



Brain Power

The why and how of neurodiversity employment in local government

BY ANTHONY PACILIO

Neurodiversity refers to the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits including but not limited to autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). An estimated 15 to 20 percent of the world's population exhibits some form of neurodivergence.¹

Neurodivergent individuals possess a wide range of skills that can solve the complex and intricate business challenges many organizations face, making them invaluable assets across various sectors. Their strong concentration, superior problem-solving abilities, and excellent pattern recognition are just some of the skills that can be especially beneficial in many fields such as technology, finance, legal, cybersecurity, and healthcare. Despite this, unemployment for neurodivergent adults remains alarmingly high, with rates reaching between 30 and 40 percent.²

Recognizing the benefits of neurodiversity in the workplace not only improves diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, but it can also lead to substantial business advantages such as increased productivity and improved quality of work.

Success by the numbers

Employers across all industries have experienced the direct benefits of hiring and placing neurodivergent individuals into meaningful careers that align with their skillsets. And in the public sector, government agencies are employing neurodiverse teams.

One example is a tolling agency that needed to verify images of license plates captured in toll lanes for commuters who were traveling without a transponder. By employing neurodivergent individuals, the agency was able to identify and document at least 350 images per hour.

In an effort to go completely digital, a state's Department of Transportation employed a team of neurodivergent data support analysts who uploaded and digitized more than 2,000 documents a day. With an error rate of less than two percent, the team exceeded productivity expectations by converting more than 25,000 documents.

In the private sector, a wealth management firm employed a team of neurodivergent employees to improve

its Power BI dashboards, an analytics platform with business intelligence (BI) reports. The team introduced a daily testing routine for the analytics platform, establishing an automated testing framework that verified more than 75 percent of the data within the extraction process. They cataloged more than 30 feature files—a common file with feature descriptions and test scenarios—which serve as documentation for the Power BI dashboards. With more than 200 test scenarios and 45 production BI reports validated, the company saved between 20 to 30 hours of manual validation every week.

Due to the testing coverage, the team effectively introduced a daily reporting checklist procedure, which notified leadership when reports were ready to provide more testing coverage in the technology stack.

This daily procedure rectified prior problems caused by inconsistent reporting and outdated data, guaranteeing data integrity.

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Percentage of the world's population that exhibits some form of neurodivergence¹

30-40%

The estimated rate of unemployment for neurodivergent adults²



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These are just a few examples that demonstrate how incorporating neurodiversity in the workplace can boost innovation and productivity. Not only do neurodivergent individuals provide strategic business results, but this underemployed community is given the opportunity to excel in a rewarding career.

People-first approach

To deploy and maintain a successful neurodiversity employment program, organizations must have a people-centric culture. The employers who are best positioned for success with a neurodiversity employment program understand the importance of a DEI culture and are usually equipped with employee resource groups (ERG) or business resource groups (BRG). ERGs are affinity groups that bring awareness and education to their communities through fundraising and other events.

Attracting neurodiverse talent begins on the career site and job boards with the job description. The language should be inclusive and direct to engage neurodiverse talent and make clear the requirements and responsibilities. Once the candidate is selected for an interview, traditional interview barriers may keep neurodivergent individuals from showcasing their skills. A hands-on evaluation with a neurodiversity-certified team lead in a supportive workplace environment is helpful to ensure the candidate is a strong fit.

However, the support cannot end there. Team leads are key components to maintaining an inclusive culture. By providing mentorship, training, and coaching, neurodiversity-certified team leads can help employers achieve increased productivity and morale while neurodivergent employees establish a strong sense of purpose.

Paving the way for change

Neurodiversity employment programs are paving the way for change and increasing neurodiversity in fields such as technology, legal, healthcare, manufacturing, and more. Not only do these programs deliver on DEI initiatives, but they also provide a strong return with increased innovation, morale, and camaraderie through diversity of thought. As awareness and adoption of these programs continues to grow, the neurodiverse community will have more long-lasting, rewarding careers.¹

Anthony Pacilio is vice president of CAI Neurodiverse Solutions.

¹ Nancy Doyle, "Neurodiversity at work: A biopsychosocial model and the impact on working adults," *British Medical Bulletin*, September 2020.

² Yesenia Carrero, "The Center for Neurodiversity and Employment"