Introducing Neurodiversity in the Workplace

March 4th, 2025

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EKVALITA

Expertise on Gender, Diversity and Inclusion

Ekvalita consist of a team of experts on gender
equality, inclusion and diversity issues.
We deconstruct power and norms since 2008

We offer

training, supervision and consulting
for enterprises, state and municipal authorities,
organizations and groups

We produce

texts, videos, web portals, reports and hand books

Accessibility

Neurodiversity awareness inclusive practices that actively create an environment where everyone can function equitably, regardless of their neurotype.

The 8 areas of accessibility:

- **physical**
- **cognitive**
- **communicative**
- **technical**
- **psychological**
- **social**
- cultural
- economic
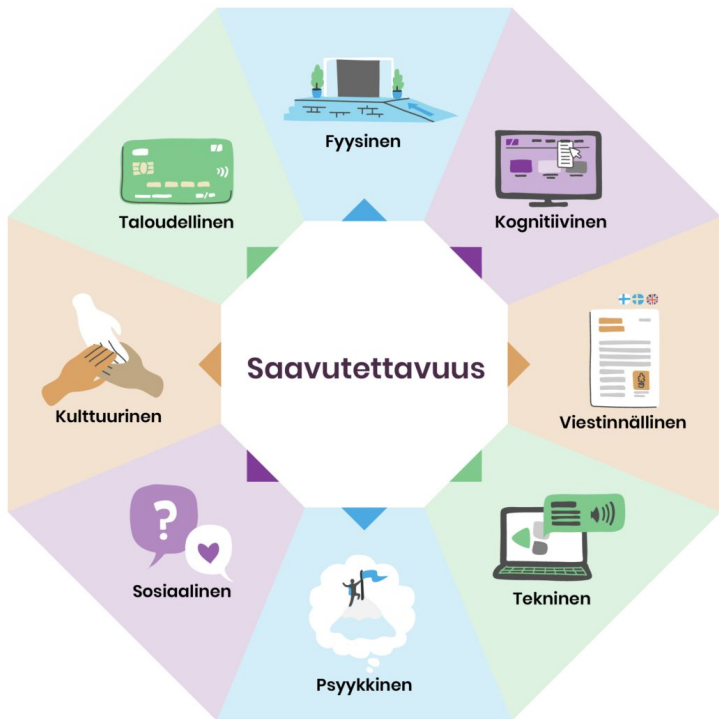
Definitions and Key Concepts

Neurodiversity (ND)

Neurodiversity (neuromoninaisuus, neurodiversitet) pointing out different ways of

- Sensory experiences
- Learning styles
- How information is processed
- The surrounding world is perceived and experienced
- How one interacts with others

Different neurotypes

We all belong to an neurotype

A **neuro minority (neurovähemistö, neurodivergenta personer)** is a population of neurodivergent people that

- encompasses any way of thinking, being, or communicating which is sufficiently different from 'the norm'.

- share an innate form of neurodivergence that results in experiencing prejudice and discrimination

Neurodiversity Definitions 1/2

ADHD (ADD)- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
This term has replaced the older term of ADD, which is not considered to be within the ADHD spectrum. This condition indicates that a person has differences in their attention span, ability to focus (can include hyperfocus) and impulsivity.

Dyslexia (Lukivaikeus, Dyslexi)- differences in the processing of words (think lexicon). This can manifest in both written and audio-processing of words.

Neurodiversity Definitions 2/2

Dyspraxia (motoristen toimintojen koordinaatiohäiriö, motorisk koordinationsstörning)- differences in movement, spatial awareness, and motor skills/coordination.

Dyscalculia (Dyskalkulia, dyskalkyli)- differences in processing and understanding numbers

Autism (ASD)- a broad spectrum of differences in how people communicate, perceive, & interact with the world.

AuDHD refers to simultaneous autism and ADHD

Tourettes- brain difference manifesting in movement processing, often leading to physical/verbal tics

Importance of Self-Labeling

- Which words to use?
- Be aware that terminology varies between different
  - Generations
  - Communities
  - Cultural context
  - Languages

Gender Perspective of ND

- The norm has been defined by symptoms typical of males.
  - In ADHD, typical restlessness for females turns inward and is not visible externally. Autistic women, due to female socialisation is ie. forcing eye contact and to engage in uncomfortable interactions in a higher extent than men
- Gender differences
  - Symptoms in boys and men are identified, and they receive help faster.
  - Many women get their diagnosis later in life after many challenges in private and work life as burnout and depressions.

Masking ND

- Masking is a term used to describe the coping mechanisms or strategies that neurodivergent people use to successfully navigate their world and/or to hide the manifestations of their neurodivergence from others.
  - Autistic women and girls often mask to such a degree that they risk late or missed diagnosis due to other demands of social skills compared to males
- Although traditional behavioral therapies actually encouraged masking, current approaches strive to avoid it.

Why could masking be harmful? How can ND people coexist in a world not made for them without resorting to masking?
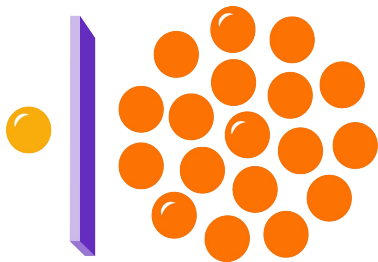
ND in workplace

Challenges

What are some key challenges organizations of various sizes and industries face in interfacing with ND individuals?
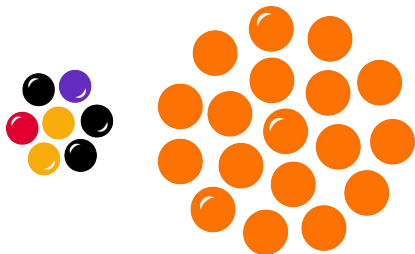- Lack of awareness
- Lack of specialist knowledge
- Lack of resources
- Misperceptions or dismissal of validity of ND issues
- Overly positive or negative perceptions of a given ND condition's impact on a person's life and value as an employee or client
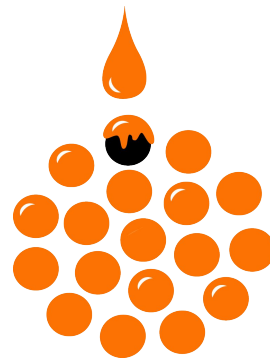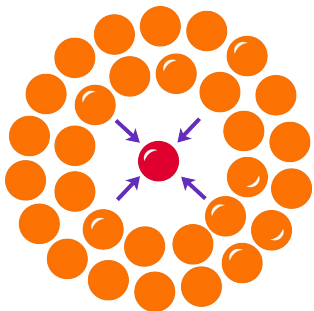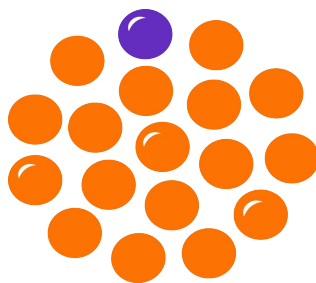
Others?

Challenges

Exclusion

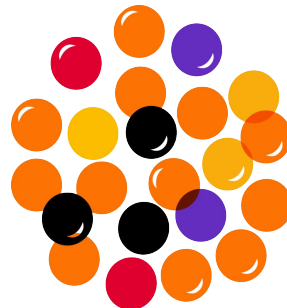**Segregation**

Assimilation

**Othering/
Exotification**

Integration

Inclusion

Neurodiverse-friendly workplace

Neurodiverse inclusive leadership

1. ND leadership in C-Suite and Management Roles **can self-identify** to show that inclusion goes beyond tokenism and includes people in decision-making capacities.

2. Leadership should publicize **ND-inclusivity as a corporate value**, communicate policies and steps that put these values into practice, and focus on inclusivity in recruitment, retention, and promotion (esp. think about end of year reviews procedures).

3. Leadership should use **inclusive/appropriate language**, maintain open lines of communication with ND stakeholders, ensuring their views on appropriate terminology and accommodations are fully considered.

Make workplace adjustments 1/2

Recruitment practices

- **Job adverts and descriptions;** Focus on the essential job skills, tasks, and deliverables.
- **Application process**: Info on application process length, possibility to return to the application
- **Interview**: Let candidates know what to expect
- **Disclosure moments**; Give the opportunity to disclose any conditions
- **Multiple opportunities to perform**
- **Reasonable adjustments**; eg. time limits, sending interview questions to the candidate in advance, adjusting display settings on online assessments, or having someone present with them to support.
- **Company or industry jargon should be clearly addressed** and defined in the recruitment and onboarding process. This should be written and available for easy reference.

Make workplace adjustments 2/2

Physical, digital and mental adjustments

- Provide **quiet spaces** in the office
- Avoid open plan office arrangements. **Minimize hot desking**
- Use clear naming conventions for room names and desks.
- **Furniture**: Adjustable desks, chairs or bouncing sitting balls that can roll or bounce, and basic fitness equipment such as treadmills or pedal devices.
- **Headphones** allowed
- **Accessible software**, e.g color filters, text-to-speech function, anti-glare devices, or other accessibility equipment.
- Utilizing applications, e.g., smartwatches, pre-filled spreadsheet formulas, and pre-populated schedules and calendars

Manager perspective 1/2

Creating psychological safety

- Building a safer space consciously and systematically.
- It is important that, for example, adjustments at work do not require a diagnosis, but can be obtained quickly if needed.
- Clear and direct communication, allow the use of different communication channels, ensure understanding.

Inclusive meeting practices

- Clear agenda and rules/operating procedure (raise hand or mute, when to contribute/engage, etc)
- Written summaries of oral discussions or meetings.
- Allow opportunities for movement

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Manager perspective 2/2

Promote flexibility

- Remote work that allows for individual flexibility in relation to workload and anxiety.
- Flexible working hours and the opportunity to structure one's own work.
- Be mindful of stress and overload for ND people, adapt the work

Offer tools for organization, planning, and prioritization

- Careful design of job roles
- Clear task assignments, schedules, and responsibilities.
- Regular check-ins
- Provide instructions in different formats: written, visual, video.

Case Study- EY launches 1st Neuro-Diverse Centre of Excellence in the UK

Aim to hire 150 people with ND.

USA Studies found ND employees were more innovative on avg in terms of work quality, efficiency and productivity.

Accommodations:

- shifted from a behaviour-based interview process to a performance-based one;
- hiring and training is done so in small groups;
- and orientations are offered in advance for candidates to familiarise themselves with the workplace

Takeaways

- **Communicate**
  - Talk about it. Listen and learn, avoid assumptions, respect boundaries (not everyone wants to share).
  - Be clear of the possibility to reach out (do you...)
- **Clarify**
  - Remember misperceptions or dismissal of validity of ND issues is common
- **Collaborate**
  - Encourage participation, be flexible, change in attitude, remember diversity is an asset.
  - Challenge your prejudices stereotypes

Workplace adjustments benefit everyone, but they can be life-changing for neurodiverse employees.

Links

Example of a Neurodivergent Inclusion Policy

ND Resource Hub

Thank you for your attention!

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