

CREATIVITY OVER CONVENTION

**an evidence-based
framework for
neuroinclusive human
capital management**



introduction

An abstract graphic of a brain in profile, facing right. The brain is filled with a pattern of small, light blue circles. Overlaid on the brain are several concentric, dashed blue lines that form a series of arcs, suggesting neural pathways or a signal field. The background is a solid dark teal color.

Current workforce trends suggest that by 2040, over 40% of the global workforce will identify as neurodivergent.¹ This means that the bulk of everyone's colleagues, trainees, and supervisors will bring awareness of and appreciation for different ways of thinking, processing, sensing, and interacting in the workplace.

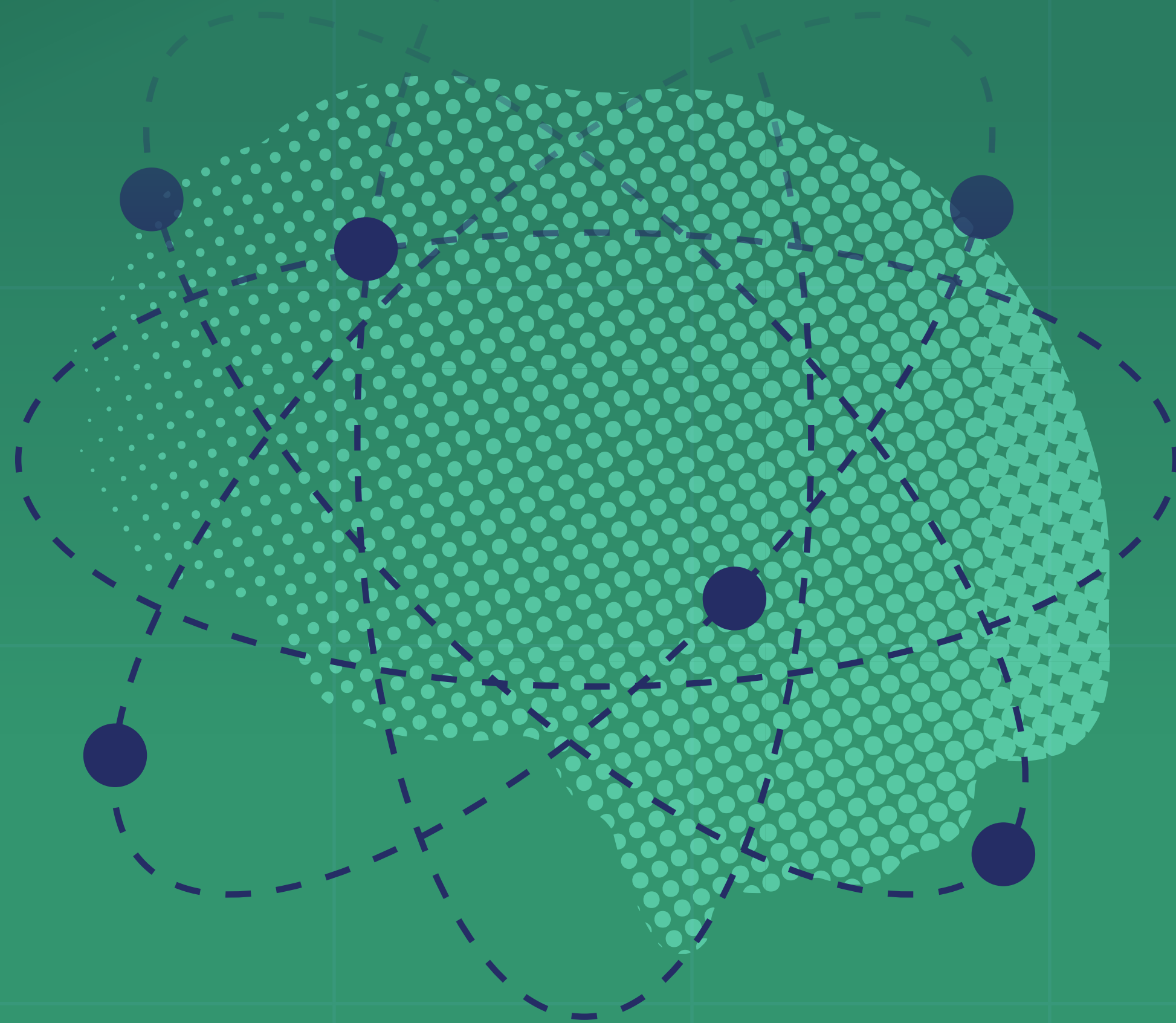
Neurodiverse workforces have the potential to generate incredible business value. Drawing on the findings of an empirical qualitative study of neurodivergence in the workplace ([see Appendix](#)), this report explains how companies can prepare for increasingly neurodiverse workforces. Businesses need to make intentional investments in their human capital management practices to prepare for a changing workforce.

If done right, **neuroinclusive human capital management will lead to more systematic, more organized, more productive, and more agile work for all.**

This analysis uncovers new aspects of the business case for neuroinclusion and forecasts forward-thinking strategy for changing workplace demographics.

¹ [Everway, 2024](#)

what is neurodiversity?



The idea of **Neurodiversity** recognizes that all minds work differently. Neurodiversity positions cognitive differences as naturally occurring variations in human cognition, just as biodiversity positions differences in species and traits as naturally occurring variations in biological systems. **Healthy ecosystems rely on complementary variation. So do innovative businesses.**

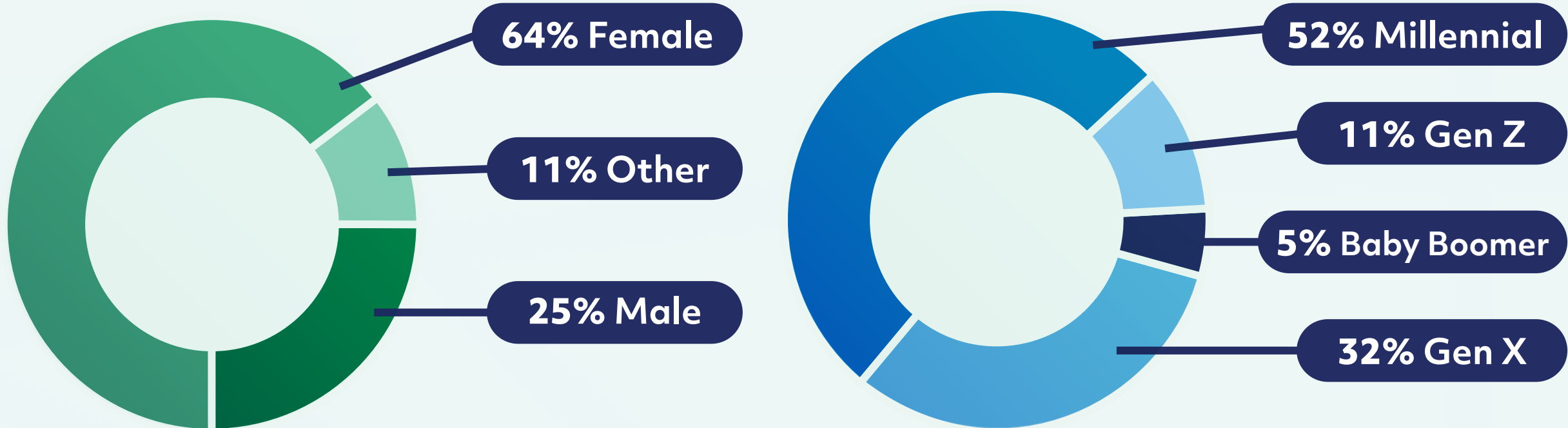
Throughout the report, readers will encounter a variety of related terminology:

- **Neuroinclusive** refers to workplaces that support the full range of human cognition; this report defines what neuroinclusion looks like in the context of human capital management, which is how companies optimize employee productivity, increase engagement, and decrease attrition by treating people as valuable assets
- **Neurodivergent** refers to people with cognitive conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Bipolar Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress, and learning disabilities such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and Dyscalculia
- **Neurotypical** refers to people with typical or standard cognition

participant trends & characteristics

This analysis is based on the findings of a qualitative study of neurodiversity in the workforce, conducted by Disability:IN from November 2024 to March 2025. Disability:IN purposively sampled 75 of 175 respondents for interviews. See Appendix for detailed methodology.

PARTICIPANT GENDER & GENERATION



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

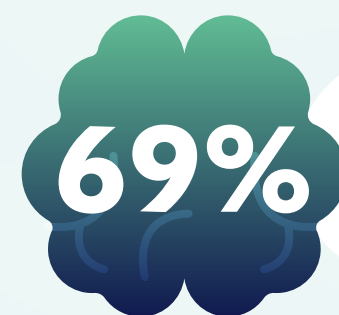


- Australia
- Ireland
- Poland
- Kenya
- Netherlands
- Spain
- United Kingdom
- United States

PARTICIPANT DIAGNOSES



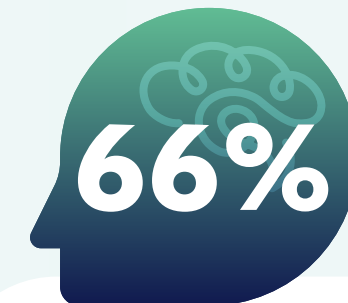
- 57% with Autism
- 52% with ADHD
- 16% with Post Traumatic Stress
- 15% with Learning Disabilities
- 10% with Bipolar
- 10% with OCD



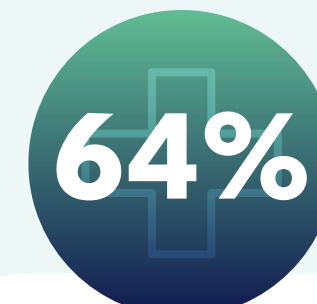
69% report advantageous cognitive characteristics associated with their neurodiversity



64% of participants self-identify as a person with a disability

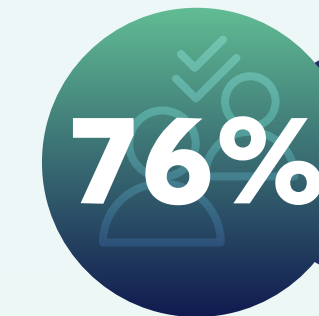


66%
received an adult diagnosis



64%
reported clinical diagnosis

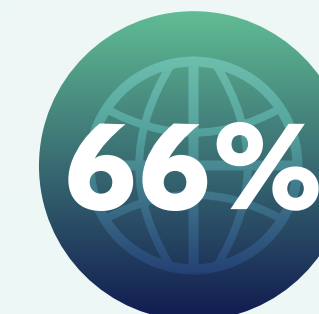
PARTICIPANTS AT WORK



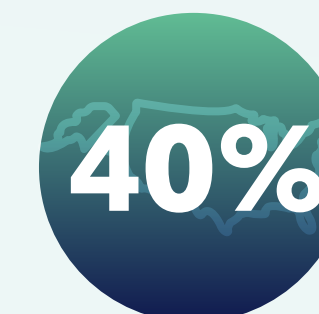
76% report good relationship with manager



65% participate in their company's disability self-identification campaigns



66% of non-U.S. participants requested accommodations or adjustments



40% of U.S. participants requested accommodations or adjustments

executive summary

6 Ways That Neurodiversity Increases Productivity For Everyone

Neurodivergent communication styles, support needs, and self-awareness can lead to greater productivity by fostering...

1. **Better Managers**
2. **Stronger Goal-Orientation**
3. **Accessible Communications**
4. **High Levels of Engagement**
5. **Design for Productivity**
6. **Flexible Working Arrangements**

6 Pillars of Neuroinclusive Human Capital Management

Companies that update their human capital management frameworks now can get ahead of the curve and harness the value of barrier-free workforces by...

1. **Upskilling Managers**
2. **Updating Communication Norms**
3. **Universalizing Accommodations**
4. **Broadening ERGs**
5. **Developing New Talent**
6. **Piloting Flexible Work Arrangements**



PART 1: **how neurodiversity fosters productivity**

A neurodiverse workplace is a productive workplace because neurodivergent communication styles, support needs, and self-awareness enhance productivity for everyone by creating more intentional managers, stronger goal-orientation, clearer communications, higher levels of engagement, better design for productivity, and more flexible working arrangements.

how neurodiversity fosters productivity for everyone

1 More Intentional Managers

Successful managers of neurodivergent people learn to be more intentional about direct communication, how to deliver employee feedback, how to allocate tasks based on cognitive assets, how to explain their reasoning to employees, and how to discretely manage workplace accommodations.

2 Stronger Goal-Orientation

Neurodivergent employees' preferences for structured meetings, detailed agendas, advanced written notice, and automated notetaking mean more goal-oriented processes for everyone.

3 Clearer Communications

Neurodivergent employees' preference for direct and unambiguous written instruction without social subtext results in more accessible and clear communication for everyone.

Higher Levels of Engagement

65% of neurodivergent people in the sample participated in their employer's disability data collection efforts and **64%** of them identified as people with disabilities.

This level of engagement helps companies meet government mandates for disability employment, where they exist, or advance internal efforts for disability inclusion.

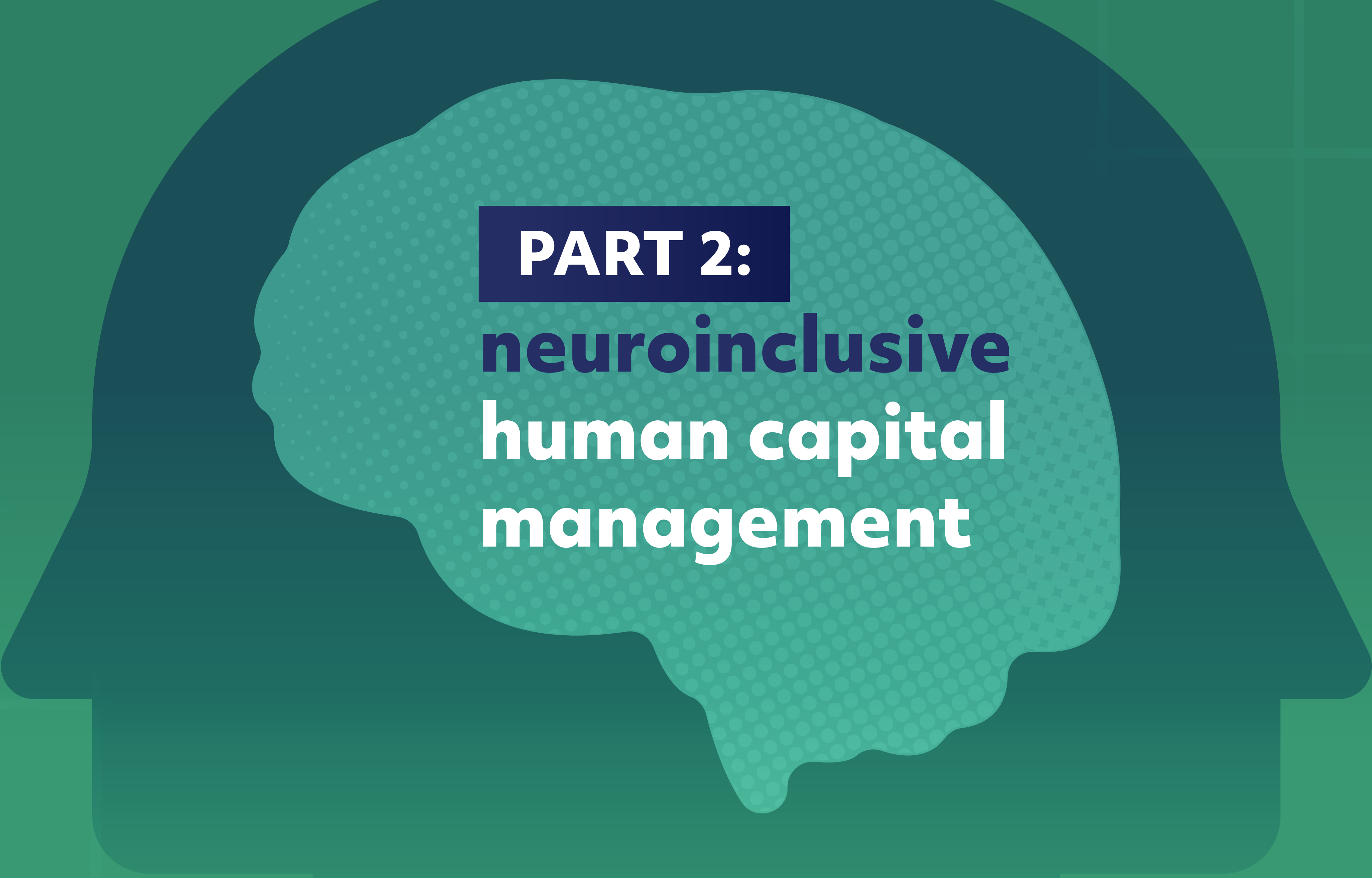
Better Design for Productivity

For generations, neurodivergent people have made informal adjustments to the workplace to increase their productivity; by asserting their support needs for quiet spaces, assistive devices, and distraction-free environments, neurodivergent employees model routine use of adjustments to design for individual productivity.

More Flexible Working Arrangements

Neurodiverse employees' success is linked to flexible working arrangements that allow the individual to determine when, where, and in what environment they are most productive.

Flexible work gives employees choice to determine where and how they work best, which benefits all employees, including parents, caregivers, busy people, and people with disabilities.

A large, stylized graphic of a human head in profile, facing right. The head is filled with a dark teal color. Inside the head, there is a lighter teal, brain-shaped area with a pattern of small white dots. The text is centered within this brain area.

PART 2: **neuroinclusive human capital management**

If the generational increase in self-identified neurodivergence comes to fruition and companies do not adjust their human capital management practices, they face unsustainable demand for individualized workplace adjustments. **Forty percent (40%) of U.S. study participants and 66% of non-U.S. participants requested formal adjustments related to their neurodivergence.**

Companies that update their human capital management frameworks now will be prepared to support the productivity of their workforce by **upskilling managers, updating communication norms, universalizing adjustments, broadening ERGs, rethinking talent strategy, and piloting flexible work arrangements** to create accessible workplaces where neurodivergent people can be successful. These six pillars of neuroinclusive human capital management draw on study findings to illuminate implications, directions, and solutions for the future of workplace policy.

management

Management characteristics that matter to neurodivergent employees

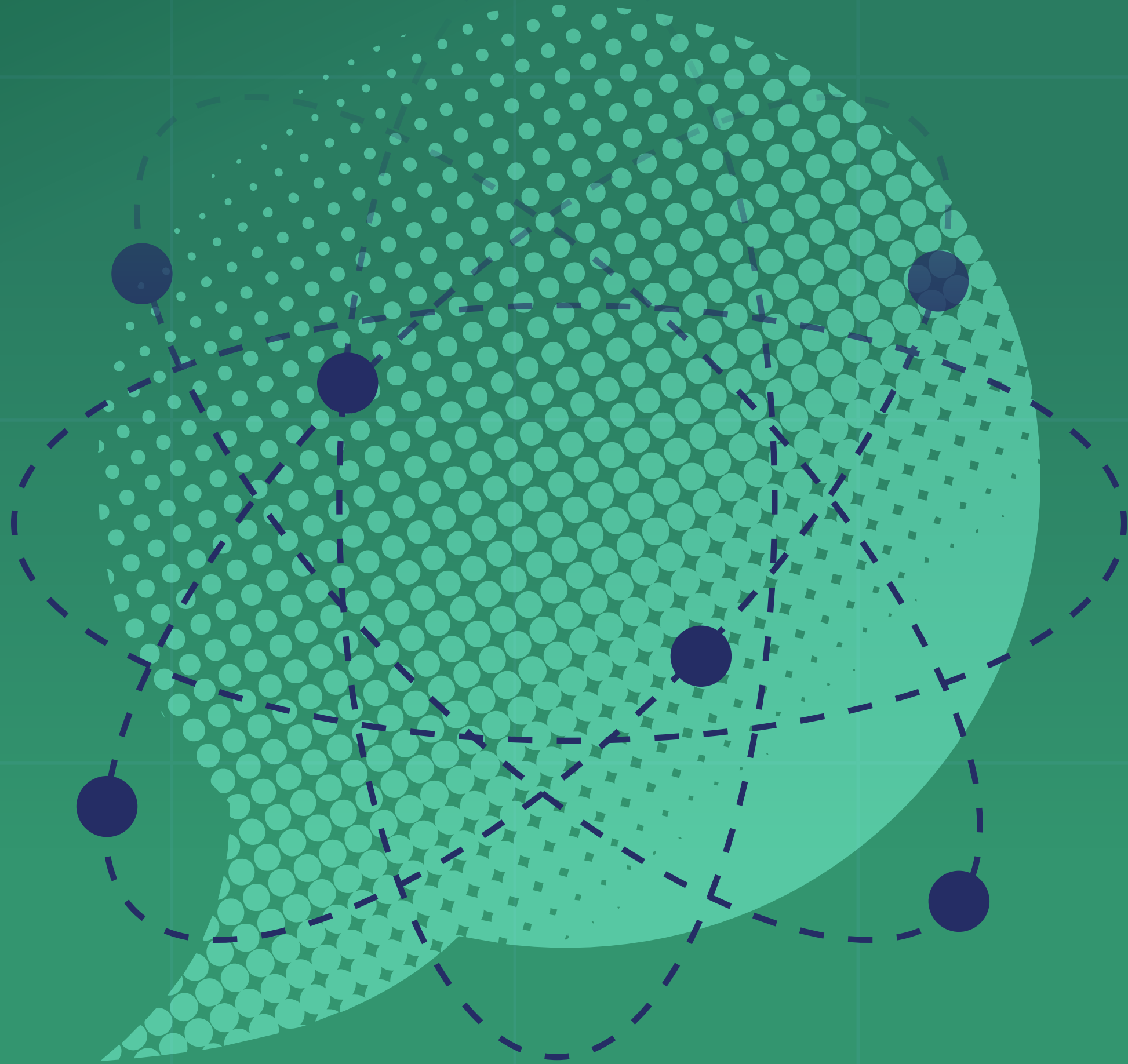
- Talks through challenges without condescension
- Receptive to workplace adjustments
- Learns to recognize signs of over stimulation
- Mediates misunderstood characteristics (such as overly direct communication or burnout) with colleagues
- Educates themselves about the diagnosis
- Does not disclose direct reports' neurodivergence to others
- Considers tasks based on strengths

76%

76% of neurodivergent participants reported a positive relationship with their manager, then explained what management characteristics matter most to them.

These management characteristics will become more important as neurodiversity increases in the global workforce.

communication



Eighty five percent of neurodivergent millennials use artificial intelligence (AI) in everyday work tasks (compared with 50% of Baby Boomers, 57% of Gen X, and 29% of Gen Z).

AI has emerged as the go-to email composition assistant for neurodivergent professionals because it helps:

- **Make direct messages more professional and nuanced**
- **Shorten and simplify long, complicated ideas**

Moreover, neurodivergent people are pioneering the use of AI to seek reassurance in the workplace. Rather than relying on another person for feedback, neurodivergent employees are consulting with AI to check that their ideas are cogent, concise, and accessible to others before sharing them with colleagues—a practice that can improve communication and efficiency among all employees.

accommodations & adjustments

To avoid an influx of individualized requests for adjustments, accommodations, and flexible working arrangements, companies can embrace the principles of accessibility for neuroinclusion.

Companies that standardize the workplace adjustments that matter most to today's neurodivergent workers will stay ahead of the curve.



Automatic transcription and captioning for meetings and events



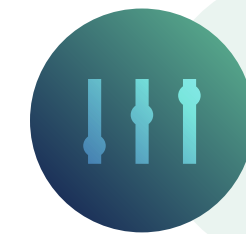
Detailed agendas sent in advance



Space to ask clarifying questions



Unambiguous written instructions



Sensory office adjustments



Flexible working arrangements

employee resource groups



64%

of neurodivergent people
in our study identify
as disabled

Sixty four percent (64%) of study participants voluntarily identify as neurodivergent and disabled. Given that workplace rights for neurodivergent people are anchored in anti-discrimination laws that protect people with disabilities, disability-focused ERGs often serve companies' neurodivergent populations, including those who not explicitly identify as disabled. As the population of neurodivergent people in the workforce expands, so too will your disability-focused ERGs. Younger generations of neurodivergent people are keenly aware of their work-based strengths and struggles, and they turn to ERGs for resources, community, and support.

To meet the demand for customized conversation, disability-focused ERGs are launching **neurodiversity-focused ERG pillars for neurodivergent people, caregivers, and allies**. Demand for new internal communities is driven by a desire to have more specific conversations about neurodivergence in the workplace that reflect a wider range of diagnoses and accommodations for non-apparent and sensory cognitive disabilities.

talent

Today's neurodivergent talent are keenly aware of the strengths they bring to the workforce.

Across diagnoses, analysis revealed a set of common neurodivergent characteristics related to reasoning, critical thinking, and social and sensory skills in the workplace.



Neuroinclusive talent strategy means valuing critical thinking and reasoning skills over social and sensory skills: innovation over interaction, creativity over convention.

Reasoning

- Understand the why
- Applying morality to work
- Problem naming
- Perfectionist streak
- Rigid belief systems
- Can not lie

Critical Thinking

- Pattern recognition
- Special interest focus
- Naturally analytical
- Attention to detail
- Look at things from a different angle
- Systems thinking

Social & Sensory

- Sensory sensitivity
- Misses subtext
- Cannot filter sensory information
- Difficulty networking
- Feel deeply emotional about things
- Very direct
- Binary thinking
- Tangential
- Deeply empathic

Workplaces that reward people who excel in social interactions, large group dynamics, busy environments, and unspoken workplace decorum overlook neurodivergent talent who struggle with social conventions and are sensitive to sensory stimuli imperceptible to many neurotypicals.

Workplaces that reward innovative approaches to solving problems, prioritize performance over social interaction, and leverage alternative viewpoints will **benefit from neurodivergent talent who excel in systems thinking, problem solving, and creative reasoning that make work products more competitive.**

work arrangements



Neurodivergent people in today's corporate workforce are unequivocal: **the principle of flexible work is the most important workplace accommodation and the most impactful driver of retention and productivity.**

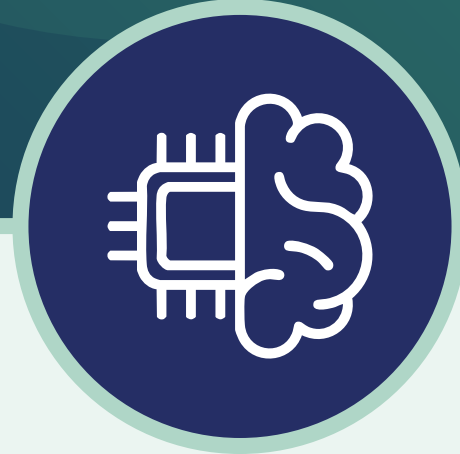
Flexible work, which involves the ability to customize one's setting, schedule, surroundings, and time away, is more important in principle than remote work.

Flexible work allows neurodivergent employees to control for the social and sensory aspects of employment by creating work settings that nurture their productivity in the office and at home.

framework for neuroinclusive human capital management



**Upskill
Managers
to Lead
Cognitively
Diverse
Teams**



**Embrace
Assistive
Technology and
AI to Improve
Employee
Communication**



**Shift From
Individualized
Adjustments
to Universal
Supports**



**Launch a
Neurodiversity
Pillar Within
Your Disability
ERG/BRG for
Neurodivergent
Employees,
Caregivers,
and Allies**



**Prioritize
Innovation Over
Interaction and
Creativity Over
Convention**



**Adopt
Flexible Work
Arrangements
to Boost
Retention and
Productivity**

appendix: about the study

This analysis is based on the findings of a qualitative study of neurodiversity in the workforce, conducted by Disability:IN from November 2024 to March 2025. Disability:IN invited neurodivergent people from its partner companies to participate in a thirty-minute interview, then purposively sampled 75 of 175 respondents for interviews to maximize global participation and generational diversity.

Roughly two thirds of participants opted for a recorded virtual interview, while one third opted to submit a fully-anonymous online written interview form. Each interview was then analyzed for qualitative thematic markers representing demographic data, diagnostic information, neurological characteristics, workplace experiences, and personal identity. A quantitative data set was created to identify relationships between factors. The full data set consisted of >2,800 in vivo codes that were generated in an initial round of hand coding. In the second round, each data point was broken into primary deductive analytic codes, followed by a third inductive round of coding. Weekly coding meetings and two rounds of interrater reliability checks were performed during the coding process.

The findings of the qualitative analysis inform this report, which has been crafted into an industry research brief based on the empirical findings in the context of an exhaustive academic and industry literature review of neurodiversity in the workforce.

The study received funding from HSBC and other Disability:IN corporate partners.

appendix: about the team

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Your Business Partner for Disability Inclusion.

Disability:IN is the leading nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide. Together with the world's leading companies, Disability:IN drives progress through initiatives, tools, and expertise that deliver long-term business impact. **Are You IN?**



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