent. Unlocking insights for neurodiversity inclusion can provide companies with unique opportunities to employ talented individuals that are unemployed or underemployed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Neurodiversity at work

The term neurodiversity refers to the concept that humans experience their environment in many different ways and that natural variations occur in learning, behaving, and thinking, thus focusing attention on the differences without trying to cure the deficits (Baumer, 2021). Singer coined the term ‘‘neurodiversity’’ as a potential identity category such as class, gender, or race, noting that humans with neurological conditions are part of the normal variation of the human brain functions with no need for a cure but understanding (Singer, 1998). Since then, neurodiversity research and discussion have quickly spread with the support of the internet (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). Thus, the term neurodiversity contains conflicting definitions, depending on the perspective of neuroscience, psychology, or social activism, such as psychologists study neurodiversity as a ‘within-individuals’ instead of a ‘between-individuals’ phenomenon (Pollak, 2009). Table 1 provides a basic understanding of common terms and descriptions.

Table 1

Definition or descriptions of terms surrounding neurodiversity

Label	Description
Neurodivergent	A non-medical term that describes people whose brain develops or works differently for some reason. This means the person has different strengths and challenges from people who are typical (Ortega & Choudhury, 2011).
Neurominority	A subset of people whose communication and cognitive thinking differs from the majority of the population (Hull et al., 2017).
Neurodiverse	Refers to a group of people where some members are neurodivergent (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012).
Neurotypical	Persons not affected with a neurological disorder exhibit typical neurological development characteristics (Romoser, 2000).

Although neurodiversity originated to explain and support those with ASD, it has extended to persons with other cognitive and social debilities, such as ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and Tourette syndrome (Brinzea, 2019). Table 2 outlines three common neurological disorders commonly associated with neurodiverse. For a complete list of definitions and descriptions, see Appendix A.

Table 2

Neurological disorders commonly associated with neurodivergent

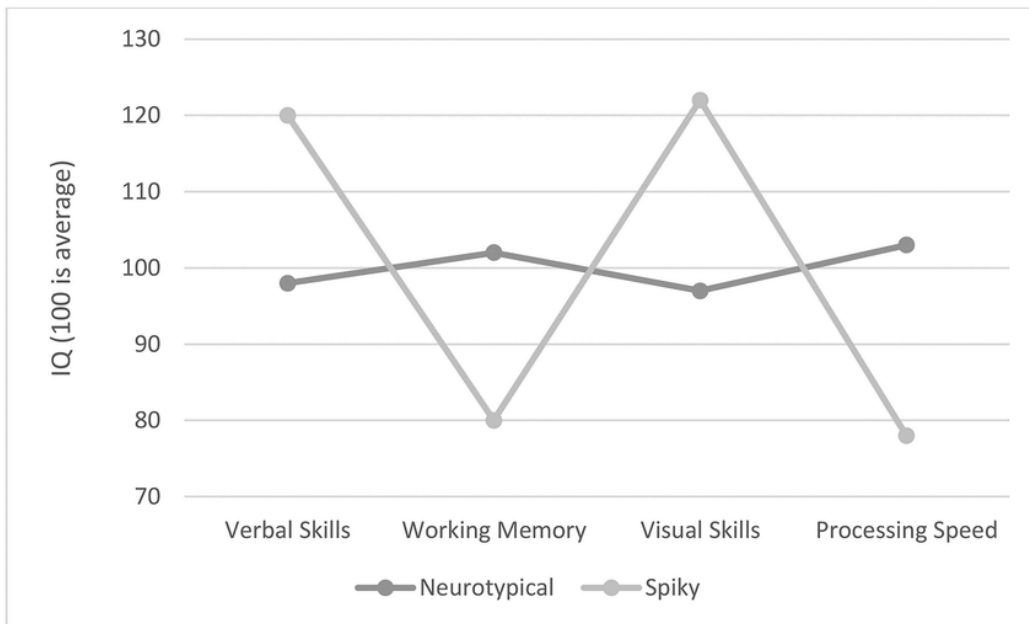
Condition	Description
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	“Autism Spectrum Disorders are neurodiverse conditions that affect how people communicate and interact with other people, characterized by rigid thinking, restrictive and repetitive behaviors, and social communication challenges. People with ASD may be overly dependent on routines, susceptible to changes in their environment, to bright lights, noises, smells, textures, or tastes, and may display inappropriate behavior” (Brinzea, 2019)
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	“is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood, lasting often into adulthood, it involves the part of the brain that controls impulses, self-regulation and inhibition and it is characterized by a persistent pattern of inattention (that makes it difficult for people to finish tasks) and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity (leading people to speak and act without thinking, to interrupt others and to have difficulty waiting their turn). Poor concentration may lead people with ADHD to become absent-minded, easily distracted and easily bored or having poor organizational skills” (Prevention, 2019)
Dyslexia	“causes difficulties with reading, writing and spelling, with working memory and short-term memory, with rapid naming, concentration and time management and organization” (APA)

Neurodivergent individual’s cognitive ability typically contains large variability within their profile with statistically significant differences between peaks and troughs (Doyle, 2020). The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (Wechsler, 1955) is one of the more frequently used intelligence tests that includes scores on Verbal Comprehension (VC), Perceptual Reasoning (PR), Working Memory (WM), and Processing Speed (PS).

Individuals with index results that fall within two standard deviations from each other indicate neurotypical, which is the majority of the population, and those that cross the threshold of two or more standard deviations are different from the neurotypical majority (Doyle, 2020). People diagnosed with ASD, ADHD, or dyslexia maintain greater divides between their peaks, which are their strengths, and valleys, which are their challenges, than the majority neurotypical population (Kirby & Smith, 2021). This study indicates that while neurodivergent individuals may have weaknesses or deficits in certain areas, there are generally opposite strengths in other areas. They indicate a more specialized approach to thinking than generalized one. Figure 1 depicts an average IQ score of 100 from the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale and contrasts the difference between a neurotypical and a person with a “spiky” profile (Doyle, 2020).

Figure 1

Contrast IQ that is spiky versus neurotypical



Source: (Doyle, 2020)

Neurodiversity models

Several models have been used to describe disabilities. Three of these models are described along a spectrum. The medical model implies that the disability or disorder resides within a person and requires a cure or regulating the person towards the majority of the population (Szasz & Hollender, 1956). On the opposite side of the spectrum is the social model of disability, which describes the debility or disorder between society and the person (Oliver, 2013). This model states that these impairments are not limiting unless society places constraints on the disabled. Moreover, the social model proposes that disability be tackled by remodeling society to provide increased accessibility, accommodation, and lessening discrimination and stigma (Dwyer, 2022). The neurodiversity approach is in the middle of these two models. The neurodiversity approach (Chapman, 2021) suggests that 1) the disability is the product of neurodivergent individual features and the environment. 2) the debility can be addressed by reforming the societal views of neurodiversity and the setting. 3) the goal should not be healing or normalizing the disabled individual. 4) the diversity of cognitive abilities should be valued, and neurodivergent individuals should be acknowledged for who they are.

Previous research from this business context raises some concerns with the Neurodiversity approach. While (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012) acknowledge that neurodiversity should be accepted and accommodated by society, they also suggest that others on the spectrum have more significant needs for accommodation or government assistance. They disagree with the neurodiversity approach because acceptance does not help difficulties with relationships, communication, sensory issues, and rigid behaviors. On the other hand, a precise diagnosis has advantages and disadvantages, which parents

and adults must realize to make appropriate choices. Psychiatric diagnoses carry real consequences, such as stigmatization risk, labeling, symptomatic cynicism, and threats to individuality (Nelson, 2021). On the other hand, many neurodivergent individuals benefit from their diagnosis, be it therapy, education, empathy from co-workers or managers, or simply having resources to improve their daily experience (Nelson, 2021).

Person-environment fit theory

Many companies desire to select and retain employees that meet the job's demands, adapt to changing conditions, and remain loyal and committed. In contrast, employees want to work for companies that use their skills best and meet their express requirements (Caplan, 1987). PE fit occurs when needs are met for both the person and environment, and they share essential values providing a fit between people and the setting or organization (Kristof, 1996). PE fit perception is the compatibility between the work setting and the employee, which is a general construct inclusive of organization, group, job, and other persons (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006).

A person-job fit (PJ) is the employee's abilities relating to specific job demands or the needs of an employee with specific job rewards (Kristof, 1996). Neurodivergent employees may have different needs than neurotypical, and conversely, companies may have specific job demands that relate better to a neurodiverse workforce with unique skill sets. A person-organization (PO) fit focuses on the degree to which companies and employees contribute to values and meet the desires of both the employee and the company or organizations (Chatman, 1989). A person-group (PG) fit is the interpersonal compatibility between an employee and their workgroup or team (Judge & Ferris, 1992). Previous literature suggests that many neurodivergent employees may have difficulty

with interpersonal communication (Szulc et al., 2021). Thus, it is essential to understand how neurodivergent employees view their group fit. Studies around the specific environmental aspects such as PJ, PO, and PG fit represent the majority of the research in PE fit (Edwards & Billsberry, 2010).

PE fit theory provides a real-world theoretical framework for learning how non-fit produces tension or stress in the individual and environment. Resolving the misfit condition may involve coping strategies, defensive strategies, or finding a new environment (Edwards et al., 2002). Previous research found stress or tension with the degree of misfit (Edwards et al., 2002). Understanding how neurodivergent employees perceive fit and misfit with specific environmental conditions provides insight into how we can reduce tension in a neurodiverse workforce.

PE fit is also related to a person's desire to satisfy their independence, relatedness, and competence, which relate to better job performance and affective organizational commitment (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009). The neurodiversity approach focuses on identity, relating to others, and their unique skillset instead of deficits. PE fit ties into workforce inclusion based on belongingness and uniqueness, which is also found in the neurodiversity approach. Qualitative research designed to provide an understanding of working neurodivergent adults' experiences and barriers they faced at work found that nearly all the respondents either directly or indirectly voiced 1) external perceptions of neurodiversity, 2) identity degradation, 3) self-identity, 4) organizational obstacles, 5) neurodiversity empowerment, and 6) language regarding neurodiversity (Burton et al., 2022). This qualitative research of 21 neurodivergent adults ranging in age from 21 to 60 found that neurodivergent individuals are negatively impacted by stereotyping, identity

degradation, lack of accommodations, and lack of flexibility (Burton et al., 2022). Burton et al. (2022) called for future research that studies the lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals in the workplace outside the United Kingdom.

Therefore, understanding how neurodivergent employees perceive inclusion will contribute to the neurodiversity approach and PE research. As the research on PE fit amasses, it becomes apparent that growing our knowledge of PE fit, in the separation of time and setting, is inadequate (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006). An example of this inadequacy is a psychometric examination, a test designed for neurotypical employees and a common process for discovering PJ fit, decreasing the neurodivergent selection (Burton et al., 2022).

Neurodiversity strengths and challenges

When discussing neurodiversity in the workforce, challenges and potential advantages are brought forth. Thus, when discussing the hiring and retention of neurodivergent persons, we need to understand that necessary accommodations vary depending on individual needs (Brinzea, 2019). While it is acknowledged that various accommodations are necessary for neurodivergent adults, understanding the strengths and challenges of each diagnosis is equally important.

Between 15-20% of the global population is neurodiverse, with 10% diagnosed with dyslexia, 5% diagnosed with ADHD, and 2% with ASD (Montvelisky, 2021). Therefore, dyslexia, ADHD, and ASD account for approximately 85% of the neurodiverse community. This research will focus on the most widely diagnosed neurodiverse disorders in the workplace, including ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia.

ADHD may have strengths in creative thinking, spatial reasoning, hyper-focusing, passion, and courage (White & Shah, 2006). The challenges with ADHD are time management, concentration, insomnia, depression, maintaining employment, and difficulty with teamwork (Kessler et al., 2009).

ASD may have strengths in memory, including other specific skills (such as math, music, and reading), novel thinking, hyper-focused, and detailed examination (Doyle, 2020). The challenges with ASD are time management, concentration, coping with multiple tasks, social, communication, and the need for routine (Doyle, 2020). As discussed previously, ASD is on a spectrum with difficulties and strengths varying among those diagnosed.

Dyslexia may have gifts in entrepreneurialism, originality, visual reasoning, spatial expertise, and storytelling (Eide & Eide, 2012). At the same time, they display weaknesses in literacy, memory, organizational skills, and time management (Doyle, 2020).

Inclusion at work

The workplace climate can be unfriendly and sometimes hostile to neurodivergent employees, making it difficult for them to feel included and comfortable participating in social gatherings (Robertson, 2009). Research conducted in the United Kingdom provided a qualitative study of 237 ASD adults and found 83 percent of those surveyed strong or very strong that the most noteworthy real-world obstacles faced resulted from the lack of acceptance and knowledge of their variances by their peers (Beardon & Edmonds, 2007). Thus, it is necessary to understand why the benefits and desires of

neurodivergent employees pose a critical opportunity to examine current inclusion at work theories.

The inclusion theories attach significant standing to belongingness and appreciation, which are related to certain arrangements of social activity (Dobusch, 2021). Inclusion, as defined by Shore et al. (2011), is the gradation of the perception that the individual is a valued member of a workgroup through satisfactory experiences of belongingness and uniqueness. Based on this description, inclusion is seen as the satisfaction of individual needs within a group that entails belongingness and uniqueness, and the work team is responsible for including diverse team members, rather than the diverse person changing themselves to fit in (Jansen et al., 2014). One of the distinguishing characteristics of Shore et al. (2011) framework of inclusion is the idea that people desire belonging and valued for their uniqueness. Whereas, some diversity models emphasize the advantages of similarity, thus leaning on belongingness and not the distinctiveness theme, which invites assimilation as opposed to inclusion (Shore et al., 2011).

A close-fitting connection between belongingness and a specific method of assembly participation can diminish the opportunities for neurodivergent employees to feel included since additional efforts may be necessary to conform with social demands (Dobusch, 2021). While many neurodivergent professionals face communication and social challenges, it does not imply that neurodivergent individuals devalue social relationships. Many try for close and deep relationships but do not automatically conform with neurotypical criteria (Hendricks, 2010). Therefore, if we acknowledge that organizational inclusion concepts have boundary conditions for neurodivergent

employees, we can close the gap from aspiration to reality of inclusive practices in the workplace (Dobusch, 2021).

Inclusion, discrimination, and legal issues for neurodiverse employees

Three U.S. federal statutes that defend the disabled at work are the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and amended by the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against disabled persons by federal agencies, federal contractors, and those receiving federal financial assistance (Larson, 1986). The Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 extended this mandate to all areas of life, including private employment, transportation, public entities, and public accommodations (Hensel, 2017). The 2008 ADA Amendments Act increased the list of actions that institute major life actions, including thinking and communicating, all of which some courts had previously refused to recognize (Barry, 2010). The EEOC adjoined interacting with others to its regulatory catalog. Companies working in good faith can evaluate at the start of the relationship whether higher interpersonal skills are an indispensable function of the job or merely pleasing in an interview setting (Hensel, 2017).

Few evidence-based research has been produced for understanding work discrimination and by what means it may cause the group's overall employment challenges (Van Wieren et al., 2008). However, feelings of unfairness toward co-workers can emerge regarding invisible neurological and psychological disorders. The EEOC in the U.S. recommends employers not reveal medical conditions connected to special accommodations to co-workers (Patton, 2019). The non-disclosure of an employee's medical condition provides perceived prejudice on the part of coworkers because they

lack an understanding of a neurodivergent employee's requirements for special accommodations (Patton, 2019).

Past literature suggests a strong argument for the disclosure of ASD as vital to workplace success. Gentry et al. (2015) suggest that people may be more willing to excuse exasperating behavior if there is a documented reason. Those who disclosed their diagnosis to their employer were more than three times as likely to be employed as those who did not (Ohl et al., 2017). Disclosure of ASD may influence the attitudes of co-workers and managers toward individuals with this disability (Pfeiffer et al., 2017).

While PE fit provides a theoretical understanding of employee fit inside a workplace organization, inclusion research provides mechanisms to understand how the organization can improve fit through inclusion. The neurodiversity approach seeks the inclusion of neurodivergent individuals through a better understanding of unique neurodivergent traits where there are both strengths and weaknesses. Thus, understanding how neurodivergent employees perceive inclusion, exclusion, and coping with exclusion is critical for companies to diversify their talent pool, remain compliant with EEOC statutes, and build an inclusive work culture.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This study's methods are rooted in a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory procedures are intended to develop a cohesive set of concepts that explain a social phenomenon through a lens of rigorous theoretical underpinning (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). To understand the perceptions of neurodivergent professionals, the study utilized semi-structured interviews with neurodiverse working adults that have disclosed to their employers their neurological variations such as ASD, dyslexia, or ADHD. Procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the University of Missouri- St. Louis institutional review board (IRB), and all participants provided informed consent.

Since neurodivergent adults were interviewed, the interview mechanisms were flexible to gain the most insightful responses. Adjustments were made in the interview to respect the communication requirements or constraints of the neurodiverse participant (Martin et al., 2022). Flexible strategies allowed for increased participation with communication challenges and high anxiety levels. Respecting autistic preferences for contributing to research through online text, via Zoom, or in person provided accessible means of communication, specifically for participants who have issues with auditory handling, transportation, or social exchanges (Nicolaidis et al., 2019). Therefore, offering various mediums for interviews ensured interview inclusion.

Participants

Twenty neurodivergent professionals provided data through semi-structured interviews. Each of these participants was clinically diagnosed with Dyslexia (15%), ADHD (40%), or ASD (45%). The interview protocol provided flexibility for two separate interviews due to perceived question fatigue. However, only two participants

desired two interviews, and the rest chose to continue the interview process instead of scheduling an additional interview. The interview duration ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, with an average of 70 minutes.

The age of the participants ranged from 26 to 64 years, with an average of 39.5. The gender of participants was 45% female and 55% male. All participants were White. Work experience ranged from 2 to 27 years, averaging 12.5 years. All participants met the following criteria for sample inclusion:

1. Adult (over 24 years old).
2. Reside in the United States of America.
3. 4-year college graduate
4. Medically diagnosed with dyslexia, ADHD, or ASD.
5. Minimum two years of work experience within the last ten years (part-time or full-time and not necessarily with the same company) beyond college.
6. Work experience averaged over 20 work hours per week.
7. Disclosed to the employer, supervisor, or work team that they are neurodivergent with Dyslexia, ADHD, or ASD. Whether or not accommodations were requested.

Recruitment and data collection procedures

Participants were recruited from my personal network, LinkedIn, Specialisterne (a neurodivergent job support agency), and Neurodiverse Brains in the Workplace (a neurodivergent job support agency).

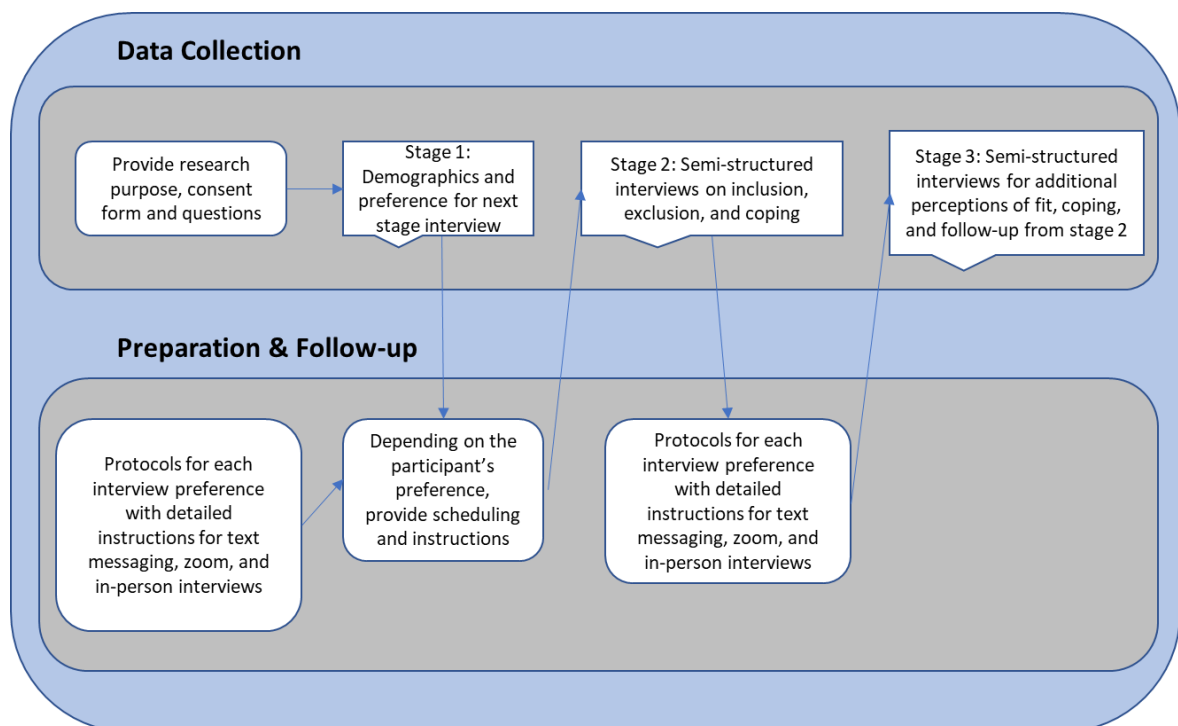
The interview process was designed for up to three stages should the participant encounter question fatigue. See Figure 2 for a diagram of the interview process. Only two (10%) chose to break up their interviews into two. The rest chose to continue the

interview process. The questions were emailed to participants one week before the interview.

Drawing from Walkowiak (2021), neurodivergent individuals may have difficulties in in-person or virtual interviews with cameras because of increased anxiety. Therefore, participants were given a choice to interview in person, via Zoom with a camera off or on, or chat through Zoom. All participants chose a Zoom interview, with twenty percent preferring the camera off and the rest choosing to keep the camera on. To guard the confidentiality of the participant information, pseudonyms were chosen by each participant.

Figure 2

Data collection stages and preparation



Inter-rater reliability

To eliminate bias throughout the coding process, a second researcher with similar knowledge and expertise in the field assisted in reliability testing. To attain better reliability, re-coding was necessary. NVIVO software was utilized to reduce the processing time of coding and categorization. Another DBA cohort member agreed to assist in the inter-rater reliability. We used four transcripts out of twenty to review. The first review revealed an inter-rater reliability of 64%.

After discussion and review of transcripts, the codes were consolidated from 31 to 18 categories. These categories are built at a higher level from the initial codes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Once the 31 codes were consolidated into 18 categories, our inter-rater reliability increased to 79.5%.

Chapter 4: Results

Our findings reveal neurodivergent perceptions of inclusion, exclusion, and coping with exclusion in the workplace. Overall, results indicate six inclusion themes, six exclusion themes, and six ways neurodivergent professionals cope with exclusion. Table 3 provides a list of inclusion and exclusion themes provided by neurodivergent participants. Table 4 provides an overview of the coping strategies identified in this study.

Table 3

Perceived inclusion and exclusion themes from a neurodivergent perspective

Inclusion Themes	Exclusion Themes
Psychological safety	Toxic culture
Flexible accommodations	Lack of flexible accommodations
Feeling heard	Feeling unheard
Understanding of neurodiversity	Lack of neurodiversity awareness
Close connections with co-workers	Social ostracism
Appreciation	Feeling unappreciated

Inclusion

Findings related to our primary research question, “How do neurodivergent professionals perceive inclusion at work?” significantly add to existing theory. The Gartner Inclusion Index lists seven elements of inclusion in the workplace, fair treatment or fair recognition and rewards, integrating differences or respecting and valuing each other’s opinions, decision-making by considering the ideas and suggestions offered by other team members, psychological safety, trust, belonging or people in my organization caring about me, and diversity (Romansky et al., 2021). Through our semi-structured

interviews, neurodivergent participants supported previous research and added novel categories they perceived as inclusion. The six inclusion themes that emerged from this study include psychological safety, flexible accommodations, feeling heard, understanding of neurodiversity, close connections with co-workers, and appreciation.

Psychological safety

Psychological safety is an environment where employees do not fear speaking up, asking for help, or admitting mistakes (Edmondson, 1999). Therefore, psychological safety allows individuals to bring their identity or authentic self to work without punishment. Sixty percent of the participants identified psychological safety as essential for feeling included.

When you're at work and you are allowed to voice your own opinions. So, I felt included when I felt safe to voice my opinions. Derek (ASD)

So, with them, being willing to be flexible and including me and the ways that I process stuff, I really felt like it was a safe environment for me. Linda (Dyslexia)

My boss publicly shared; how he was so stressed out and anxious when he was being interviewed. His willingness to share that publicly was like this chink in my armor. What it said to me was that in this place that I could not be perfect. This is a place that I could have weaknesses and admit that I'm not good at budgeting. Overall, this job has been the first to provide a safe environment for me to be able to say, hey, this is a thing I'm struggling with and I'm on medication for it. Diego (ADHD)

And it's okay to be different and succeed in this company. Instead of, that's not normal or you're different. Drake (ASD)

It would be voicing saying, hey, I'd love to accept you for who you are, come with us. It's the natural ability of somebody to join to naturally join. Patrick (ASD)

Flexible accommodations

Seventy-five percent of our participants identified reasonable, flexible accommodations at work as essential to feel included. Their responses did not refer to

legal accommodations where they had to document or formally request from Human Resources. Instead, these were flexible accommodations made voluntarily by their team (co-workers) or supervisor. These accommodations were often made based on the team's understanding of neurodiversity and the neurodivergent individual's needs.

So, I think it was the company's patience and flexibility that provided me the drive to want to do my best. So, a dry-erase marker and board help me exponentially. I mean, it's amazing for me. Mary (ADHD/ASD)

So, my co-workers understand me in meetings. They understand and encourage me when I just pop up out of my chair at a conventional meeting where everybody sits around the table. Everybody in the meeting allows me to get out of my chair and give my idea out on the board. No one made me feel like that was awkward or odd, or it they just flow right with. Mary (ADHD/ASD)

Just being able to let me leave work early has been a super big help for sure. Belinda (Dyslexia)

It just makes me feel included that I have a lot of the physical resources available for me to be able to accomplish my job tasks so like those gels that I was mentioning or being able to utilize, my phone to read something to me, being able to wear headphones while I'm at work. Jake (Dyslexia)

I appreciate it when my actual manager would check in with me to kind of give me more insights that maybe I wouldn't have known otherwise. So, to be able to debrief that and to have it explicitly like laid out was helpful. Alice (ASD)

Feeling heard

Feeling heard is the belief that one's input, whether questions or ideas, will be recognized and addressed or responded to (Kerrissey et al., 2022). One must be invited to the implicit or explicit conversation to be heard. Eighty percent of the participants voiced feeling heard as a means of feeling included.

And being out there, and that was my job, and I was a duty expert, for it made me feel close because they came and asked me. Hey, how would you do this, or is this possible for us to do it? Carl (ADHD)

The idea that my opinion was valued feels inclusive. Mitch (ADHD)

I feel included in meetings where I feel like my input is valued. Lauren (ASD)

In my current job now, I feel that I'm heard and my input is appreciated. Belinda (Dyslexia)

Also having people listen to your ideas. I do have input and feel included when I'm being heard. That means not only listening to me but taking my input seriously and not pacifying me. Doris (ADHD)

Understanding of neurodiversity

Understanding of neurodiversity in the workplace refers to the knowledge of colleagues that neurodiversity exists and the understanding of neurodiversity based on information or experience. Forty percent of the participants voiced that awareness and understanding of neurodiversity were essential to feel included. 75% of respondents indicating flexible accommodations as a component of being included suggests that for flexible accommodations to exist, awareness and understanding of neurodiversity already existed and was necessary to provide flexible accommodations. Therefore, it may be reasonable to assume that awareness and understanding of neurodiversity may precede flexible accommodations.

Everybody knew I was autistic. There was no issue whatsoever. There's no issue because they understand me and now people are very great about it." Sam (ASD)

In my place of work, neurodiversity is more understood mainly because there's several of us who are on the spectrum. I'm not alone." Daisy (ASD)

He finally understands me. I think he's starting to figure out what works for me. He is also understanding what I can do. That makes me feel great. Just having companies being open and understanding that we are different. And the companies want you to be included. Derek (ASD)

Close connections with co-workers

A network connection is strong when the two parties involved in the relationship have known each other for a long time, communicate frequently, or feel emotionally

attached (Marsden & Campbell, 1984). Close connection strength relies on social similarities and close proximity (Reagans, 2011). Therefore, research suggests that close connections are the opposite of social ostracism and a perception that others or an individual have a shared connection, which would include an invitation to social events, trust, engagement, and provide positive reinforcement. Eighty-five percent of participants indicated that close connections were critical to feeling included.

I have one co-worker who is very understanding, and they take time out of their day to make sure that I know what's going on. They remind me to relax when I'm getting stressed. Out of all my co-workers only one that sits next to me understands more than everyone else. But I think that has a lot to do with the fact that I have shared information. I trust this person explicitly enough to tell them that that I was diagnosed. Cadvan (ASD)

Relationships are built over time. It's someone that I have come over time to appreciate their wisdom. It was not an overnight relationship. It evolved, and I just seemed to me that bit of wisdom seemed right. And over time I learned to appreciate their perspective. A personal relationship with the folks. My next-door office neighbor and I have a personal relationship that relieves the isolation. Mitch (ADHD)

The top things that make me feel included is connection and that is a big one. If you feel like someone's invested in your personal growth and development that helps motivate you to want to do your job well. So, I'd say connection is probably number one, because if someone's routing for you as an individual that's a game changer. Just being able to chat with co-workers about their lives, their pets, and other connections. Whatever that is always helps to make you feel included. Alice (ASD)

Close connections certainly build trust for sure. Being invited helps me feel included even if I don't ever go. Just being invited even if it is a loud, bright, and chaotic environment, I might pop in for like 20 min and leave. Lauren (ASD)

Appreciation

The five components of appreciation are words of affirmation, quality time, showing appreciation through actions, tangible gifts, and individual-focused praise

(White, 2017). Seventy percent of participants shared examples of appreciation for feeling included.

I complete this stuff, and everybody would clap. And that made me feel really included because it felt like I would. You know I was getting congratulations for doing something. Cat (ASD)

Being recognized for my unique skills. Doris (ADHD)

People see that your knowledge and in the work that you're putting in. And then, at the end of the year after the season was over, there was a part where they recognize the coaches. Well, during all that, I felt really included. Paul (ADHD)

I think this is a big one for inclusion and it applies to everyone which is appreciation. Just knowing that you feel appreciated, and the work that you're doing is appreciated. Belinda (Dyslexia)

Exclusion

Our second goal was to understand how neurodivergent professionals perceive exclusion at work. Through semi-structured interviews, our participants shared that they perceive exclusion in six ways: toxic culture, lack of flexible accommodations, feeling unheard, lack of neurodiversity awareness, social ostracism, and feeling unappreciated.

Toxic culture

A toxic culture includes disrespecting behaviors such as ridicule, lack of trust, unethical behavior such as harassment, lack of managerial transparency, and lack of diversity (Sull et al., 2022). Eighty percent of participants shared that a toxic culture in the workplace made them feel excluded.

Other co-workers would be bullying others and myself. They would point out mistakes publicly and imply or directly say that we were dumb. Also, certain co-workers would gossip about others to make them look bad. Lauren (ASD)

The head of the department came out and said there is no chance of you are ever being promoted. You are going to have to find another job, or you're going to have to leave the company. I also know 3 people in my department getting

promoted over me with less experience and education. Then they put it in writing that there was no chance of my ever being promoted, even though I have more experience and have more credentials than those being promoted. I understood that there was no future for me with this company. Sam (ASD)

Usually, what would make me feel excluded is if there was a hostile like work environment, for example, the place feels like a really tense like. You're constantly stepping on eggshells every time you're there. Caroline (ASD)

Another perspective of things that make me feel less included is when we have patient interactions, and they start either making fun of people with disabilities and neural disabilities or not neurotypical. Jake (Dyslexia)

Lack of flexible accommodations

Some neurodivergent disabilities create more negative reactions than visible disabilities, as there is stigma related to neurodivergent diagnosis and undesirable social issues (Syma, 2019). Eighty percent of our participants indicated they experienced exclusion through a lack of flexible accommodations.

Sensory inputs are just overwhelming to me, and it's been an extreme challenge, because I'm over stimulated all the time. It's just like I get anxious. There are three empty offices literally on the opposite side of the hallway from where I am. But I'm not allowed to relocate to them. And so that's been a little bit of a challenge, but just being able to focus for me. Debbie (ADHD)

It's extremely frustrating, because there have been times where I do want to leave, but they're inflexible and say no you can't. It's like I must. Patrick (ASD)

This one thing that kind of makes me feel excluded are lack of clear policies. For example, when I see violations in this black and white code and say this driver screwed up and were over their clock by 2 minutes. I'm going to start writing them up. But my coworkers say its only 2 minutes and we should give the driver a break. It doesn't matter to me; it was 2 minutes, and the driver broke the rules. There is no gray zone for me, but my coworkers seem to understand the gray rules. I don't so I kind of feel out of the loop. Cadvan (ASD)

My supervisor said, "We can't talk to you because this is an accommodation, and it has to go through HR." And you must receive an official letter, and then you must officially respond. It's not anything that's easy, and the fight is almost worse than what you must deal with in your own brain. The fight for accommodations is worse than not having the accommodations at all. And so, it's almost like a stumbling block for me because I'm thinking this doesn't have to be this hard,

because my life is hard enough trying to literally push against a fire hose of senses all day long. Debbie (ADHD)

People don't give clear instructions drive me crazy. It's something that's been done here a lot. There are times when I've needed accommodations and people didn't care that made me feel the opposite of included or cared about. Another obstacle is the leader of the meeting not providing context before the meeting so I can prepare. Lauren (ASD)

Feeling unheard

Feeling unheard violates listening expectations from the speaker, including shutting down the speaker through immediate rejection, superficial listening or pacifying response, and distracted listening, which includes not paying attention in action or voice (Kriz et al., 2021). Many neurodivergent professionals feel excluded when management and other co-workers do not hear their voices. Fifty percent of our participants felt excluded at work when they felt unheard.

I feel excluded when people don't hear me. I tried many times to give advice on heading off a problem, but no one listened or cared to act. I would tell them the things you need to look at or suggest a change and their response was "Nope, we are going to do it our way." When coworkers and supervisors no longer listen to your concerns or ideas, even when you have industry background and experience, you just kind of give up. Debbie (ADHD)

Maybe I am a subject matter expert or have information that I want to give, but it's a group meeting and heavily dominated by one or 2 people. I can't ever find the chance to get a word in. I found that people would pretend they were listening to me, but then would just like not take into consideration anything I said. Lauren (ASD)

I feel excluded when my co-workers or supervisors are not listening to my ideas. It's just the fact that you're willing to sit there and listen and not say that's a bad idea, but saying, okay, I hear what you're saying. But let's kind of build on that to make it better. Belinda (Dyslexia)

Lack of neurodiversity awareness

Eighty-five percent of participants viewed exclusion behavior as stemming from a lack of neurodiversity awareness. Many voiced that if their coworkers, management, and others understood their condition, they would experience less exclusion.

Since not a lot of people know about my situation that I have either mental health issues that I must deal with, I feel that I'm not really included in the team. My supervisor told me he doesn't quite understand what neurodiversity is. I brought the notice of a neurodiversity resource group meeting to my manager, and he said "what is this? Explain this to me." My supervisor didn't understand what this neurodiversity resource group was or about. I don't think that my co-workers really understand much about neurodiversity either. Cadvan (ASD)

I think it is important that my environment, the people around me, just the willingness to try and understand that somebody else sees the world differently and interacts with the world differently than you do. I mean you don't have to do it the same way it has been done before. Mary (ADHD)

There's a lack of understanding neurodiversity that hurts me. People just don't think about things that they don't understand. They don't understand autism. If they don't know that you have autism, they're not going to make that connection and give you those supports. I don't want to be a burden on other people. I feel like would help to have them understand me better which would allow more comfort because it hard to ask for support. Lauren (ASD)

I think it's just because they don't talk about it or it's not something that's been talked a lot about, and that's what causes more of the exclusion. We will have these problems in the workplace. The only way we're going to be able to fix this in our society today is that we talk about it. There has been no communication about neurodiversity. Patrick (ASD)

It's not like everybody's going to function the same way. It's kind of stupid to expect everybody to function the same way because we're not all the same. You think companies would understand it. Daisy (ASD)

Social ostracism

Ostracism refers to the process of rejection and exclusion (Gruter & Masters, 1986). It often occurs as “shunning” or ignoring others in small homogenous groups and is often used to maintain order, punish deviance from social norms, and increase social

cohesion (Gruter & Masters, 1986). Social ostracism is the experience or perception of being separated from others psychologically; an example is being ignored or social isolation (Sommer et al., 2001). Opposite to close connections, social ostracism is referred to as the “silent treatment” (Sommer et al., 2001). Sixty percent of participants indicated that social ostracism made them feel excluded at work.

Sometimes the exclusion is just being ignored, you know. And that can impact your work, when you've worked with someone for a year, and they maybe had no more than three conversations with you. Alice (ASD)

Basically, when co-workers or supervisors are almost irritable at my mere presence. Daisy (ASD)

I feel like I'm more excluded honestly at my workplace, because when I'm around my coworkers they kind of form, a click. You'll notice that everybody kind of comes into like group together. And then there's me standing outside this group. Nobody says, hey, come, join us. They should be drawing me in rather than ignoring me. They kind of stayed to their own side. Patrick (ASD)

There was a certain amount of social ostracism, you know. People would tend to avoid you. They would give polite explanations as to why you were left out. Doris (ADHD)

Feeling unappreciated

Lack of appreciation refers to the failure of management to value what is of value to its workers (Nelson, 2006). Three percent of participants identified a lack of appreciation for feeling excluded, while 70 percent voiced being appreciated for feeling included. This disparity suggests that a lack of appreciation may be implied through social ostracism, feeling unheard, and lack of flexible accommodations.

I realize I I've often felt excluded in terms of the getting work done and the celebrating of it being done. So, everything's not about the to do list. Diego (ADHD)

When I graduated from the aspiring leader's program, nobody at work acted like they really cared. When a co-worker graduated the year before, they made a big deal about it in a departmental meeting, and everyone seemed to care. So, I kind

of felt not included and kind of weird. Drake (ASD)

It would be good if someone with a little bit more authority would show gratitude occasionally, you're doing something innovative in that class of yours. Mitch (ADHD)

Coping with exclusion

Our final research question, “How do neurodivergent professionals cope with exclusion at work?” offers a view into how neurodiverse individuals deal with exclusion. Participants indicated both proactive and reactive means of coping. For proactive coping, 80% of participants indicated that they engaged in masking, and 55% indicated they voiced educating colleagues, help-seeking (55%), changing their environment (50%), and maintaining emotional control (40%). For reactive coping, 35% utilized a stress-reducing coping strategy. Table 4 lists coping themes from perceived exclusion by neurodivergent professionals.

Table 4

Coping strategies at work from a neurodivergent perspective

Coping Strategies
Masking
Educating colleagues about neurodiversity
Help seeking
Changing their environment
Emotional control
Stress relief

Masking

Masking or camouflaging is the act of concealing neurodivergent traits to present neurotypical traits, which is linked to stress, identity loss, and other negative

consequences (Radulski, 2022). Eighty percent of our participants stated that they mask to fit in. However, they also indicate that masking has adverse psychological, emotional, and physical effects.

I was trying to force myself to fit into places where I didn't necessarily fit in. I found that this masking caused more damage than necessary. I know that I'm different and instead of making myself even more uncomfortable, I've just kind of just go with the flow. I try to hide my true self to fit in. I've been pushing myself and exerting my emotions and my stress levels to try and fit into groups. Cadvan (ASD)

I didn't want to ever stick out because I never told anyone about my disability. Initially, I was never treated for it because at that time there was little neurodiversity understanding. And I didn't want to stick out. Therefore, I tried for years to mask my issues. Derek (ASD)

There is some masking... you got to plow through and just keep going. You don't have a lot of choices sometimes. You know I spent a lot of years tap dancing and trying to keep all the plates spinning because I didn't want people to know that it was a struggle. The analogy would be the duck on the pond. It looks like it's just gliding along, but its little feeder going furiously underneath. Doris (ADHD)

I mask my disability by trying hard not to interrupt people and trying not to monologue. I'm constantly policing myself. Nothing comes naturally. You're constantly thinking about everything you say all the time. With all the masking you do, it is difficult to keep up with everybody else. with or without sport supports. Lauren (ASD)

Educating colleagues about neurodiversity

Educating others refers to teaching them better ways of understanding neurodiversity. For the neurodivergent population, teaching others how they interpret the world and their sensory issues is critical for a neurotypical workforce to understand and help develop proper accommodations or adjustments. Our neurodivergent participants suggest they cope with exclusion by educating others, including coworkers and managers, about their success needs. Fifty-five percent of our neurodivergent participants said they educate others to cope with exclusion.

But after I did tell everybody that I struggle with dyslexia, they were very understanding, and they were able to help me and helped me in a way I needed to be helped. I think, just by opening more about myself personally that help them understand. Linda (Dyslexia)

I tell people I'm somebody that needs facts. So, I can understand. So that means you need to walk me through the process. Patrick (ASD)

I wrote an article. I wrote a piece on LinkedIn for myself and discussed the importance of what it's like to be autistic. I'm writing regularly about my experiences and what I'm doing for my research. They understand what it's like for me to live on the spectrum. I know that several members of my department regularly read my material. So that's good, and they talk. Sam (ASD)

You must start somewhere, and that is just educating everyone that there are so many ways people learn, interact and process. People interact with the world and everybody's different. Mary (ADHD)

Help-seeking

Help-seeking behavior is a process instigated by a problem that challenges personal abilities and contains problem-focused, intentional actions, and interpersonal interaction (Cornally & McCarthy, 2011). Participants frequently mentioned needing help interpreting the neurotypical world, conflict resolution, coaching, and clarifying processes or rules. Fifty-five percent of the participants indicated they sought help coping with exclusion.

I have a friend that has been diagnosed with autism. He reminds me that when I'm feeling frustrated that it is okay. But it is not okay to shut down without explanation. Cadvan (ASD)

It's just with autism that we are I would say, socially deaf. And that we must have things explained to us socially because we can't really understand it ourselves. We lack the perceptiveness to see it ourselves. So, we kind of need like a hearing friend for a deaf person. Cat (ASD)

My mother is the one person in this world that has mentored me. She's somebody that has made my work at any organization better, just because we talk so much about ways to fix things and ways to make things better. A trusted mentor is something that everyone needs. Patrick (ASD)

Job coaching has been probably one of the reasons why it felt comfortable succeeding and trying things out in the workplace. I think there was an instance, it was a miscommunication I had with one of the other people at the company. I was able to try to kind of resolve that, and I was able to debrief that interaction with the job coach in our monthly meeting. Alice (ASD)

For me, I must compensate by making sure that there are some people around me that I can hand those things to once we get it to the 10-yard line so that they can get it into the end zone. Tim (ADHD)

Changing their environment

Half of our neurodivergent participants chose to change their environment when they experienced exclusion, including changing jobs, leaving their workstations temporarily (escape), or altering their physical workspace. Fifty percent of our participants responded that they changed their environment to improve well-being and productivity.

If it can't adapt, then I must get out of the environment. So, if I feel frustrated that I must remove myself from the situation, and just step away from everything and just refresh just I can't, I can't deal with it. I've had many moments where I felt that way when I was at work, and I had to remove myself. Patrick (ASD)

I was looking for another job and preparing to leave. I interviewed with other companies and got a job offer on the next month and I was ecstatic to leave. It was the best thing in the world for me to leave. Sam (ASD)

I got up and walked away. I was like, I don't want to be here anymore.” Belinda (Dyslexia)

Emotional control

Findings suggest that feeling excluded produces intense emotion in neurodivergent employees, and control over these emotions takes considerable effort by the neurodivergent professional. Forty percent of our participants indicated that emotional control was essential when dealing with exclusion.

I didn't make a big scene or anything. Don't get me wrong, I was very professional, like I did all my duties and stuff. As someone who's hoping to be a

professional in my field to regulate my thoughts and emotions. You know to hold a professional atmosphere at my work. Caroline (ASD)

I try to remind myself like to try and keep it in a context. I'm like I got to stop and pause for my feelings and actions like I didn't even have the verbiage for it like three years ago. But that's made a difference. Paul (ADHD)

You must exercise emotional control, or you can't show that this it upsets you. You can't show that being excluded upsets you. If you do show that you're unhappy about it, you will inhibit or limit the amount that you share with other people. Doris (ADHD)

I can control my emotions, and I can control how I react to the people around me. And I think about that daily and that really does help me. Mary (ADHD)

Stress relief

Neurodivergent professionals stated that active and rest coping strategies reduce the stress caused by exclusion. Thirty-five percent of participants indicated using mental coping strategies to reduce stress stemming from exclusion, such as mindful exercise, positive self-talk, relaxing activities, or isolation.

I just have embraced a lot of coping mechanisms and techniques. And so, you know, I learned all about meditating and mindfulness and gratitude, journaling. Diego (ADHD)

I learned coping mechanisms very early. Reading is my escape. Later it was movies. I would watch movies, and I didn't have to think it was all encompassing, and that to me was, you know relaxing. Debbie (ADHD)

I try to do mindfulness every day. I do pretty good with it, especially for me. I think that makes a difference because what I try to do is put things into context. Paul (ADHD)

Without the accommodations that I requested; I ended up isolating a lot. Lauren (ASD)

Additional findings based on diagnosis

This research utilized 501 quotes coded from transcripts. Findings indicate a few interesting trends based on diagnosis in the intensity (number of references) of

inclusion/exclusion and coping themes based on the references from those with ADHD versus those with ASD. Please see Table 5 for each category's inclusion and exclusion references.

Table 5

Inclusion / Exclusion References

	# of References			
	Dyslexia	ASD	ADHD	Total
Inclusion	33	81	81	195
1. Psychological safety	5	13	18	36
2. Mindful accommodation	9	17	16	42
3. Feeling heard	4	12	15	31
4. Awareness or understanding of neurodiversity	2	4	4	10
5. Close connections-affinity-social engagement	8	29	15	52
6. Appreciation	5	6	13	24
Exclusion	24	100	59	183
1. Toxic or defensive culture	9	23	7	39
2. Lack of mindful accommodations	3	24	19	46
3. Not feeling heard	1	6	16	23
4. Lack of awareness or understanding	6	29	11	46
5. Social ostracism	5	17	4	26
6. Lack of appreciation	0	1	2	3
Total	57	181	140	378

For inclusion, ASD-diagnosed professionals were significantly more likely to reference “close connections” compared with those with ADHD ($p < .01$). Those diagnosed with ADHD were significantly more likely to reference “appreciation” when asked about inclusion ($p < .01$).

For exclusion, ASD participants referenced “toxic culture” ($p < .02$) and “social ostracism” significantly more than those diagnosed with ADHD ($p < .01$). Those with ADHD were significantly more likely to mention “feeling unheard” ($p < .02$) than those with ASD.

We detected these differences during coding, and although differences among different neurodiverse groups were not the primary goal of this research, we report them to serve as a foundation for future research.

There were also differences in coping with exclusion. Those diagnosed with ASD referenced “educating others” and “help-seeking” significantly more than those with ADHD ($p < .01$). See Table 6 for the count of references by diagnosis and category.

Table 6

Coping with Exclusion References

	# of References			
	Dyslexia	ASD	ADHD	Total
Coping with Exclusion	12	67	44	123
1. Educate the environment	5	18	4	27
2. Masking	3	19	16	38
3. Seek Help	1	13	3	17
4. Change the environment	2	7	5	14
5. Emotional Control	1	6	10	17
6. Mental Coping (relieving stress)	0	4	6	10

Additional findings based on gender

Since the sample contained 55% male and 45% female participants, the references by diagnosis and gender were further explored. Table 7 provides references by inclusion and exclusion category by diagnosis and gender.

Table 7

Gender and Diagnosis References by Inclusion and Exclusion

	# of References			
	ASD		ADHD	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Inclusion	32	40	52	29
Psychological safety	3	8	12	6
Mindful accommodation	7	8	8	8
Feeling heard	4	6	8	7
Awareness/understanding of neurodiversity	3	1	2	2
Close connections	12	14	13	2
Appreciation	3	3	9	4
Exclusion	54	44	26	33
Toxic or defensive culture	13	10	3	4
Lack of flexible accommodations	12	11	6	13
Not feeling heard	1	5	8	8
Lack of awareness/understanding of neurodiversity	21	7	4	7
Social ostracism	6	11	3	1
Lack of appreciation	1	0	2	0

ASD males referenced a lack of neurodiversity awareness (when discussing exclusion), at significantly higher rates than females with ASD ($p<.01$). On the other hand, ASD females referenced not feeling heard and social ostracism (when discussing exclusion) at significantly higher than males with ASD ($p<.01$). For inclusion, ADHD males referenced close connections at significantly higher rates than females with ADHD ($p<.01$).

Participants also differed in the way they coped with exclusion. Among the respondents with ASD, males shared “educating the environment” significantly more than females ($p<.05$). In the ADHD group, males shared “changing the environment” and “stress relief” significantly more than females ($p<.05$). Table 8 provides coping with exclusion references by diagnosis and gender.

Table 8

Gender and Diagnosis References by Coping with Exclusion

	# of References			
	ASD		ADHD	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Coping with Exclusion	44	23	25	19
Educate the environment	15	3	1	3
Masking	10	9	8	8
Seek Help	7	6	2	1
Change the environment	6	1	5	0
Emotional Control	3	3	4	6
Mental Coping (relieving stress)	3	1	5	1

Chapter 5: Discussion

One benefit of qualitative research is the unique information on the subject through the participant's perspective (Follmer et al., 2018). Our participants provided rich perspectives on neurodiversity inclusion, exclusion, and coping with exclusion.

This research demonstrates the affinity for six specific elements of inclusion, such as psychological safety, belongingness, trust, understanding, appreciation, and a novel element of flexible accommodations, which differs from ADA accommodations.

Understanding neurodivergent perceptions of inclusion matters because research has shown that perceived inclusion is positively related to organizational commitment, job performance, and team role performance (Chen & Tang, 2018). Therefore, with neurodivergent individuals entering the workplace, companies need to understand how these individuals perceive inclusion, and this study offers new insights into inclusion research through the neurodiversity perspective. Specifically, our findings create new knowledge through a novel element referred to as flexible accommodations. Our results demonstrate that flexible accommodations are critical for neurodiversity inclusion.

Further, research participants identified six elements of exclusion: toxic workplace, social ostracism, feeling unheard, unappreciated, lack of neurodiversity awareness, and lack of flexible accommodations. This research offers a neurodivergent view of exclusion and offers new insights into exclusion from a neurodiverse perspective. The results demonstrate that exclusion is perceived by lacking flexible accommodations and an environment that does not understand neurodiversity.

Finally, this research provides insight into how neurodivergent professionals cope with exclusion. Six elements were voiced: masking, help-seeking, emotional control,

mental coping strategies, educating others on neurodiversity, and changing their environment. To resolve misfit, individuals may seek adjustment strategies such as changing the environment or changing self, relief-seeking strategies, and/or exit strategies to cope with exclusion (Follmer et al., 2018). Therefore, companies need to understand how neurodivergent individuals cope with exclusion. Unresolved issues either end with employee disengagement or exist. Our participants voiced several positive coping strategies, including educating others on neurodiversity. Neurodivergent professionals disclosed their diagnoses and helped others understand the differences in how neurodivergent employees see and interpret the world around them.

With these novel findings and new insights, this study expands the scope of our current understanding of inclusion for neurodivergent professionals in the business context.

Another strength of this research resides in the diverse sampling of not only balanced gender representation but also broad ranges of age and work experience. Further, our research participants came from various industries, including education, ministry, software, and banking. Geographically, participants represented diverse regions, including California and Maryland, with several participants residing in the southern states of Texas and Arkansas.

Theoretical contributions

Understanding the challenges, organization behavior implications, and policy concerning neurodivergent employees is a nascent area of research that deserves more attention (Patton, 2019). Results of this research offer new insights extending inclusion and exclusion theories from the neurodivergent professional's perspective, specifically

via identifying two categories, awareness/understanding of neurodiversity at work and flexible accommodations as necessary for perceived inclusion. These two variables identified in this study have yet to be explored by empirical research and remain a gap in inclusion research for neurodivergent professionals. If prior research on inclusion through forms of diversity such as gender or race fail to apply to the neurodiverse population, then research could make the implicit assumption of neurotypical views or risk missed refinements for the neurodiverse community (Vogus & Taylor, 2018),

Neurodivergent professionals shared that they seek flexible accommodations to feel included and excluded when these are not provided. Flexible accommodations differ from ADA accommodations legally mandated for all employers with a disability. Flexible accommodations are informal, based on the employee's individual needs and low cost, and these can be either environmental adjustments, flexible hours, or individual support. Neurodiversity is unique for each individual and requires tailored support for their success. The lack of flexible accommodations signals to the participant that the company, team, or manager are not interested in providing the accommodations necessary for their success, and thus they feel excluded.

Understanding how neurodivergent professionals cope with perceived exclusion is a second contribution of this research. Previous research on general misfit suggests that a person perceiving exclusion may seek an adjustment strategy. If this does not relieve the misfit perception, then leaving strategies will ensue (Follmer et al., 2018). This study suggests that adjustment strategies such as help-seeking, masking, emotional control, and changing the environment constitute the coping strategies for neurodiverse professionals. However, this research also suggests another novel coping element for neurodivergent

professionals: educating others on neurodiversity. Since neurodivergent individuals see, sense, and react to the world differently from neurotypical employees, neurodivergent professionals may choose to help educate others to attain a better fit for themselves. A fuller integration of coping strategies identified by neurodivergent professionals would undoubtedly enhance inclusion research by extending our understanding of how neurodiverse employees cope with exclusion. Further, our novel findings may generalize to other minority populations, such as foreign-born employees, informing inclusion and exclusion theory building.

Practical implications

Previous research already suggests a significant advantage to companies that create a culture of inclusiveness, and this research is particularly vital to each organization hiring neurodivergent professionals. Findings suggest that leaders should be aware of what practices enable neurodiversity inclusion or drive perceptions of exclusion. Further, results suggest that management may be able to recognize a lack of inclusion in their organization by the coping mechanisms deployed by neurodivergent employees, such as masking, educating, help-seeking, and stress exhibited by trying to maintain emotional control.

Considering that not everyone works best under the same conditions, companies must learn about diverse employees by actively seeking awareness and observing them. Better attention should be paid to employees' sensory preferences and environments that could be adverse to performance, such as open-space offices involving a lot of background noise, intense lighting, and congestion (Brinzea, 2019). For neurodivergent employees, options to modify the environment to reduce sensory processing demands,

flexible work hours, when possible, receive clear job expectations, clear instructions, and reassurance in stressful situations should be priority considerations (Petty et al., 2023).

Accommodation is a policy put into action (Gates, 2000). It is the delicate point where the needs of the person with a disability must harmonize with the workplace policies and procedures and the needs of supervisors and coworkers to ensure that the gaps in functional capacity caused by the disabling condition do not interfere with meeting job requirements (Gates, 2000). Thus, flexible accommodations refer to an adapted environment to the needs of the neurodivergent individual based on altering requirements balanced with cost, efficiency and should be readily available without blatant segregation based on a diagnosis. This practice differs from typical ADA accommodations requiring the person to request and disclose their disability through a formal government-mandated procedure.

Further, management should listen to neurodivergent professionals and allow them the opportunity to help educate others on neurodiversity. General neurodiversity awareness may not be enough to provide an inclusive environment. Training sessions, various campaigns, workshops, and frequent internal communication in the company may help employees better understand what to expect from and appreciate the differences neurodivergent colleagues bring to the workplace and the need to make workplace accommodations. Results of this research suggest that neurodivergent professionals have different needs for feeling accommodated and often desire to help educate their coworkers and supervision. Previous research suggests that awareness training may allow those with disabilities to talk about their conditions and inform practices that may help their integration (Bewley & George, 2016). Our participants voiced concerns over asking

for accommodations that required a formal HR process which required paperwork, disclosure, and detailed reasons why accommodations were necessary. Our participants were either embarrassed to request accommodations formally or felt that the work involved in asking for these accommodations was as painful as not having the accommodations. Therefore, flexible environmental or social accommodations should be a routine part of the organizational culture. In addition, organizations should consider providing these flexible accommodations to anyone who needs them to avoid segregation based on an individual's diagnosis. Current findings suggest engaging neurodivergent employees by encouraging them to voice their concerns, share their insights, and provide a better understanding of their needs. This voice-sharing may resolve feelings of being unheard or lack of psychological safety.

Beyond providing better awareness and understanding as well as flexible accommodations to neurodivergent employees, leaders should take proactive measures to ensure that the environment is psychologically safe and that neurodivergent employees are connected to the larger work community and feel heard. Leaders should enhance psychological safety through values-driven reasons and show their vulnerability to allow employees to feel psychologically safe expressing their true selves. To enhance authentic connections, leaders should look for opportunities to connect neurodivergent employees with others with similar interests, goals, or individuals who understand and appreciate neurodiversity. To foster an environment where employees feel heard, leaders should encourage their employees to express their needs to be more successful at work. Based on their diagnosis, the participants indicated that what is essential for inclusion may differ across groups. For example, ASD-diagnosed professionals were more likely to

reference “close connections” than those with ADHD. Those diagnosed with ADHD were more likely to reference “appreciation” when asked about inclusion. This finding is supported by medical experts who suggest ASD-diagnosed individuals typically have social deficits making it difficult to make new friends or feel included socially (Crouch, June 1, 2023). Therefore, it makes sense that ASD individuals would identify close connections as being essential to feel included because their co-workers are more likely to be connected in and outside the work environment. ADHD-diagnosed individuals typically have fewer social deficits than ASD and have friends outside of work, which may explain why ADHD-diagnosed individuals were more likely to reference appreciation to feel included. Appreciation is a typical inclusion response for neurotypical individuals (Crouch, June 1, 2023). Therefore, employers should ensure that each neurodivergent person is heard and seek to understand the employee and their unique preferences for inclusion, including identifying and providing flexible accommodations. The inclusion elements may evolve as trust develops. Many of our participants also voiced that they trusted leaders when the leaders demonstrated vulnerability.

Coping strategies for exclusion may also differ based on the diagnosis. Those diagnosed with ASD indicated “help-seeking” three times more than those with ADHD. Typically, ASD-diagnosed individuals have social deficits and need additional support than those with ADHD (Crouch, June 1, 2023). Since ASD-diagnosed individuals have more social deficits than those with ADHD, it makes sense that ASD-diagnosed individuals would seek help understanding the job process or relationships and with informal social rules or subtle social issues. It is common for ASD-diagnosed individuals

to be given detailed instructions that would be obvious to a neurotypical individual (Dr. M. Crouch, personal communication, June 1, 2023). These findings suggest that those with ASD may need more support socially than those with ADHD. Therefore, managers may need to offer internal and/or external support to those with ASD based on their individual needs. Providing flexible accommodations offer an effective solution to accommodate individuals' unique needs.

This research suggests that companies can create an inclusive environment for neurodivergent professionals by providing psychological safety, close connections, allowing for voices to be heard, creating neurodiversity awareness, offering flexible accommodations, and appreciation. Therefore, managers should make the work environment safe to ask questions and feel heard. Managers should also look for formal and informal opportunities to create connections for neurodivergent employees. To ensure an understanding of neurodiversity, organizations should provide general awareness training and allow neurodivergent employees for their input on training content to provide a deeper understanding of neurodiversity. Organizations should allow managers and co-workers to make flexible accommodations. Accomplishing inclusion is an ongoing process that should portray improvements over time.

Limitations

Our participants reside and work in the United States, thus limiting our research to Western workplace culture. Therefore, future research should sample participants from other countries for comparison and generalization.

Participants were college graduates, which limits the voice of those without a formal education after high school. All individuals in the sample were currently working.

Therefore, we could under-represent those employed who lost their job and cannot find another. Only those working in a professional capacity were interviewed. Therefore, neurodivergent individuals working in a temporary capacity (part-time) or those working retail or manual jobs may be underrepresented in the current sample.

Also, only those diagnosed with either dyslexia, ASD, or ADHD were interviewed. While this group is estimated to represent 85% of the neurodiverse population, this study is limited to these three diagnoses.

All participants in this qualitative study were White, and future research should employ an ethnically more representative sample, including the Black and Hispanic neurodiversity community in the workplace.

Another limitation of this study is that we only interviewed neurodivergent employees. This limits the study to the perspective of the neurodivergent individual. The voice of management or co-workers could have provided additional insight into neurodiversity inclusion.

Future research directions

The results of this research provide some exciting and new perspectives on inclusion from a neurodiverse perspective. Although the participants clearly articulated the six elements of inclusion, exclusion, and coping with an exclusion, future research remains to expand inclusion research. Future research should explore the relationship between the six elements of inclusion and job performance for neurodivergent employees. Perhaps these relationships can be quantified into an understanding of the hierarchy of salience of these elements.

Further research into flexible accommodations is necessary to provide an in-depth understanding of accommodations needed for an inclusive environment. Perhaps future research could further define flexible accommodations and how they impact not only neurodivergent employees, but other minority groups based on gender, race, national origin, and religious groups. Flexible accommodations could also positively impact ex-military transitioning to the civilian workforce. Therefore, future research should examine how flexible accommodations may impact diverse employee groups beyond the neurodiversity community.

For exclusion, ASD participants referenced “toxic culture” and “social ostracism” twice as much as those with ADHD. Those with ADHD were twice as likely to mention “feeling unheard” and “feeling unappreciated” than those with ASD. These results suggest that there could be a linkage between the perception of inclusion or exclusion and the participant's specific diagnosis. There were also differences in coping with exclusion. Those diagnosed with ASD indicated “help-seeking” three times more than those with ADHD. Therefore, further research is necessary to understand how the diagnosis may impact perceptions of inclusion.

Furthermore, future research is necessary to understand how a company based on size can implement neurodiversity inclusion and the overall costs of implementing flexible accommodations versus the cost of lost productivity for not accommodating.

Conclusion

This qualitative research provides new insights into how neurodivergent professionals perceive inclusion, exclusion, and cope with exclusion. Participants identified six elements respectively to attain inclusion and exclusion in the workplace. To

cope with the neurotypical world, participants shared that they mask their uniqueness which creates stress by being unable to be themselves. To resolve these issues, many seek assistance through mentors, family, or coworkers to help understand the neurotypical environment, encouragement, and mediation.

Participants voiced that they do not want pity or costly accommodations but rather an understanding of their uniqueness and how they can successfully benefit the organization. With this insight, companies that provide an inclusive environment can easily navigate neurodiversity inclusion by listening to their neurodivergent employees and implementing cost-effective, flexible accommodations. It is only by uncovering the contextual realities of neurodiverse perspectives from their voices that we will fully understand and attain neurodiverse inclusion at work.

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Appendix A: Description of Neurodivergent Conditions

Condition	Description
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	“Autism Spectrum Disorders are neurodiverse conditions that affect the way people communicate and interact with other people being characterized by rigid thinking, restrictive and repetitive behaviors, and social communication challenges. People with ASD may be overly dependent on routines, highly sensitive to changes in their environment, to bright lights, noises, smells, textures, or tastes, and may display inappropriate behavior.” (Brinzea, 2019)
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	“is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood lasting often into adulthood, it involves the part of the brain that controls impulses, self-regulation and inhibition and it is characterized by a persistent pattern of inattention (that makes it difficult for people to finish tasks) and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity (leading people to speak and act without thinking, to interrupt others and to have difficulty waiting their turn). Poor concentration may lead people with ADHD to become absent-minded, easily distracted and easily bored or having poor organizational skills.” (Prevention, 2019)
Dyslexia	“causes difficulties with reading, writing and spelling, with working memory and short-term memory, with rapid naming, concentration and time management and organization.” (APA)
Dyspraxia	“a form of Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD). The disorder affects fine motor skills - the co-ordination of small muscles, such as the hands and fingers - and gross motor skills - the co-ordination of large muscles, such as the arms and legs. People with dyspraxia experience difficulties with large and/or small movements which may affect balance, fatigue levels, hand-eye coordination, hand movements or manipulation skills; reading and writing difficulties; over sensitive to taste, light, touch or noise; poor sense of time, speed, distance, weight, or sense of direction; organizational or planning difficulties; difficulties with accuracy, concentration or following instruction; slowly adaptation to new or unpredictable situations.” (Barr, 2019)
Dyscalculia	“is a neurological condition that causes a specific and persistent difficulty in understanding numbers which can lead to a diverse range of difficulties with mathematics such as sizing, ordering, and reading and writing numbers. It can occur singly but often co-occurs with other specific learning difficulties, such dyslexia and/or dyspraxia.”
Tourette Syndrome (TS)	“a type of Tic Disorder, that causes a person to make involuntary, repetitive movements and vocalizations called tics. Individuals with Tourette Syndrome (TS) have had at least two motor tics (ex: blinking, eye rolling, grimacing, shoulder shrugging, jumping etc.) and at least one vocal/ phonic tic (whistling, coughing, tongue clicking, animal sounds, saying random words and phrases.” (Brinzea, 2019).