

Inspiration:
**Working with
neurodivergence**

2024

Deep
concentration

Analytical
skills

Routine
changes

Creative
thinking



Foreningen af
Rådgivende Ingeniører
FRI

Inspiration for working with neurodivergence

Neurodivergence is a term that refers to the diversity of human brains and nervous systems. It recognises that people have different ways of thinking, learning and perceiving the world, and that these differences are not necessarily abnormal or morbid, but rather a condition considered a natural variation in the human population.

Neurodivergence encompasses a variety of conditions, including autism, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, dyslexia and other forms of developmental or cognitive differences. These differences may involve both challenges and strengths, and the concept of neurodivergence highlights the importance of recognising and valuing both aspects of diversity.

The engineering industry can greatly benefit from creating a more inclusive workplace culture that takes neurodivergence into account, because when innovation and inclusion are strengthened, it can help to create a competitive edge when recruiting good employees, which the industry so badly needs.

Benefits for the consulting engineering industry

An important part of neurodivergence is the notion that diversity in brains and nervous systems can be a source of innovation and creativity. By recognising and supporting neurodivergence, the consulting engineering industry can benefit from the unique perspectives and abilities that neurodivergent people have to offer.

In short: The engineering industry and people with neurodivergence can be a good match for each other for several reasons, but the individual company must commit to it.

Since neurodivergence covers a wide range of different brain profiles and cognitive differences, it is difficult to make a specific list of characteristics typical of neurodivergent individuals. Some **common features** seen in neurodivergent individuals include the following:

- **Deep concentration:** Some neurodivergent individuals may have the ability to focus deeply on a task for long periods of time without being distracted.
- **Attention to detail:** Many people with neurodivergence have a unique ability to focus on details and work with precision. This is a necessary skill in the engineering industry, where even small mistakes can have big consequences.
- **Creative thinking:** People with neurodivergence often think in a different way than others, which can lead to innovative and creative solutions to complex problems – a trait that is highly sought after in the engineering industry.
- **Strong analytical skills:** Neurodivergent individuals often have strong analytical skills and can see patterns and connections that others cannot. This is an important quality in the engineering industry, where being able to analyse complex data and systems is necessary.
- **Ability to work with repetitive tasks:** Many engineering jobs involve repetitive tasks that require a high degree of patience and endurance. People with neurodivergence often have a high tolerance for repetitive tasks and can stay concentrated for longer periods of time.

However, it is important to note that not all neurodivergent individuals will have these characteristics and that there can be great variation from person to person. In addition, it is worth remembering that neurodivergence is not a disease or a disorder, but rather a natural variation among all of us.

“As an employee who contributes to our dynamic workplace, I believe that fostering a truly inclusive environment involves recognising and appreciating the diverse neurocognitive strengths within our team. Embracing neurodiversity is not only a matter of adaptation but also about unlocking the untapped potential that brings different perspectives, working styles and ‘minds’ to the table. It is the diversity in all of us that creates job satisfaction and an inclusive workplace”

Points of attention

Different communication styles: Neurodivergent individuals may have different ways of communicating, including verbal and nonverbal expressions, which may be different from the typical communication style.

Sensory differences: Neurodivergent individuals may experience the world differently than neurotypical individuals, and may have different sensory strengths and challenges, such as sensitivity to light, sounds, smells or touch.

Hyperfocus: Neurodivergent individuals tend to become deeply engaged in an interest or activity and focus very intensely on it. It may be interests which may differ from what is typically common or popular in society.

“At my workplace, I got the opportunity to feel that I could contribute something. I solved tasks that suited me and what I can do and worked well together with my neurotypical colleagues. I entered the labour market and found out what my special skills are, how I can arrange my work so that it fits who I am and how I can tackle a normal working day. Even when feelings run high and I find myself in situations I would otherwise find very difficult to handle. My employment here was a bit of a baptism of fire and a learning exercise in finding resources I did not think I had and solving problems in collaboration with my colleagues. The experience I gained means that today I handle tasks that I did not think were possible for me just a few years ago.”

Points of inspiration for working with neurodivergence in the workplace

People with challenges as described above can be a very positive contribution to the company, and by emphasising and focusing on the positive aspects, the company can create a culture that values diversity and increases collaboration and innovation in the organisation.

“The company has really made me feel part of the team, not different, despite the few hours I put in. One of the things they have done is to invite me to events just like everyone else.

For me, it is also important to be able to use my education and be part of the labour market for the number of hours I can. And the company has made that possible.”

Working with neurodivergence in diversity contexts may include a number of different initiatives and strategies that are adapted to the specific needs and characteristics of neurodivergent individuals, e.g.:

- **Strengthening inclusion and acceptance through a strong culture:** It is important to create an inclusive and accepting culture in the workplace, where neurodivergent individuals feel welcome and valued for their differences. This can be achieved, for example, through training and education of managers and employees, as well as through the creation of social communities and support groups.
- **The job advertisement can be used to attract neurodivergent individuals** by signalling the company’s wish for a diverse workforce
- **Adaptation of the recruitment process:** The recruitment process can usefully take neurodivergence into account and include alternative ways of assessing candidates, such as exams and tests designed to take neurodivergence into account and thereby highlight the unique strengths of neurodivergent candidates. (Often the usual recruitment processes can also accommodate this type of candidate – should that be included here?)
- **Workplace design:** An adapted workplace can give neurodivergent individuals the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the organisation. This may include adaptations to the physical environment of the workplace, such as lighting, noise level and ergonomic equipment as well as flexible working hours and tasks.

- **Education and training:** It is a good idea to increase awareness and understanding of neurodivergence and its positive impact on the organisation. This can be done by offering education and training to managers and employees on what neurodivergence is and how to work with neurodivergent people.
- **Communication considerations:** Communication in the workplace can also take neurodivergence into account. It is a good idea to consider using different communication styles that take into account the different needs and preferences of neurodivergent employees. Alternative communication methods, such as pictures, graphics and other visual aids, can also be used to a greater extent.

Learn to take challenges into account

Although neurodivergent employees may have unique strengths and contributions to the workplace, they may also encounter certain challenges due to their neurological differences. Some potential 'weaknesses' that may affect neurodivergent employees' reactions and well-being include:

- **Social interaction:** Some neurodivergent employees may have difficulty understanding and responding to social cues and norms, which in some situations can make it difficult to build relationships and communicate effectively with colleagues and customers.
- **Personal communication:** Neurodivergent employees may have challenges expressing themselves clearly and effectively and may need more time to process and formulate their thoughts.
- **Organisation and planning:** Some neurodivergent employees may have difficulty organising their tasks and planning their time, which may affect their productivity and ability to meet deadlines.
- **Planning working hours:** Some neurodivergent employees may need more breaks and shorter working days to thrive in the workplace. This can be due to several reasons, such as the impressions they receive from the outside world (lights, sounds, smells), poor sleep (especially for people with autism and ADHD) and any medication.
- **Routine changes:** Neurodivergent employees may have difficulty dealing with unexpected or unstructured situations and may need more time and support to adjust to changes in the workplace.

Inspiration for further reading

Get an overview of laws and regulations relating to the inclusive labour market and the active employment initiatives at cabi:

<https://www.cabiweb.dk/lovstof/> (in Danish)

Overview of the disability compensation schemes that aim to help people with a functional impairment to obtain and maintain employment:

<https://star.dk/indsatser-og-ordninger/handicapomraadet/> (in Danish)

The Danish Authority of Social Services and Housing's Knowledge Platform, which collects and disseminates interdisciplinary knowledge about disability and employment:

<https://sbst.dk/tvaergaende-omrader/vidensplatform-om-handicap-og-beskaeftigelse> (in Danish)

- **Code of Care - company**
- **ADHD-Association**
- **Autism Association**
- **Virtual Reality in Healthcare KHORA**
- **Fountainhouse**
- **Job centre and jobnet.dk (borger.dk)**
- **Molis – Psychologist – Psychologists specialising in autism, ADHD and Asperger's**
- **Danish Mental Health Fund**
- **Disability compensation schemes STAR**
- **Act on Compensation for Disabled Persons in Employment**
- **Wage subsidy for new graduates with disabilities (the icebreaker scheme)**



Deep
concentration

Social
interaction

FRI, the Danish Association of Consulting Engineers, is the trade association for consulting and engineering firms. FRI works to improve the business conditions of its member firms and the framework conditions of the industry. We have done so since 1904.

Analytical

FRI's member firms primarily provide consulting within: Building, urban planning and architecture, construction and infrastructure, energy and industry, climate and environment and international development.

- FRI is a platform for identity and pride
- FRI is a platform for networking
- FRI is a platform for influence
- FRI is a platform for services

FRI creates value for all member firms.

See more at www.frinet.dk

Creative
thinking



Foreningen af
Rådgivende Ingeniører
FRI