

Corporations and Neurodivergent Women Need to Coexist

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Abstract

Neurodivergence is a non-medical term that refers to individuals whose brain differs from stereotypical brain functions; this divergence in brain function can include autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and dyslexia. Neurodivergent women face unique challenges at the intersection of gender biases and neurodivergent stigma, which significantly impact their workplace experiences, career advancement, and overall well-being. This study employed a quantitative analysis of surveys conducted with 10 neurodivergent women aged 20-40 and 10 human resources professionals within the same organizations. Study results found that approximately 66% of neurodivergent women surveyed experienced workplace biases and have reported having a decrease in job satisfaction, increased masking of neurodivergent behaviors, and restricted career advancement. Further research indicates that around 44% of human resource professionals voiced uncertainty about incorporating neurodiverse-inclusive policies, emphasizing neurodiversity familiarity. In correlation with the presented data, there is a call for corporations to implement flexible work schedules, quiet office spaces, transparent communication procedures, and neurodiversity training to foster a more inclusive environment. While some organizations have adopted neurodivergent-friendly practices, budget constraints and leadership resistance remain significant obstacles. These findings reinforce the urgency for corporations to implement policies that support neurodivergent women and create a more equitable workplace.

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Pip Jamieson is a UK-based entrepreneur who founded and is now the Chief Executive Officer of The Dots, a professional network company catering to the creative arts. However, she is also known by another name: Delightfully Dyslexic. Pip Jamieson was diagnosed with

dyslexia from an early age and faced many challenges. In a podcast called The Hidden 20%, Pip Jamieson stated that growing up and working in different environments was a struggle (YouTube, 2024). Now, Pip sees her dyslexia as a superpower and source of creativity, becoming an advocate for neurodivergent individuals (Pip Jamieson, n.d.). Neurodiversity, according to the article Incorporating Neurodivergent Individuals into Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives, is the concept where the divergence, such as Autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, from stereotypical brain functions should be celebrated and not a problem that requires a solution (Komarow et al., 2020). However, many people in society do not recognize neurodivergence as a strength. Neurodivergent individuals, in particular women, face multiple challenges in everyday life, such as biases against neurodivergence and gender, obtaining resources for neurodivergence, and finding accommodations that fit their needs. One of the places that are among the highest that do not foster inclusive environments for neurodivergent women is workplaces. Organizations that follow a more traditional structure can cause neurodivergent women to have decreased job satisfaction, hindrances to career advancement, and negative impacts on mental and physical well-being. By analyzing the challenges that neurodivergent women encounter in and out of the workplace, this study emphasizes how corporations can effectively implement inclusive strategies for neurodivergent women to create a more supportive work environment.

Literature Review

While much research shows how corporations can become more inclusive for neurodivergent adults, researchers have conducted little study on how organizations can better include neurodivergent women and address their unique struggles. Since little research exists on how businesses can create a more inclusive environment for neurodivergent women, this study will explore the following research questions and hypotheses:

Research Questions (RQs):

1. What straightforward methods can human resource departments execute to facilitate an inclusive and supportive work atmosphere for neurodivergent women?
2. How do inclusive workplace policies affect job satisfaction and career advancement of neurodivergent women?

Hypotheses (Hs):

1. Human resource departments that create inclusive strategies targeted towards neurodivergent women can immensely enhance job satisfaction and engagement among neurodivergent women.
2. Organizations with sufficient support systems, such as neurodiversity information sessions and adjustable work accommodations, will experience lower turnover rates among neurodivergent women.

This literature review will highlight the primary issues that neurodivergent women face, in and out of the workplace, such as gender and neurodivergent biases, pressure to mask neurodivergent tendencies, and lack of organizational resources and how businesses can introduce additional stressors. In addition, this literature review will expand on already established research on how traditional work environments can become more inclusive and how misdiagnosing neurodivergent women can have lasting consequences.

Neurodivergent women face numerous challenges, including gender biases and misconceptions about neurodiversity. A 2023 article by Sarah Eckersley highlights that children and a small percentage of adults prefer a male scientist over a female scientist. Furthermore, women in these male-dominated roles often perceive them as "lower" than their male counterparts (Eckersley, 2023, p. 44). Not only do neurodivergent women experience biases

against their gender, but they also encounter biases against neurodiversity. Neurodivergent individuals are also viewed as physically and mentally weaker than neurotypical individuals or employees (LeFevre-Levy et al., 2023). Due to these biases and misconceptions toward neurodivergent women, corporations are more likely to give poor performance reviews, which can hinder career advancement opportunities for neurodivergent women. In addition to these poor performance reviews, recruiters or hiring managers who see a trend in neurodivergent women's strengths and weaknesses could result in "typecasting" these individuals into completing the same tasks (Praslova et al., 2023, p. 66). Typecasting is the process in which a person is placed in a role repeatedly due to stereotypes. Gender and neurodivergent biases do not only result in decreased career advancements and typecasting, but they also have other consequences, such as masking.

Traditional work environments have various stressors, including deadlines, long hours, and varied social levels. While these factors are manageable for a neurotypical person, these factors can become stressors for neurodivergent women and lead them to a phenomenon known as masking. Masking is the process where individuals, especially neurodivergent women, suppress or hide traits of their neurodiversity to align with societal norms, particularly in schools and workplaces (McKinney et al., 2024). While masking can help neurodivergent women appear "normal," the function can cause an extreme decrease in mental fatigue and an increase in burnout, particularly in the workplace (Zhuang et al., 2023, p. 2). Corporations should work towards creating quiet office spaces to facilitate the stressors of traditional workplace environments, which can lead to higher productivity, less burnout, and higher job satisfaction (Russo et al., 2023).

While quiet spaces can help mitigate the effects of masking, corporations that follow traditional organizational structures often lack the necessary resources to accommodate neurodivergent women, which can cause further barriers for them. One of the aspects in which businesses lack resources for neurodivergent individuals is the recruitment process. A recently published article on implementing strategies for a more inclusive recruitment process stated that "unemployment runs for neurodivergent adults as high as 30-40%," (Shalfrooshan, 2024, p. 12). Corporations that have a deeper understanding of neurodivergent women's behaviors can hire a range of interviewers who comprehend that, in some cases, neurodivergent women interpret social cues differently (Russo et al., 2023). Organizations can implement other accommodations to promote a more inclusive environment: flexible work schedules, workshops on neurodiversity, and clear communication between superiors and managers. Ensuring these methods can help offer a place where neurodivergent women can grow and showcase their skills, such as intense patience for repeating tasks, dependability to complete complicated tasks, and high concentration levels and observation of detail (Davies et al., 2023).

Rationale for Further Research

Current research on the struggles of neurodivergent individuals has made strides in pushing workplaces to be more inclusive. However, there is a considerable gap in literature and research that primarily focuses on procedures tailored to neurodivergent women. Ongoing diversity and inclusion initiatives have often failed to encapsulate the range of accommodations that neurodivergent women require, which results in persistent workplace inequalities (Komarow et al., 2020, p. 36). More in-depth research is essential to examine methods that human resource departments can install in workplace systems to promote a more inclusive climate.

In addition, researchers need to conduct more studies on the diagnosing process of neurodivergent women. According to Cook et al. (2024), more men than women receive diagnoses of autism or any form of neurodivergence. Misdiagnosed or undiagnosed neurodivergent women may experience anxiety and develop lasting consequences for their mental and physical well-being.

Methodology

Participants

Due to the nature of this study, researchers required two sample groups. The first group included 10 neurodivergent women employees, ages 20 to 40, who received a formal diagnosis or self-diagnosed. The second sample group was comprised of 10 human resource professionals of varying ages with experience working in the same company. Researchers initially recruited these two groups through LinkedIn. After finding a few participants, they used word of mouth to recruit additional participants. While searching for participants on LinkedIn, the focus remained on locating human resource professionals and female neurodivergent employees within the same company. Researchers evaluated companies with various roles and departments based on preset criteria to achieve a diverse spectrum of employees.

Design

In order to gain a more profound understanding of how corporations can implement more inclusive strategies to foster a more supportive work environment to meet neurodivergent women's needs, a quantitative study was conducted utilizing two questionnaires as research instruments that catered to each sample group: one for neurodivergent women employees and the other for human resource professionals.

Procedure

In order to gain a more profound understanding of how corporations can implement more inclusive strategies to foster a more supportive work environment to meet neurodivergent women's needs, a quantitative study was conducted utilizing two questionnaires as research instruments that catered to each sample group: one for neurodivergent women employees and the other for human resource professionals. For example, the surveys will include questions such as, "My workplace provides sufficient resources for neurodivergent individuals: Strongly Agree-Agree-Neutral-Disagree- Strongly Disagree and "How long have you been with the company: A. 1-5 years, B. 5-10 years?" Regarding the survey about human resource professionals, example questions are: "I am knowledgeable about neurodivergent workplace practices: Strongly Agree-Agree-Neutral-Disagree-Strongly Disagree, and "Which of the following practices would you be willing to implement or participate in: Neurodivergent workshops, Gender bias workshops, and the like."

Data Analysis

Once the participants completed the surveys, the results were organized into two different forms –circle graphs and an Excel sheet –and analyzed through descriptive analysis. The circle graphs provided insights and calculated the answer choices that were selected the most. The Excel sheet utilized the data analysis process known as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, or SPSS, to give further insights into how many participants answered each answer choice in percentage form.

Findings

Sample Characteristics

Researchers conducted two surveys that gathered responses from neurodivergent women employees and human resource professionals to analyze the range of inclusivity strategies and

their impact on job satisfaction and career advancement. The neurodivergent women sample incorporated different age groups, with the highest participation between 20 and 40. Most participants reported having a formal neurodivergent diagnosis, while some participants reported having been self-diagnosed. For neurodivergent women, the most prominent amount of time worked at the company was 1-10 years, highlighting varying levels of career progression.

The sample for the human resource professionals had a broad spectrum of experience levels, with the most representation from 0-5 years and 11+ years. The human resource participants surveyed varied in familiarity with neurodiversity or neurodiversity programs. Some reported vast knowledge, while others expressed little to no awareness.

Research Question 1: Methods to Foster Inclusivity

The survey results below highlight the key strategies workplaces can implement to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment catered towards neurodivergent women. The most recorded strategies that neurodivergent women and human resource officials would find highly effective are flexible work hours and quiet workspaces. The budget constraints inhibited actions from being taken. While it was one of the least recorded, neurodivergent women and human resource professionals stated that transparent communication practices would help curate a more inclusive environment for neurodivergent employees. However, the barrier that stopped this action from being adopted was a lack of understanding of leadership.

Research Question 2: Impact of Inclusivity on Job Satisfaction and Career Advancement

Neurodivergent women employees expressed varying levels of job satisfaction, ranging from very satisfied to dissatisfied. The research showed that implementing more neurodivergent-friendly policies directly increased job satisfaction. Additionally, most neurodivergent women

participants reported that they masked their authentic selves at work because of the pressure to conform to traditional workplace standards.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

A thorough study analysis supports the first hypothesis that businesses that create inclusive work practices catered toward neurodivergent women can positively impact job satisfaction and career advancement. Organizations that implemented specific strategies, such as flexible work schedules and in-office sensory-friendly workspaces, reported increased job satisfaction and productivity. In contrast, further developments in neurodivergent supportive work culture are required to foster inclusive work environments for neurodivergent women as masking behaviors continue.

Implications for Human Resource Practices

Based on the survey results, human resource departments are essential for creating an inclusive environment for neurodivergent women. Further responses indicate that distinctive initiatives such as neurodiversity awareness workshops, bias training for leadership and general staff, and tailored procedures are needed to sustain neurodivergent employees (especially neurodivergent women). Nonetheless, to continue to support neurodivergent women in the workforce, barriers such as budget constraints and opposition from leadership will require constant action to overcome, such as advocacy towards executive levels of management.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers perspicuity into workplaces fostering a more inclusive environment for neurodivergent women, multiple limitations inhibit its potential, such as a smaller sample size and biases surrounding self-reported data. As forthcoming research persists,

such studies should investigate larger samples, inclusive initiatives, and longitudinal studies.

While this research paper has limitations, it emphasizes businesses' need to foster more corroborating work environments for neurodivergent women. By prioritizing inclusivity towards neurodiversity, corporations can continue to enhance work environments for all employees because corporations coexisting with neurodivergent women are essential to any company's growth.

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