

Spring

Technology


Why neurodiversity
should be on your agenda



So, the first question for many is 'what is neurodiversity?'

Neurodiversity is a combination of the terms 'neurological' and 'diversity' that originated in the late 1990s. It is attributed to Judy Singer, an Australian social scientist on the autism spectrum, and was initially championed by ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) societies.

Subsequent groups have adopted the term and it is widely used to cover developmental conditions such as ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), ADHD (Attention Hyperactivity Deficit Disorder), developmental speech disorders, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysnomia, intellectual disability and Tourette syndrome and increasingly mental health conditions.



Neurodiversity refers to the diversity of the human brain and neurocognitive functioning. As such, neurodiversity encompasses individuals who are 'neurotypical' and 'neurodivergent'.¹

The rise in prominence of neurodiversity in the last couple of years has been fuelled partially by the rise of well-known, successful, neurodivergent leaders. There is a growing voice amongst those who have succeeded. Richard Branson has been very open about his dyslexia and Orlando Bloom has recently created a video about dyslexia with the American charity 'Made by Dyslexia' in which he talks to children and parents about how he overcame his own challenges. Others, including Will.i.am, Whoopie Goldberg, Tommy Hilfiger, Bill Hewlett (co-founder of Hewlett-Packard), Craig McCaw (former Chairman of Clearwire Corp) and most recently Victoria Beckham, have also spoken openly about neurodiversity.

¹ ACAS Research Paper Neurodiversity at Work (2016), Helen Bewley and Anitha George, National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR)

How are employers reacting?



According to the National Autistic Society, only 16% of adults with autism are in full-time paid employment in the UK, compared with 47% of disabled people and 80% of non-disabled people.²

Within the UK, the Dyslexic Association³ claims those with dyslexia are up to five times more likely to be unemployed and dyslexic thinkers make up to four in ten of the unemployed population. With 10% to 16% of the population affected by dyslexia, even if we take the lowest figure this equates to around 7.3 million people in the UK. Globally this is 700 million people.

Figures also suggest that those who work are not finding their way into main stream employment. Julia Logan, found that 35% of entrepreneurs identified themselves as having dyslexia. This signals that businesses are failing to either attract or retain a significant pool of ambitious and success-driven talent.⁴

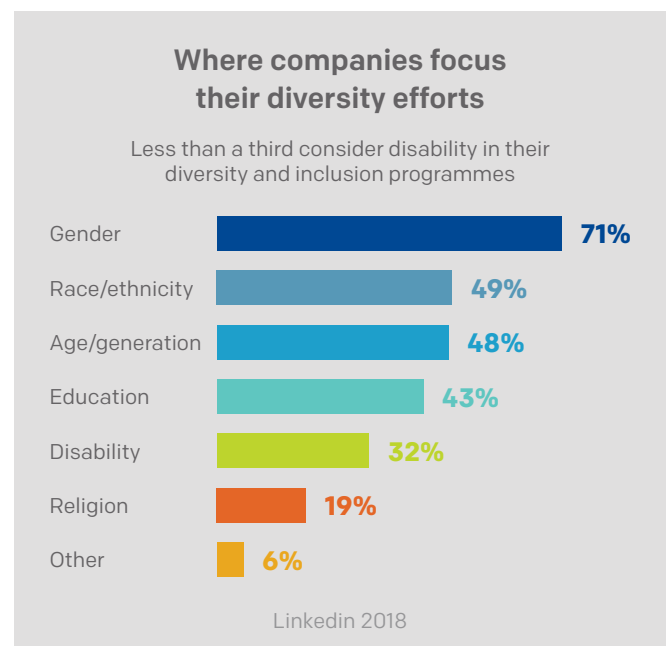
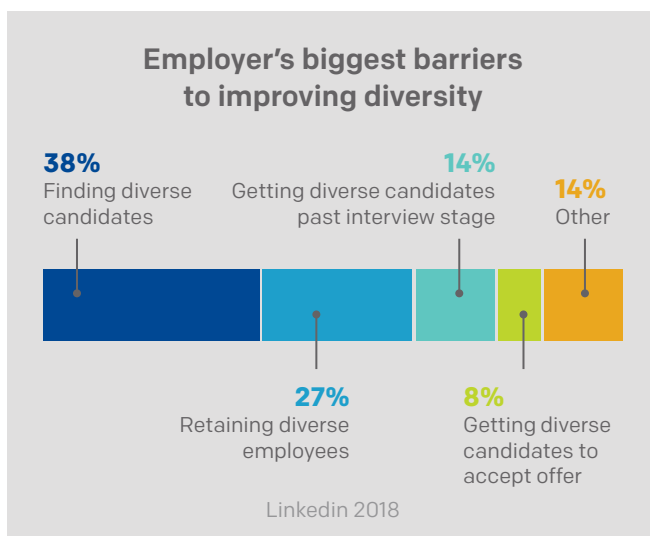
² Autism Employment Gap Report (2016), updated 2018

³ bdadyslexia.org.uk

⁴ "Dyslexic entrepreneurs: the incidence; their coping strategies and their business" (www.interscience.wiley.com)

What are the barriers?

LinkedIn’s 2018 Workforce Diversity Report⁵ looked at companies’ perceived barriers to creating more diverse environments. The survey categorised barriers into five key areas, the greatest of which by far was ‘finding diverse candidates’.



However, it seems the answer may be simpler in reference to neurodiversity. It just isn't on the diversity and inclusion agenda for most companies. "10% of HR professionals in the UK say consideration of neurodiversity is included in their organisation's people management practices" according to a poll by the CIPD from early 2018. A further 17% weren't sure and a disappointing 72% of HR professionals questioned said that consideration of neurodiversity wasn't part of their people management practices.⁶

The LinkedIn Workforce Diversity report from 2018⁷ uncovered the same trend, with less than a third of companies considering any disability in their diversity and inclusion programmes:

So, the question appears to be, why aren't companies trying to engage with a neurodivergent talent pool?

Mike Spain, founder of the UK's Cyber Neurodiversity Group, which co-ordinates inclusion activity across the cyber industry says:

"There's an element of 'what would we be letting ourselves in for?... but an even bigger fear of getting it wrong and possibly making things worse.'"⁸

⁶ <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/150218-neurodiversity>

⁷ <https://news.linkedin.com/2018/11/linkedin-2018-workforce-diversity-report>

⁸ The Independent Newspaper: Pull Out: Diversity & Inclusion #0566 January 2019



Why should neurodiversity be part of our diversity and inclusion strategy?

There is a range of reasons why businesses should incorporate neurodiversity into their recruitment and inclusion strategies:

It's the law: Neurodivergence will usually amount to a recognised disability under the Equality Act 2010. Under this legislation, a person is considered disabled if they have 'a physical or mental impairment' which has 'a substantial and long-term adverse effect' on their 'ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. As employers, the legal implications of not supporting neurodiversity are the same as not supporting any other person who has a form of registered disability.

You are missing out! Creativity, lateral thinking, a different perspective, highly specialised skills and strict consistency are commonly associated with neurodivergent people.

David Neeleman – ADHDer and founder of Jet Blue Airways – said he would refuse a magic pill to become 'neurotypical', due to the benefits his ADHD has provided him in business.

"Look at the positives... Just keep thinking about the good side of ADD, the creativity and the originality it can stimulate."⁹

Rick Green, founder of Totally ADD, outlines the 'Super-Powers' he associates with ADD including Super in a Crisis, Super Creative, Super Intuitive, Super Quick and Laser Vision.

Whilst keen to show the benefits of neurodiversity it's imperative not to make assumptions about those skills but to engage in methods of revealing individuals' abilities.

Build winning teams: If employers understand more about individual profiles, strengths, weaknesses and communication styles then they can build stronger, more innovative, rich teams.

Nancy Doyle, managing director of Genius Within and a psychologist advising on the BBC documentary Employable Me, says:

"The main benefit we hear about is that the inclusion of diverse thinking styles increases creativity and innovation within an organisation. Homogenous work teams fail to challenge the status quo and can become entrenched and inflexible."

⁹ https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/neurodiversity-at-work_2018_tcm18-37852.pdf

¹⁰ <https://totallyadd.com/blog/5-superpowers-of-adhd>

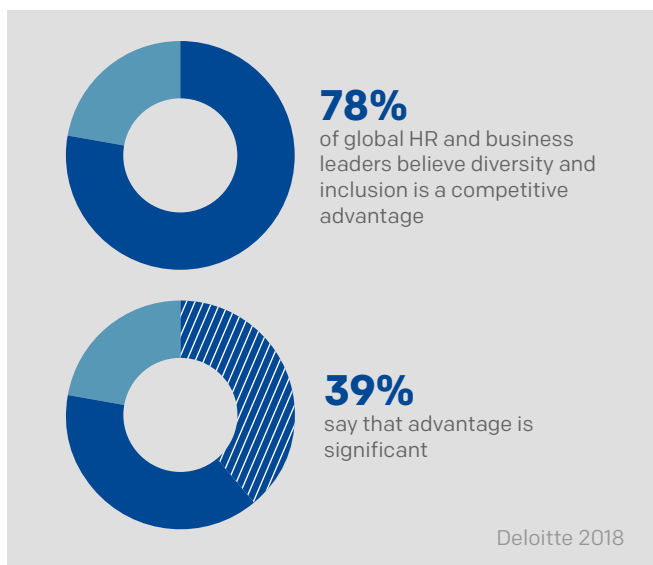
It's a prevalent theory, Steve Silberman, author of NeuroTribes suggests that:

“They can think in ways neurotypical people can’t, can identify problems invisible to neurotypical employees and suggest solutions outside of the box.”¹¹

Access a wider talent pool: An estimated 600,000 vacancies in digital technology are costing the country £63 billion a year, according to information provided by TechUK in a report on skills shortages published by the Edge Foundation¹². Failing to engage fully with your talent pool will cost you time in hiring and potentially increase the cost of attraction, as well as increasing the risk of missing out on valuable innovation.

Diversity pays dividends: There is a growing appreciation that diversity in general can bring financial benefit. McKinsey’s research on Delivering Through Diversity¹³ quantifies the financial benefits of some specific types of diversity, including gender and ethnic diversity.

Deloitte’s Millennial Survey¹⁴ reveals that most businesses already appreciate the need and benefits associated with diversity:



Awareness of the business case for inclusion and diversity is on the rise. While social justice typically is the initial impetus behind these efforts, companies have increasingly begun to regard inclusion and diversity as a source of competitive advantage, and specifically as a key enabler of growth.

Professional staffing experts Badenoch + Clark undertook research into the benefits of diversity in their whitepaper ‘Inspiring Inclusion in the Workforce’. The authors list the benefits of a diverse workforce, citing that diversity:

- unlocks diversity of thought;
- boosts retention;
- improves engagement;
- maximises profitability;
- heightens quality of hires;
- increases organisational performance;
- grants access to a range of perspectives that will ultimately help to set an organisation apart.

¹¹ CIPD Report: Neurodiversity at Work Published February 2018

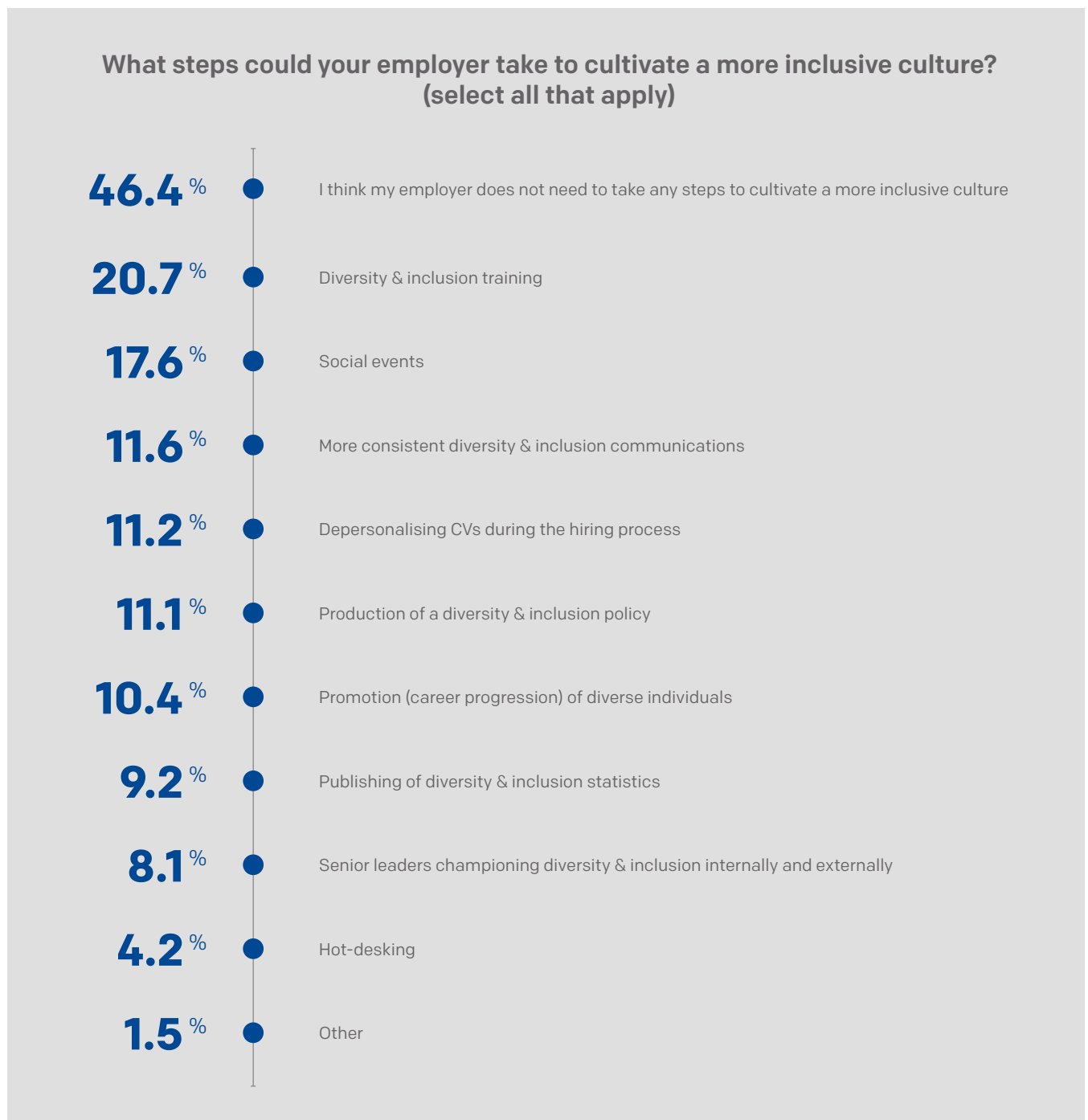
¹² <http://www.edge.co.uk/SkillsShortagesBulletin2>

¹³ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity>

¹⁴ <https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html>

The first steps

This whitepaper also asked employees about ways their employer could cultivate a more inclusive environment:





Simple steps include:

1. Think about the language you use:

Avoid ambiguous or generic job adverts and don't ask for things you don't really need. Keep it clear and think about how you present the information.

2. Offer multiple application methods:

Encourage people to call to ask questions. Allow people to provide covering messages via video. Offer choice where possible.

3. Make the interview and selection process relevant: Clearly outline what information you need from the interview and approach it as an opportunity to learn about an individual.

4. Take the first steps: The most important part of this is making the decision to start to address your company's approach to neurodiversity. Make the first step.

Working with specialists



Caroline Turner, CEO at Creased Puddle, spoke to the Institute of Equality and Diversity Professionals about building a more diverse and inclusive workplace:

“The starting point for all has to be getting the internal structure right. Our clients say we are more concerned with how we leave a business, than how we find it”.

Building a more diverse workforce requires the right structure and culture to help bring about positive change to the way we recruit and retain people. At Spring Technology we’re proud to be specialists in our field, finding tech talent in diverse talent pools, and helping organisations engage with and recruit a more neurodivergent workforce.

Spring Technology is a specialist technical and senior appointments recruitment partner. As part of The Adecco Group, Spring Technology has a breadth and scale that is unique in the UK. We believe in leading by example; learning from our peers and using our influence to occasion positive and real change. We make every effort to help support our clients embed diversity and inclusion into their culture, with fair and equal hiring strategies.

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

If you are looking to attract more neurodiverse talent, we're here to help.
Please contact a member of the team:

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