

Neurodiversity and Innovation: The Benefits of Hiring Employees Who Break the Mold

by [Phil McKinney](#)

Today, a diverse workplace is not only common, it's a requirement. While racial and gender diversity are givens, there's also an important new frontier: neurodiversity. A neurodiverse workplace provides new talent opportunities for those previously deemed unemployable, and more importantly, it provides workplaces with new perspectives and ways of thinking that spur more creative solutions and innovations.

Neurodiversity Gaining Ground in the Business World

[Forbes Magazine](#) has postulated that a diverse workplace is beneficial to an organization, and a requisite for growth and innovation. Three years ago when this study was conducted neurodiversity wasn't taken into account. [Forbes recently updated their study](#) to find the answer to the question: do these same employers find benefits and opportunities in neurodiversity?

The short answer: yes.

Simply put, neurodiversity—which usually refers to the incorporation of people with autism into a group or organization—is another facet of diversity that makes a workplace great. And as the children of today—more specifically, the 1 in 68 children estimated to have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)—grow up and enter the workforce, neurodiversity is going to become even more important than ever before.

Even now, there are plenty of adults on the autism spectrum who are finding successful employment in major corporations like SAP and Microsoft. Companies, like finance giant [Freddie Mac](#), have developed hiring programs that specifically target adults on the autism spectrum.. Technology giant SAP is sourcing 1% of their future workforce using a process they call “[Autism at Work](#)” to recruit, train, and onboard individuals with autism by 2020. Creating a supportive environment allows them to capitalize on the strong attention to detail many individuals with ASD poses, placing them in departments like software development and testing that would most benefit from the application of this attribute.

Benefits of a Neurodiverse Workplace

There is a huge amount of **untapped potential in neurodiversity**, which goes well beyond skin-deep differences.

A neurodiverse workforce brings new ways of thinking that spark creativity and innovation.

Phil McKinney

Beyond the attention to detail that many on the spectrum display, many employers who require creative solutions to problems find it beneficial to hire employees on the autism spectrum. Just as those with varying racial and economic backgrounds think differently based on their experiences, neurodiverse individuals think differently because their minds just work differently. And if your company relies on new, innovative ideas to keep it moving forward (as most do), it pays to have as many different perspectives on the team as possible.

People with autism are less apt to look at the world in the same way as neurotypical people and accept the status quo as the best way of doing things. They are generally less prone to taking things at face value, which is something great innovators have to actively train themselves not to do. They may be better able to see past “packaging” and look at the root of a problem or question without the same kind of emotional bias most neurotypical people have.

Some of the greatest thinkers and innovators in history have subsequently been “diagnosed” with autism. Of course, we’ll never know for sure, but many have hypothesized, based on accountings of their personalities and habits, that figures such as Tesla, Einstein, Darwin, Mozart, and Emily Dickinson were all on the autism spectrum.

How Can Employers Foster a Neurodiverse Workforce?

There is no question that the future is pointing towards a more neurodiverse workplace. So, what are some of the ways that employers can encourage a neurodiverse workforce and create the conditions where neurodiverse employees can thrive?

Seek help from specialists. There are established programs that can help you match your open positions and business needs with a neurodiverse talent pool. For instance, the Danish company **Specialisterne**, which has expanded to numerous other countries, trains and employs those on the autism spectrum in IT consultancy work.

Dispense with traditional interviews. A big part of the traditional hiring process is the interview, which among other things allows the employer to assess how well the potential employee will “fit” with the rest of their workforce. But when you’re hiring specifically for the purpose of neurodiversity, that concern isn’t quite as relevant. Those on the autism spectrum generally don’t have the smooth social skills that play well in a traditional interview, so autism advocates recommend a more skills-based approach. Set up an “interview” that allows the potential employee to demonstrate their work rather than how well they can articulate why they should be hired.

Educate the rest of the workforce. While hopefully you’ve hired an open-minded, flexible workforce who will have no trouble adapting to a more neurodiverse office, make sure everyone is on the same page. Have a meeting or send out a memo about the initiative and the reasons for it and make it very clear that this is for the benefit of the company. Explain any special accommodations that will be made for the new employee or employees, and let workers know they can come to you with any questions or concerns.

Be flexible. Some of the structures and routines of your office may not allow your employees on the autism spectrum to do their best work. For instance, be prepared to find a separate space for those employees if the main office environment is too loud or chaotic. But most importantly, be open to new ideas that your non-neurotypical employees come up with, ideas that may challenge your past assumptions. That’s the whole reason for having a more neurodiverse workplace, after all: fostering creativity and innovation by incorporating different perspectives and ways of thinking.