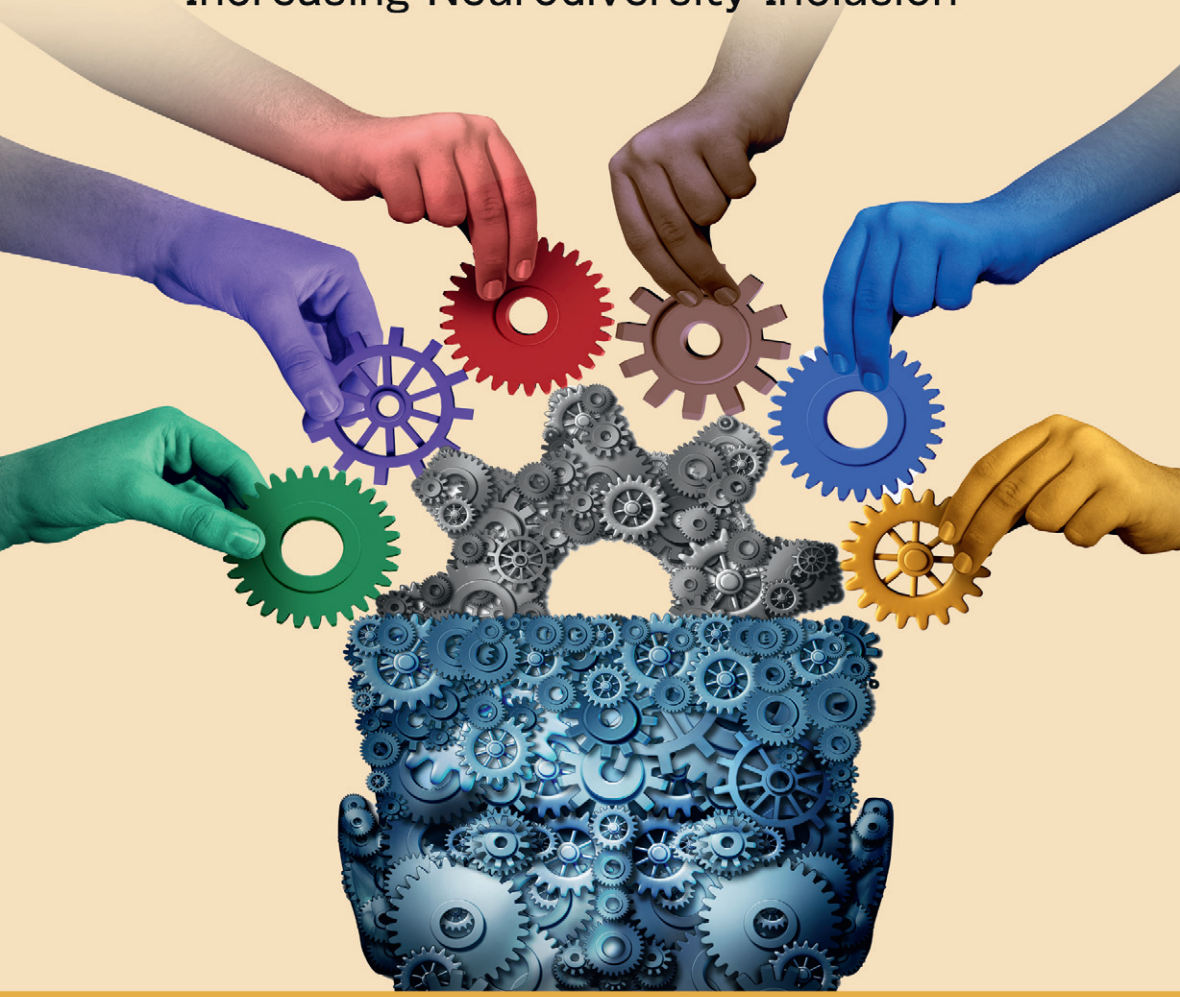
Research in Organizational Science

Neurodiversity in the Workplace

Conceptual and Practical Insights for Increasing Neurodiversity Inclusion



Edited by

Daniel J. Svyantek

Neurodiversity in the Workplace

Research in Organizational Science

Series Editor: Daniel J. Svyantek

The series, *Research in Organizational Sciences (ROS)*, was developed to address issues that provide timely, topical perspectives for the study of organizations. The chapters in each volume of *ROS* are intended to provide insight for organizational behavior and organizational theory study through concentration on an important newly developing topic in the field (e.g., the effects of COVID on employees and organizational performance) or the use of organizations that may not be traditionally studied in organizational behavior and organizational theory journals (e.g., sports organizations). *Research in Organizational Sciences* helps make connection among researchers in different fields that might not normally communicate. By serving as this link, *ROS* hopes to provide new ideas that will further the study of organizations and employees across the many disciplines with an organizational science focus.

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Tiffany Jameson, PhD, MBA, is an industrial-organizational psychologist and a recognized subject matter expert in inclusive workplace practices. As the founder of **grit & flow**, a boutique consulting firm, she partners with organizations to enhance business operations by fostering environments that support neurodivergent individuals, enabling them to thrive. Her thought leadership is reflected in her LinkedIn Learning and Coursera courses on neurodiversity, ADHD, and autism, as well as through her engagements as a global speaker. Her publications include research, essays, and opinion pieces in the Career Development International, *Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology's TIPS*, and *INFORMS Magazine*, where she explores topics such as measuring neurodiversity inclusion, diversity fatigue, and career sustainability for ADHD workers. Her research focuses on the critical role of direct managers in fostering career sustainability, meaning, and flourishing through person-centered practices, as well as developing quantifiable measures to support.

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Courtney Tsahalis, PhD, is a public library director with over 15 years of experience in public libraries and a deep passion for library science and community engagement. She earned her PhD in Information Studies from Dominican University in 2025, with research focused on the intersection of public library accommodations and neurodiversity. She has presented her work at numerous state and national conferences, including NYLA and ALA's LibLearnX, sharing insights on inclusive library practices and the experiences of neurodivergent individuals. In addition to teaching MLIS courses, she provides professional development opportunities for library staff on topics such as accessibility, inclusion, and neurodiversity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Lilah Donnelly
Daniel J. Svyantek

ABSTRACT

Neurodiversity in the workplace is an increasingly important topic with critical implications for the workforce. However, organizations still struggle to support neurodivergent employees. This chapter describes the purposes of the volume, *Neurodiversity in the Workplace*. These purposes include (1) calling attention to the experience of neurodivergent individuals at work; and (2) describing methods for organizations and employees seeking to support neurodivergent individuals at work to use. The chapters in the volume explore the challenges and opportunities associated with neurodiversity at work by presenting different perspectives on neurodiversity in organizations to provide an overview of how organizations can better support neurodivergent employees, particularly those with Autism and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These chapters address structural barriers, recruitment and hiring practices, and disclosure for neurodiverse employees. Each chapter also offers practical recommendations for workplace accommodations. An emphasis is also placed on supporting organizational changes to support a more inclusive workplace culture. Ultimately, the insights presented in these

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chapters look to bridge the gap between science and practice, providing a roadmap for creating workplaces that not only value, but empower neurodiverse talent.

Keywords: Overview; neurodiversity; person-job fit; person-organization fit; careers; inclusion accommodations

This volume, *Neurodiversity in the Workplace*, goal is to call attention to (1) the experience of neurodivergent individuals at work; and (2) methods for organizations and employees seeking to support neurodivergent individuals at work to use. Neurodiversity in the workplace is an increasingly important topic with critical implications for the workforce. However, organizations still struggle to support neurodivergent employees. The following chapters explore the challenges and opportunities associated with neurodiversity at work by presenting different perspectives on neurodiversity in organizations. The authors provide an overview of how organizations can better support neurodivergent employees, particularly those with Autism and ADHD. These chapters addressing structural barriers, recruitment and hiring practices, and disclosure for neurodiverse employees. The chapters also offer practical recommendations for workplace accommodations and emphasize the need for organizational changes to support a more inclusive workplace culture. Ultimately, the insights presented in these chapters look to bridge the gap between science and practice, providing a roadmap for creating workplaces that not only value, but empower neurodiverse talent.

We will use the following definitions provided by Langley and Ritterbush (this volume) to provide common definitions for this volume for the terms neurotypical, *neurodiversity, neurominority,* and *neuroinclusion.* Neurotypical is used to describe individuals whose behaviors and brain functions, such as cognitive and sensory processing, fall within the statistical norm or expectations of society (cf., Doyle & McDowall, 2021). Neurodiversity is defined as "a biological truism that refers to the limitless variability of human nervous systems on the planet, in which no two can ever be exactly alike due to the influence of environmental factors" (cf., Singer, 1998). Neurominority specifically emphasizes the presence of unique neurological minorities. The neurological minorities may result in bias from individuals who view them as strange or different. Finally, neuroinclusion is the process of diversity inclusion as it relates to neurodiversity, with an emphasis on acceptance and respect of all neurotypes. These terms will be used in the following chapter summaries.

THE CHAPTERS

Garner and Burns take the reader through a hiring scenario constructed by the Autism Friendly Community Project—Corrimal. People with Autism are often met with discomfort in the traditional recruitment and hiring process. The authors note that the way in which most jobs are traditionally defined, may pigeonhole people with Autism to oversimplified positions that they are overqualified for. To combat this, Garner conducted a hiring process for research assistants on the Autism spectrum. Rather than taking the traditional approach that focuses on matching neurodivergent individuals with jobs that reflect their "deficits," Garner uses a strengths-based approach which provides the two Autistic individuals with the proper resources throughout the hiring process. These resources include clear job advertisements with accurate and clear information about the role, a preinterview guide with clear social expectations (what to wear, where to meet, etc.) a work agreement, and a work safety plan that outlines job expectations and a protocol should workers become triggered. Ultimately, this approach proved successful and with the proper large-scale implementation, could provide an excellent framework for how to make the job marketing and hiring process more inclusive for neurodivergent workers.

Gil and Bobadilla provide a historical perspective on Autism Spectrum Disorder to explain Autism diagnoses in adulthood, and provide information on treatment and living with Autism. This historical perspective informs society's interpretation and interactions with Autistic people, particularly in the workplace. Highlighting the importance of training programs that will result in better inclusivity for people with Autism and a general awareness of the diagnosis, Gil and Bobadilla recommend several ways in which workplaces can become more inclusive. This inclusivity can foster organizational growth and development, seeing as people with Autism have refined skills and abilities that neurotypical people do not. However, a major condition of this growth is organizational leader buy in, as leaders must be the ones to adopt and live out inclusivity to set the example for an inclusive organizational culture. Finally, this chapter ends by Gil and Bobadilla providing eight recommendations for cultivating an inclusive organizational culture.

Pearsall, Brondos Fry, and Kosovich paint a clear picture of how organizations may foster neurodiverse leaders. Neurodiverse workers struggle in career progression and development which ultimately makes it challenging to progress into leadership positions. This is largely due to the current career growth landscape, which shows preference toward neurotypical individuals. However, research and practice have shown that when neurodiverse individuals do make it into leadership roles, several unique contributions, such as increased creativity, problem solving, and

productivity, are added to organizational functions. The authors express how this general lack of support for fostering neurodiverse leaders is harmful to both organizational culture and organizational effectiveness and the neurodivergent community. As such, the authors encourage the reader to rethink leadership and what leadership should look like. One particular approach to develop neurodiverse leadership is the 70-20-10 model, whereby 70% of development comes from on-the-job learning, 20% of development comes from social interactions, and 10% comes from formal training. This is just one approach to how organizations can adapt their traditional career development paths to include neurodiverse individuals. The authors finish the chapter by providing several very clear and actionable steps that organizations can take to foster, build, and promote an environment that encourages neurodiverse leaders.

Langley and Ritterbush provide examples of methods to support organizations seeking to support neuroinclusion. The authors first provide an overview of definitions that are important to grasp in order to fully understand the topic of neuroinclusion in the workplace. As it stands, neurodiversity practices are lacking in both knowledge and implementation. The authors guide the reader through the social model of disability and how this has played a large role in why neurodivergent individuals fall out of the attraction-selection-attrition model. The rest of the chapter goes on to provide recommendations for how organizations can prevent the attrition of neurodivergent individuals, especially considering the unique and positive aspects that these individuals contribute to workplaces. Taking the reader through the four newcomer adjustment outcomes, role clarity, self-efficacy, acceptance by organizational insiders, and knowledge of organizational culture, Langley and Ritterbush detail specific onboarding practices that can support these outcomes. The authors' call to action at the end of the chapter serves as the beginnings of a plan to develop neuroinclusion at work, but not without an emphasis on gaining input from neurodivergent individuals themselves.

Colley, Jameson, Jeff-Eke, and Slack explain the implications of the honeymoon phase ending for neurodivergent workers. The neurodivergent honeymoon phase, as they have defined, is "the initial period after the selection and onboarding of a neurodivergent employee, during which there is a sense of novelty, optimism, and eagerness." Upon the neurodivergent honeymoon phase ending, workers may experience distress, concern for the future of their work, and subsequent decreased performance. The authors take the readers through a variety of interventions that could prevent the stark change in support neurodivergent workers face as the honeymoon phase comes to an end. Two major ways that organizations can improve this transition is through workplace design, which would make workplaces universally designed but individually differentiated, and work

arrangements, which should be flexible in terms of location and working hours. Another way that organizations can foster a neuroinclusive workplace is by re-evaluating traditional communication practices. For example, there are verbal and nonverbal communication norms, such as tone inflections and eye contact, that some neurodivergent individuals do not use when communicating. This creates another barrier for neurodivergent workers to successfully complete the tasks of their job and socialize within the organization. The authors go on to provide ways that organizations can improve communication practices before finally discussing areas for future research. Specifically, the authors suggest a scientist-practitioner model for studying, creating, and implementing neuroinclusive work practices.

Tsahalis and Connaway shift the focus from Autism to another neurodivergent diagnosis: ADHD. The authors conduct two studies to better understand the problems that people with ADHD face at work. The first study was qualitative in nature and resulted in seven themes with 39 subthemes to be examined. These seven themes were positive work experiences, negative work experiences, ADHD strengths, ADHD difficulties, lack of supervisor support, supervisor support, and policy changes. After reviewing, analyzing, and understanding the issues that people with ADHD face at work, a second study was conducted to gain quantitative data from individuals who were involved with the creation of public libraries in the United States. Results of the 17-item survey indicated that, for the most part, policy makers of public libraries do not take into account neurodivergence when creating workplace policies. However, almost all of the respondents were familiar with ADHD and more than half consider ADHD to be a disability. While policy makers appear to have a good understanding of what neurodivergent workers need, there seems to be a disconnect in what neurodivergent workers receive in terms of accommodations and/or work environments. The authors end by discussing ways that managers and workplaces can better equip themselves to support neurodivergent workers, and specifically those with ADHD.

Schuck, MacDonald, Herrera, and Baker-Ericzén educate the reader on the importance of disclosure and self-advocacy for neurodivergent individuals while defining the role that organizations play in this process. Some people with Autism require accommodations at work to make them more successful. These accommodations should meaningfully help the individual who requires them while also not harming anyone else. Additionally, these accommodations should be widely available to anyone who needs them, yet individualized and specific to each person. The traditional workplace and overall process for receiving relevant accommodations creates barriers. In discussing this, the authors stress the importance of self-determination, that is the Autistic individuals' ability to control their lives, and self-advocacy, which is the practice of being informed and informing others

of the diagnosis. While individuals with Autism may be successful in these domains, it is also on workplaces to not only honor the requests made my neurodivergent workers, but create an environment where the requests are encouraged and welcomed. In an effort to provide organizations with interventions to support self-advocacy, disclosure, and accommodations, the authors share four programs and how and where to access them. The chapter ends by Schuck et al. discussing how employers must be educated on the topic at hand and provide a safe space for all workers, neurodivergent or not, to be successful.

SUPPORTING NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Workplace accommodations are necessary for creating an inclusive organizational culture for neurodiverse employees (Patton, 2022). Such accommodations will allow neurodiverse employees to develop careers within organizations. One way these accommodations work is to improve person-organization fit for neurodiverse employees.

Neurodiverse employees are often affected by person-organization fit issues (cf., Bhuiyan et al., 2022; Pence & Svyantek, 2016). This is particularly true when describing the course of a neurodiverse employee's career in an organization.

Person-organization fit issues may arise because of the dual nature of person-organization fit. Person-organization fit operates in at least two ways during the course of one's career in an organization. Person-organization fit affects both "fitting in" with an organization and "doing well" in an organization (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019). "Fitting in" person-organization fit is related to the very early stages of a career in organizations. This form of fit relates to such criteria as intent to join an organization; intent to stay in an organization; satisfaction; and commitment. "Doing well" outcomes are more important for the success of an employee's career in an organization. This form of fit relates to such criteria as job performance; organizational citizenship behaviors; and the avoidance of counter productive behaviors.

The collective insights from these chapters highlight interventions for organizations to consider for developing a career-long inclusive culture and improving person-organization fit for neurodiverse employees. From recruitment and hiring processes that accommodate different communication styles, to leadership development programs that foster neurodiverse workers, the authors provide clear evidence that workplaces are able to move beyond awareness of neurodiversity (i.e., the "fitting in" form of person-organization fit) to taking meaningful steps toward an inclusive culture for neurodiverse employees across a career (i.e., the "doing well" form of person-organization fit).

The traditional workplace model fosters unnecessary barriers, career stagnation, and exclusion for neurodiverse employees. However, with intentional efforts, workplaces can become more supportive, benefiting not only neurodivergent workers but also the organization. This volume provides ways for organizations to do this in such a way that neurodivergent employees should not bear the sole responsibility of advocating for their own inclusion. Companies committing to long-term change will reap the benefits of the performance of neurodiverse employees. Embracing neurodiversity is not just a matter of compliance or corporate social responsibility—it is a pathway to innovation, efficiency, and a more inclusive society. By implementing the recommendations and strategies outlined in these chapters, organizations can foster a workplace culture where neurodivergent employees thrive.

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