

EMBRACING NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

BY DANNY CUMMINGS



AGENDA

Understanding neurodiversity and the benefits to the workplace

Neurodivergent conditions and characteristics

Communicating for neurodiversity and inclusivity for all

Neurodiverse-friendly environments

Inclusive recruitment

Employer responsibilities



MY LIFE AS A FATHER OF A CHILD WITH ADHD



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY

NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodiversity = Neurological diversity

Comes from combining the words neurological and diversity.

“Neurodiversity (a term coined by Judy Singer in the 1990’s and short for neurological diversity) simply means that there is a range or diversity of ways in which human brains function, a range of ways in which we think, learn and relate to others. We do not all think, learn and process information the same way” (The neurodiverse workplace, 2020)

MODELS OF DISABILITY

- Medical model Vs Social Model
- In the medical model of disability differences are believed to arise from psychological, neurological or physiological limitations within an individual.
- There is one 'right' way of neurocognitive functioning (neurotypical).
- Within the social model, society is considered to 'cause' the disability and special needs by placing barriers in the way of people with impairments (Goering 2010).
- This model proposes that individuals are only 'disabled' by the environments and attitudes around them.

Medical Model

I need to be "fixed" to fit in with society.

Can't go to the cinemas because they are Deaf

Can't go to a cafe by themselves because they are blind

Can't work here because they can't go upstairs

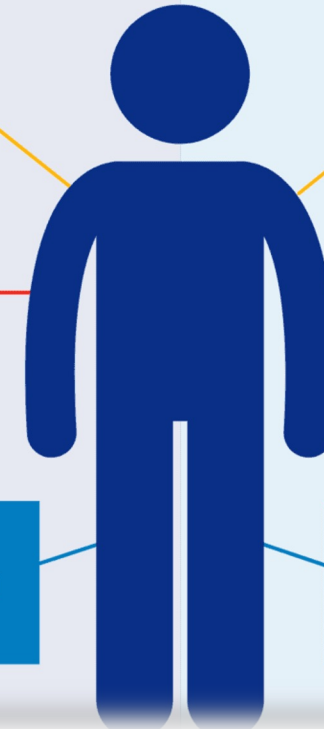
Social Model

Society needs to change so I can fit in.

Cinema hasn't provided closed captions

Cafe hasn't provided braille or electronic menu options

The building doesn't have a lift or a ramp





THE NEURODIVERSITY PARADIGM

- **The concept of neurodiversity represents a paradigm shift in the field of disability.**
- **Instead of pathologizing individuals with perceived ‘deficits’ in the way they think, learn and relate to others, the neurodiversity paradigm considers this diversity to be a normal and totally expected aspect of human variation.**
- **This view sees traditional categories and labels of disability as social constructs and opposes the view that is one ‘normal’ type of brain or one ‘right’ way of neurocognitive functioning.**

EMBRACING NEURODIVERSITY

“Neurodiversity is the idea that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal, natural variation in the human genome” (Elder Robinson 2013)

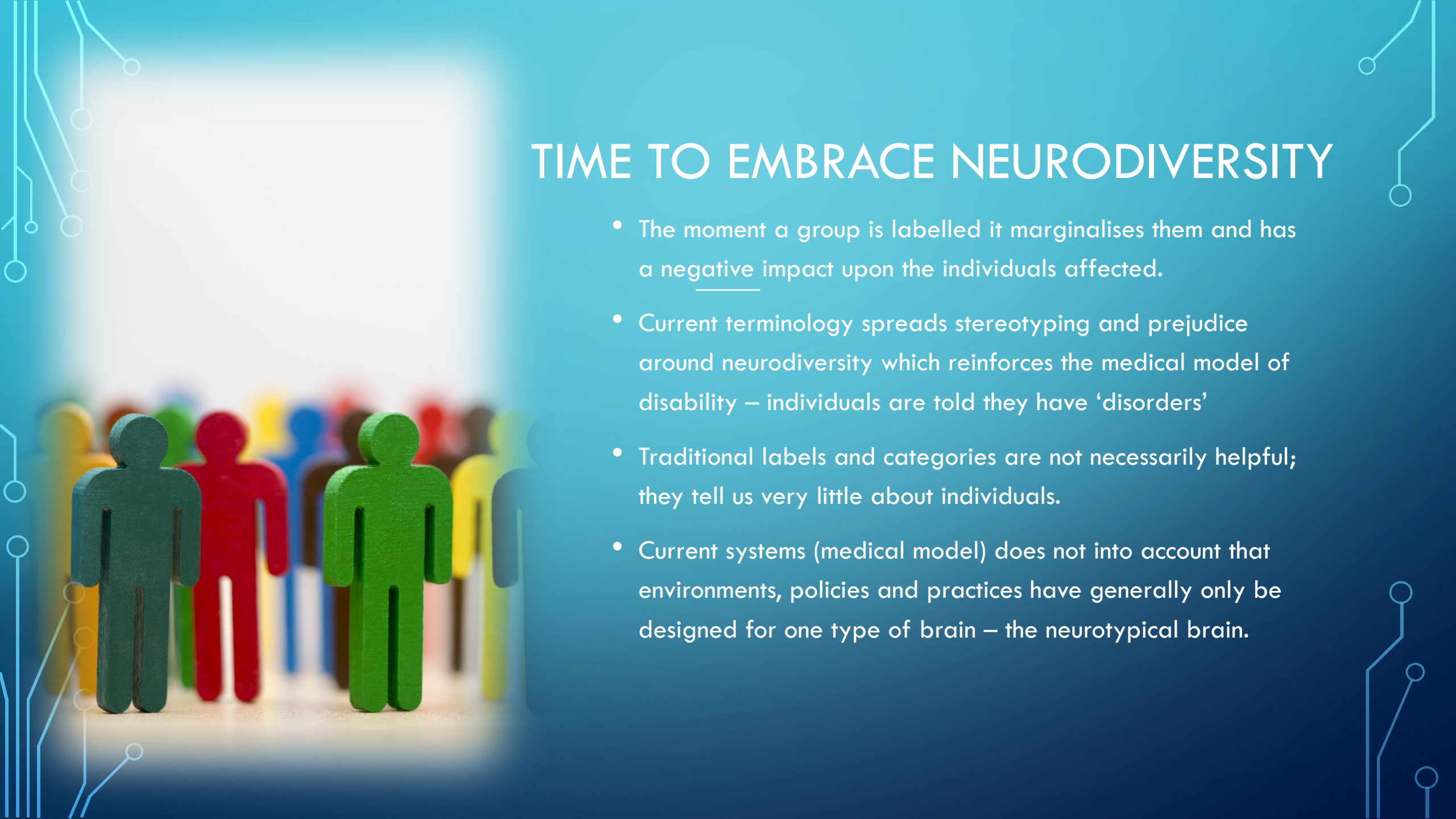
Why is it now the right time to shift using the neurodiversity paradigm in the workplace and society in general?

PERCENTAGE OF NEURODIVERGENCE IN THE POPULATION (UK)

- ✓ 10% of the population is dyslexic (BDA 2015)
- ✓ 7% of children have a developmental language (Communications Trust 2014)
- ✓ 5% of the population have dyscalculia (BDA 2015)
- ✓ 3% of the population are affected by developmental coordination disorder/dyspraxia (NHS 2016a)
- ✓ 2-5% of school aged children may have ADHD (NHS 2016b)
- ✓ 1.1% of the population maybe on the autism spectrum (National Autistic Society 2017)

TIME TO EMBRACE NEURODIVERSITY

- The moment a group is labelled it marginalises them and has a negative impact upon the individuals affected.
- Current terminology spreads stereotyping and prejudice around neurodiversity which reinforces the medical model of disability – individuals are told they have ‘disorders’
- Traditional labels and categories are not necessarily helpful; they tell us very little about individuals.
- Current systems (medical model) does not into account that environments, policies and practices have generally only be designed for one type of brain – the neurotypical brain.



BENEFITS TO WORKPLACE (1 / 2)

Meeting legal requirements: Hidden disabilities such as neurodevelopmental conditions are protected under the Equality Act 2010

The business case: Utilising the entire population and making the most of individual strengths is a better use of human resources

More effective teams: The most effective teams are made up of different talents and strengths.

Increased creativity and innovation: Neurodivergent people quite literally think differently. A neurodiverse team are likely to see issues from a different perspective. Large organisations such as Amazon, Microsoft, Ford, Google, and DXC Technology are running Neurodiversity at work initiatives (CIPD 2018)

BENEFITS TO WORKPLACE (2/2)



PERIODS OF HYPERFOCUS: THIS ALLOWS FOR EXTENDED PERIODS OF HIGH-QUALITY WORK.



CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST: TRULY INCLUSIVE EMPLOYERS CANNOT IGNORE NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS. CUSTOMERS AND CLIENTS ARE THE REASON MOST BUSINESS EXIST.



IMPROVED WELLBEING: AN ORGANISATION WHOSE ETHOS IS ONE OF INCLUSION, ACCEPTANCE AND UNDERSTANDING IS LIKELY TO HAVE A HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER WORKFORCE.



THE SOCIAL JUSTICE CASE: MANAGERS HAVE A MORAL OBLIGATION TO ELIMINATE INEQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE AND TO TREAT ALL EMPLOYEES WITH FAIRNESS AND RESPECT

NEURODIVERSITY



NEURODIVERGENT CHARACTERISTICS (1/2)

- ✓ - *Sensory differences*: which can be more or less affected by light sounds, smells, textures.
- ✓ *Executive functioning*: Challenges with planning, executing and organising, regulating emotions.
- ✓ *Ability to hyperfocus on special interests.*
- ✓ *Intense experience of emotions*: Have difficulty in describing how they are feeling. (Alexithymia)
- ✓ *Can approach things in a unique ways*: Notices things others may not.

NEURODIVERGENT CHARACTERISTICS (2/2)

- ✓ Needs lots of time alone to recharge
- ✓ Rejection sensitive dysphoria
- ✓ Preference for routine, structure and organisation
- ✓ Mirroring – observing how others act and copy their behaviour
- ✓ Stimming is self-stimulating behaviour to self-soothe or to increase focus and attention.
- ✓ Delayed processing

COMMUNICATING FOR NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE 1 / 2



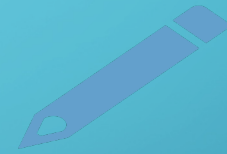
The most given answer to the question 'what makes a good manager?' is 'communication'. (Stewart 2013).



Communication is often one of the main differences for neurodivergent individuals.



Some individuals may have difficulty with written forms, spoken, both and other with social communication.



Some individuals might be extremely effective orally but be slower and less accurate readers and writers.



Some might find it difficult to understand and use some social communication. May appear socially awkward, difficulty reading between the lines or taking what is being said literally.

COMMUNICATING FOR NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE 2/2



Some are effective communicators through written means but can find the social demands of face to face more difficult and anxiety inducing; (more than just the language to process).



Some individuals may find it easier to communicate on a one-to-one basis than to follow the dynamics of group conversation.



Some people can find telephone conversations difficult due to a lack of contextual clues.


SUPPORTING STRATEGIES IN THE WORKPLACE 1/2

- ✓ Give employees sufficient time to read and respond to written materials. Ensure that agendas for meetings and reading materials are distributed several days before the meeting.
- ✓ Not to expect an immediate response from any written materials given out during meetings to digest information fully. Incorporate time in the following meeting to raise any questions.
- ✓ Many workplaces are becoming 'paper-free' zones with printing discouraged. Reading on paper means the reader is more likely to engage on a deeper level with the text (Carr 2010)

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES IN THE WORKPLACE 2/2

- ✓ Consider the presentation of written materials in the workplace (reports, briefings, instructions, posters, notices information displayed on screen).
- ✓ Use a clear sans serif font such as Arial or Calibri.
- ✓ Avoid using text in block capitals as this can be more difficult to read.
- ✓ Use simple sentences – say what you mean
- ✓ Black text on white background can be particularly difficult to read
- ✓ Use bullet points when appropriate and clear subheadings
- ✓ Avoid jargon, acronyms and technical language
- ✓ Using screen reading software/voice text software
- ✓ Use a reading pen

NEURODIVERSE FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS (GENERAL)

- 
- ✓ Individuals might be hypersensitive (over sensitive) to: Lights, noise, visual stimuli, touch, taste, personal space.
 - ✓ Open plan offices can be particularly difficult for some neurodivergent individuals and for many others due to constant background noise, office equipment, telephones and talking.
 - ✓ The unwritten expectations for social chit-chat can be exhausting and uncomfortable for some neurodivergent individuals and cause distraction for the task in hand.
 - ✓ Consider small workstations that offer privacy or even a quiet room for anybody to work in silence.
 - ✓ Regularly clean public spaces and keep office environment clear and uncluttered.
 - ✓ Hot-desking can be difficult for some. Change of routine and structure can cause increased anxiety.

NEURODIVERSE FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS (INDIVIDUAL)



SETTING AN ALARM FOR 5 MIN BEFORE MEETINGS CAN AID TIME KEEPING.



IF MANAGEMENT SCHEDULE A MEETING GIVE A CLEAR INDICATION OF ITS PURPOSE.



OFFER MORE FREQUENT 'CHECK-INS' OR SUPERVISION OPPORTUNITIES.



ENCOURAGE REGULAR BREAKS ESPECIALLY OUTDOORS.



ENCOURAGING HELPFUL APPS SUCH AS WHITE NOISE APPS, ORGANISATION APPS, SCHEDULING APPS AND VOICE TEXT SOFTWARE.



SOME EMPLOYEES MIGHT BENEFIT FROM KEEPING A LIST OF QUESTIONS THAT CAN OCCUR AND BRING THEM TO THEIR SUPERVISOR /MENTOR IN ONE GO.



ALLOW MEMBERS TO BRAINSTORM PRIVATELY THEN REJOIN THE GROUP LATER



BECOME COMFORTABLE WITH SAYING "I DON'T KNOW. LET'S FIND A SOLUTION TOGETHER" COME FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY NOT JUDGEMENT TO COME FROM A PLACE OF UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES.

INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT



Recruitment processes have often been designed with only neurotypicals in mind. There is often an emphasis on face-to-face interviews and social competence rather than on how well a candidate can do the job.



Many neurodivergent individuals can struggle to get through the application process even when they would be the best candidate for the job.



Difficulties may arise when deciphering job adverts, filling in application forms attending interviews or other stages during the selection process.

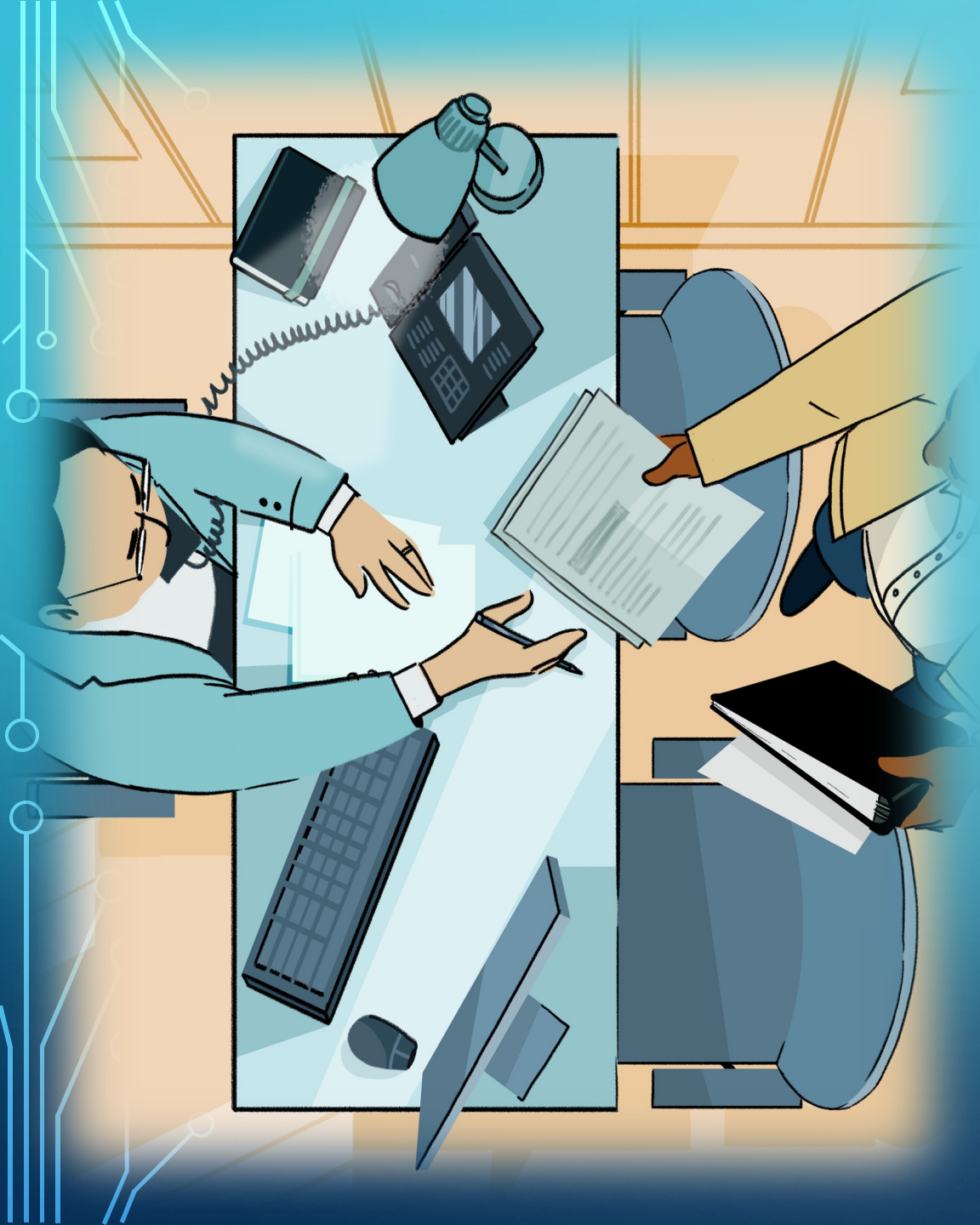


Some neurodivergent individuals can be unintentionally discriminated against because recruitment processes fail to consider strengths and skills.

INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT



- Disclosure can be very helpful for neurodivergent employees but needs to be handled carefully.
- Neurodivergent individuals have the right to disclose their condition at any time before during and after the recruitment process. They also have the right not to disclose if they wish to.
- Many small changes to the recruitment processes can be helpful to all applicants. More inclusive recruitment processes will ensure that the right people are found for each role and that unintentional discriminatory practices are eliminated for the outset.



EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

- ✓ Neurodivergent conditions are usually classed as 'disabilities under the Equality Act 2010.
- ✓ The Equality Act 2010 means that workers cannot be treated differently with regards to recruitment, dismissal, pay and benefits and other employment terms and conditions.
- ✓ The Equality Act also requires the employer to make 'reasonable adjustments' for employees.
- ✓ Incidents that are motivated by hostility or prejudice towards a disability are classed as disability hate crimes.
- ✓ Information about an employee's health condition or disability is classed as a 'special category' data under the GDPR and requires a higher level of protection.