International Academic Institute for Science and Technology

International Academic Journal of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management
Vol. 11, No. 3, 2024, pp. 13-18.

ISSN 2454-2210

International Academic Journal of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management

www.iaiest.com

Neurodiversity Inclusion and Workplace Accommodation Practices

Rafael Oliveira [a], Mariana Costa [b]

[a] *Brazilian Institute for Sustainable Innovation Research, São Paulo, Brazil.*
[b] *Brazilian Institute for Sustainable Innovation Research, São Paulo, Brazil.*

Abstract

Neurodiversity inclusion has become an important topic in the field of organizational behavior and human resource management because organizations are recognizing that differences in cognition, communication, learning, attention, and problem-solving are aspects of diversity in the workplace. However, neurodivergent individuals might still face obstacles associated with recruitment, workplace communication, performance standards, organizational culture, and workplace accommodations. The current research paper explores the issue of neurodiversity inclusion and workplace accommodations in terms of organizational behavior and human resource management. In particular, it looks at how recruitment, organizational culture, flexible work schedules, workplace communication, sensory accommodations, use of assistive technology, and individualized work can be used in order to make workplaces more inclusive. At the same time, the paper explores the roles played by human resource management professionals and managers in identifying accommodation needs, eliminating obstacles in workplaces, encouraging employee participation, and developing equitable policies. The article also emphasizes the need to move from compliance-based models to more sustainable approaches to inclusion that consider individual needs and organizational effectiveness. Using the insights offered by the literature on neurodiversity, organizational behavior, and human resources management, the article presents an approach to analyzing ways in which organizational structures can improve workplace inclusion through accommodation strategies. The conclusions drawn in the article have significant practical value for HR managers and other organizational leaders who seek to create an inclusive environment for neurodivergent individuals.

Keywords: Neurodiversity, Workplace Inclusion, Workplace Accommodation, Human Resource Management, Organizational Behavior, Employee Engagement, Inclusive Workplace.

DOI: 10.71086/IAJOBHRM/V11I3/IAJOBHRM1109
Received: 07 June 2024/Revised: 19 July 2024/Accepted: 26 August 2024/Published: 30 September 2024

Introduction

The concept of neurodiversity is becoming more significant when dealing with the behavior of people within organizational settings and managing human resources due to individual differences in how people absorb information, interact, learn, concentrate, and cope with workplace conditions. The perspective of neurodiversity recognizes neurological diversity as human differences and not only limitations of individual abilities. In terms of employment, the perspective has led to the review of traditional ways of recruiting, managing performance, developing staff, and accommodating employees. Nevertheless, neurodivergent individuals face barriers at all stages of the employment process, such as recruiting, workplace interactions, socializing, job design, and lack of suitable support. Studies on autism and employment have focused specifically on the necessity to look at organizational structures and practices instead of considering employment problems of individuals as individual matters (Vogus & Taylor, 2018). Workplace accommodation is one way of overcoming such barriers within the organization. Accommodation might entail changes in the physical environment, communication, scheduling, use of technology, management styles, or the job itself. Studies conducted with respect to autistic workers have revealed that workplace accommodations can include reduced distraction in the environment, predictable tasks, technology, and increased support from the employer and coworkers (Khalifa et al., 2020). Moreover, employer perceptions show that reasonable workplace accommodations can include changes that are specific to the individual worker as well as the environment (Waisman-Nitzan et al., 2019). Neurodiversity inclusion in the view of HRM goes well beyond individual accommodation but entails taking into account the interaction of recruitment processes, organizational culture, managerial approaches, and support systems within organizations. (Rao & Polepeddi, 2019) have suggested the Neurodiversity-Smart HR approach to emphasize the role of stakeholder involvement in creating an inclusive environment for workers. More contemporary research shows that awareness of autism in the workplace and the ability to support autistic employees is enhanced by workplace training and acquaintance with one's autistic coworkers (Petty et al., 2023). The important contributions of this paper include three aspects. First, the paper brings together the organizational and HRM aspects of neurodiversity inclusion. Second, the paper analyses the workplace accommodations that are done from various perspectives such as environment, technology, communication, scheduling, and management. Third, the paper reveals the implications of neurodiversity inclusion on HRM practices and management. The paper is structured in the following way. Section 2 gives the literature review, Section 3 introduces the method and concept, Section 4 analyses the results, and Section 5 summarizes the paper.

Literature Review

Studies related to the topic of neurodiversity at work have shifted from a deficit-oriented perspective to one that considers the impact of the organizational structure and its relationships on the neurodivergent employees' experience. One of the important areas of literature related to this topic is research on the process of transitioning neurodivergent individuals to employment and difficulties in recruitment and early career development. Studies of young adults diagnosed with autism have shown that career goals can be hampered by barriers such as recruiting problems, workplace expectations, socializing difficulties, and inadequate organizational awareness (Anderson et al., 2021). This means that employment inclusion should involve reconsideration of traditional approaches to recruiting and selecting candidates for the job position instead of using only standardized procedures. The other area of importance is the impact of organizational culture on success at work. An inclusive organizational culture can determine whether neurodivergent individuals will be accepted and will be able to participate in career development. Studies of the experiences of autistic individuals have revealed workplace relationships, communication, management processes, and organizational attitudes as elements of employment experience (Davies et al., 2023). As such, inclusion should not only be attained via formal policy but also via the day-to-day interactions among staff members, superiors, and colleagues. The literature further highlights the significance of management support. Managers play a role in assigning tasks, communicating, giving feedback, being flexible, and accessing workplace resources. A study concerning the phenomenon of autism in the organizational setting revealed that the behaviors of managers may impact the degree of inclusion that autistic employees experience in the organizational context (Basto & Cepellos, 2023). Managerial awareness is thus pertinent to identifying obstacles and accommodating individuals in the workplace setting. Disclosure at work constitutes yet another important issue in neurodiversity studies. While accommodation may require disclosure of the individual's condition, this may come with issues of stigma, misinterpretation, repercussions for their career, and workplace relations. Disclosure among autistic individuals has been studied before, where it is important to note that organizational climate and social support played an important role in influencing such disclosure experiences (Johnson & Joshi, 2016). What this means is that the need for accommodating neurodivergent individuals in the organization should be complemented with an organizational setting where it will be possible to communicate such needs without undue social or professional risks. Lastly, recent theory on neurodiversity management has

underscored the notion that neurodiversity management is an organizational process and not an intervention. A multistep process suggested for dealing with neurodiversity includes building a neurodiverse workforce, promoting inclusiveness, and forming organizational benefits through equal management (Khan et al., 2023). In general, the research literature suggests that there are several interrelated individual, interpersonal, managerial, and organizational aspects that determine the inclusion of neurodiversity in the workplace. At the same time, more attention should be paid to accommodating neurodiversity within HRM and organizational inclusiveness. The current paper attempts to fill in this research gap by considering accommodations along with other aspects.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilizes the structured conceptual review methodological approach to analyze issues related to neurodiversity inclusion and workplace accommodation practices from the point of view of organizational behavior and human resource management discipline. The methodology will incorporate insights and conclusions derived from the existing body of scholarly work on the issue in order to reveal the main dimensions of organizations linked to neurodiverse employees' inclusion. The two core dimensions under analysis are neurodiversity inclusion and workplace accommodation practices.

The methodological approach adopted is characterized by a sequential flow in which the idea of neurodiversity is used as the basis for studying organizational inclusion and accommodation. The two variables are then combined to develop the connection between the two and HR/management support, as well as the outcomes of organizational inclusiveness. The sequence used in the study is illustrated in Fig. 1.

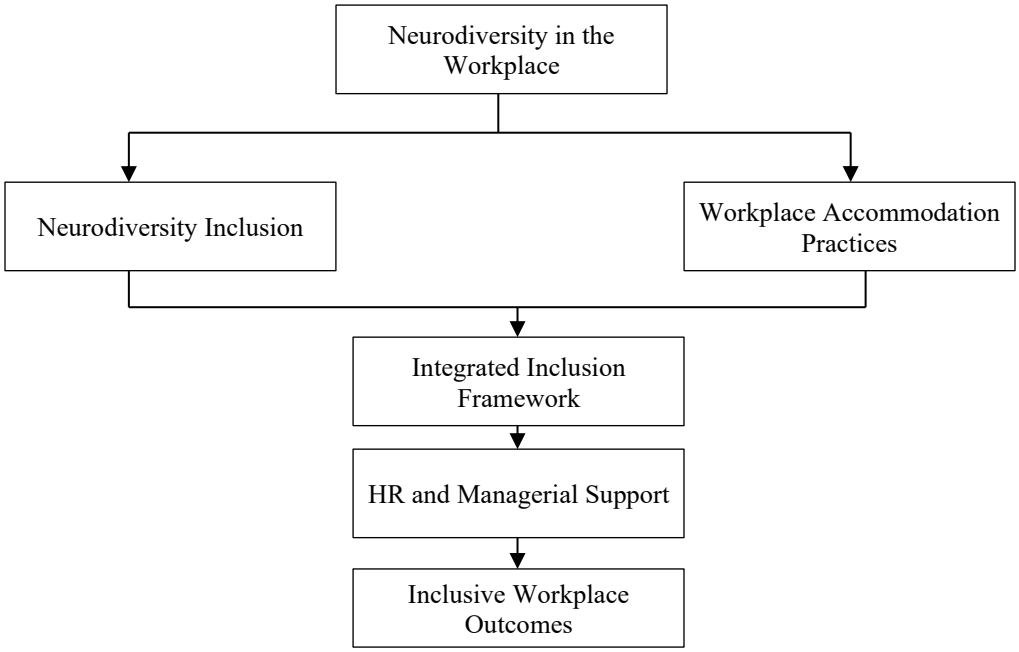


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework for Neurodiversity Inclusion and Workplace Accommodation

Fig. 1 outlines the model that was used to analyze neurodiversity inclusion and workplace accommodation practices. The model starts from the concept of neurodiversity at work and moves forward to form two related dimensions: neurodiversity inclusion and workplace accommodation practice. The combination of these dimensions was developed in order to analyze the process of how organizational inclusion and personal accommodation can work together. After that, the next step in this model is HR and managerial support, which serves as an organizational way to implement inclusive practices.

Literature Identification and Selection

The relevant literature for this study was based on the key terms such as neurodiversity, workplace inclusion, workplace accommodation, human resources management, organizational behavior, and neurodivergent employees. The selected literature for the study largely revolved around issues relating to organizational behavior and employment

of neurodiverse individuals rather than focusing on the clinical aspects. Specific emphasis was placed on the literature that addressed issues like recruiting, workplace involvement, organizational culture, supporting employees, disclosure, management, flexibility, and workplace adjustments.

Peer-reviewed, academic literature relevant to organizational behavior and HRM was highlighted. Research published from 2016-2023 was selected, with the focus being kept up to date, while also aligning with the study's research scope. Articles were analyzed for their relevance to the research purpose, contribution to conceptual theory, discussion of practices in the workplace, and organizational and employment implications.

Analytical Dimensions

The literature selected was analyzed within four dimensions. Neurodiversity inclusion focuses on the first dimension, which is the acceptance, participation, equal employment opportunities, communication, and belonging of the workforce. Workplace accommodation practices are the second dimension, which involves workplace accommodation adjustments for work schedules, physical and sensory workplace environment, communication, technology, workplace responsibilities, and working arrangements. The third dimension of HR and managerial support looks at HR professionals and managers' roles within the recruitment process, in the induction process, in managing employee performance, in building employee capacity, in managing communication within the workplace, and in the implementation of accommodation. The fourth dimension, inclusive workplace outcomes, takes into account employee engagement, job satisfaction, participation, supportive workplace relationships and equitable employment experiences.

After the thematic examination, the dimensions identified were included in the conceptual framework depicted in Fig. 1. The framework builds on the assumption that incorporating and accommodating people who are neurodiverse are similar organizational practices. While inclusion promotes participation and acceptance in an environment, accommodation practices are about workplace barriers and individual needs. HR policies and managerial practices link the two and articulate organizational inclusion goals into practices at work. The outcome of this process is a framework that is used to discuss how organizations can create more supportive and inclusive employment environments for their neurodivergent employees.

Results and discussion

Findings on Workplace Accommodation Practices

The findings of the literature synthesis suggest that one of the key elements of successful and effective inclusion of neurodiversity in the workplace is the provision of workplace accommodation. Adjustments to communication, work structure, working time, physical environment, recruitment procedures, and managerial support are all consistently identified as being important factors in reducing the barriers within the workplace in the reviewed studies. A scoping review of workplace accommodations for adults with autism revealed the variety of accommodations that can be made, highlighting that workplace accommodation needs are multidimensional and not limited to physical workplace modifications. In a similar study, reasonable workplace adjustments were examined, and it was found that clarifying job expectations and flexible working arrangements were some of the more common adjustments seen in workplaces. The same study found that respondents believed other changes could be made to be feasible, such as autism awareness training, establishing clear job expectations, and providing reassurance during stressful times.

Workplace accommodations were thus categorized into five broad groups: communication and task clarity, flexible working arrangements, environmental and sensory modifications, recruitment and onboarding support, and managerial/organizational support, for the present conceptual synthesis. These are all examples of how accommodation is intertwined with the design and management of work. The literature does not support the notion of accommodation as an exception to general HR practices, but rather the notion of flexibility and accessibility as a general part of HR practices.

Evidence from Workplace Adjustment Research

One empirical study, which included both employers and employees, found that 41% of employers and 41% of employees had noticed flexible working hours or travel arrangements as a workplace adjustment, and 41% of employers and 41% of employees had noticed clarification of job expectations as a workplace adjustment. 17% indicated that none of the suggested adjustments were observed, and 13% noted additional recruitment support. These results suggest that simple organizational changes could be beneficial, but are not always being used.

The results also show a gap between the extent to which organizations are providing and what respondents feel is achievable. Autism-awareness training was also deemed feasible by 83% of respondents, and clarifying job

expectations and providing reassurance during stressful situations were both found to be feasible by 76%. This indicates that there are some gaps that can be implemented rather than being difficult or overly costly with regard to the accommodation practices.

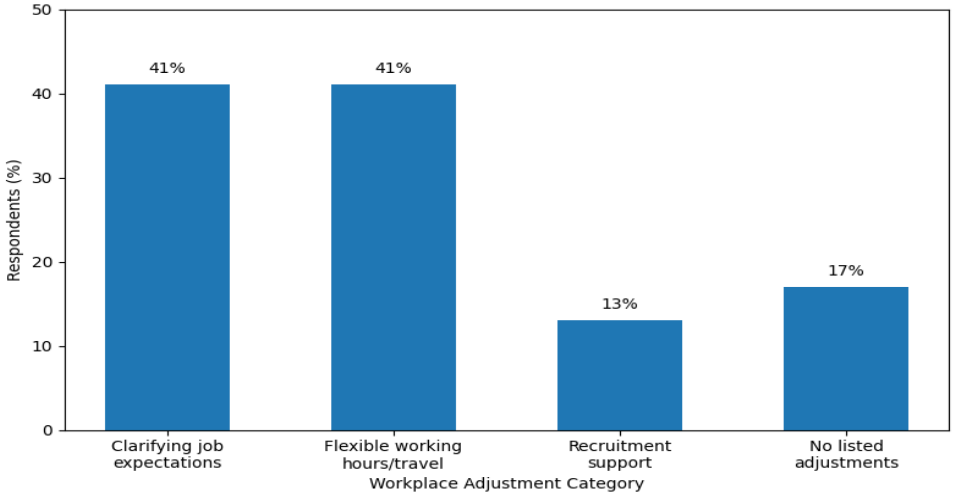


Fig. 2: Reported Workplace Accommodation Practices

Fig. 2 shows employers' and employees' listed accommodation measures in the workplace, as reported in a published survey of employers and employees. Forty-one percent of respondents said they were made clearer about job expectations, and 13% said they were provided with flexible working hours or travel arrangements, while only 13% said they were provided with recruitment support. An additional 17% noted that they had seen none of these adjustments. The figure represents the disparity in the provision of workplace accommodations, and the need to improve systematic HR support.

Role of HR and Managerial Support

The results also confirm that the accommodation practices are not independent of HR and managerial systems. The study on remote working revealed that neurodivergent workers encountered challenges resulting from the breakdown of routine, communication, distractions, and lack of understanding, and that remote working could mitigate sensory overload and assist with work–life balance. The results consequently highlight the importance of HR practices that are flexible yet have the proper structure and communication.

There is also a role for technology in the accommodation. Research with autistic workers suggests that digital technology can be used to mitigate communication challenges and facilitate access to the workplace for autistic employees, and that digital transformation can be used as a way to better align workplace environments with varying cognitive and working styles. Technology, therefore, is a tool to support accommodation, not replace it, as part of an overall package of support for the person with hearing loss.

Discussion

The findings show that there is a need to include neurodiversity in an organizational environment via a combination of organizational accessibility and individual accommodation. The evidence shows that providing clear instruction, flexible working, sensory support, and communication support can help to alleviate barriers that neurodivergent workers might face. It's crucial to remember that accommodation is not a solution to the difficulties an employee might be facing. It can also be applied proactively in the design of the job and HR processes.

The results support a multistage view of neurodiversity management whereby employers make room for neurodivergent employees, develop them with inclusive policies and practices, and seek positive employee and organizational outcomes through equitable supervision. This view further supports the notion that simply hiring individuals with neurodiversity is not neurodiversity inclusion.

In general, the literature indicates that HR policy, managerial behavior, workplace flexibility, communication, and environmental accessibility must function in conjunction with each other. The message that resonates most strongly is that rather than having to have an accommodation plan, organizations need to implement the principles of neurodiversity throughout the recruitment and onboarding process, job design, performance monitoring, employee

development, and the workplace itself. This can offer a more sustainable basis for participation and inclusion and leave room for accommodations to remain relevant to individual employee needs.

Conclusion

Inclusion of neurodiversity and workplace accommodations are significant aspects of modern-day human resource management and organizational behavior. The aim of this study was to explore the potential ways in which organizations can establish a more inclusive working environment by bridging the inclusiveness of neurodiversity and appropriate workplace adjustments, HR practices, and managerial support. Evidence suggests that neurodivergent individuals might face challenges during recruitment, with communication, workplace expectations, environment, flexibility, and the working relationship with others also being potential barriers. Clear job expectations, flexible working arrangements, supportive communication, environmental adjustments, technological support, and individual working practices can overcome these barriers in the workplace. The results also suggest that accommodation should not be considered as a one-off solution to requests but should be made a part of wider HR and organizational approaches. HR professionals and managers can play an important role in creating supportive recruitment processes, communicating, making reasonable adjustments and creating inclusive workplace cultures. The conceptual framework of this study shows how the intersections of each of these variables, namely, neurodiversity inclusion, accommodation practices, HR and managerial support, and inclusive workplace outcomes can be understood. In summary, organizations need to acknowledge differences and provide inclusive and accessible working environments for sustainable inclusion of people with neurodiversity. Future studies might be conducted on the proposed relationships across various industries, organizational settings, and types of neurodivergence to empirically support accommodation and inclusion practices.

References

Khalifa, G., Sharif, Z., Sultan, M., & Di Rezze, B. (2020). Workplace accommodations for adults with autism spectrum disorder: A scoping review. *Disability and rehabilitation*, *42*(9), 1316-1331. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2018.1527952

Petty, S., Richardson, H., Eccles, N., & Tunstall, L. (2023). Supporting autistic employees: Understanding and confidence in UK workplaces. *Industry and Higher Education*, *37*(3), 448-454. https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222221124505

Rao, B., & Polepeddi, J. (2019). Neurodiverse workforce: Inclusive employment as an HR strategy. *Strategic HR Review*, *18*(5), 204-209. https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-02-2019-0007

Vogus, T. J., & Taylor, J. L. (2018). Flipping the script: Bringing an organizational perspective to the study of autism at work. *Autism*, *22*(5), 514-516. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318776103

Waisman-Nitzan, M., Gal, E., & Schreuer, N. (2019). Employers' perspectives regarding reasonable accommodations for employees with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *25*(4), 481-498. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2018.59

Anderson, C., Butt, C., & Sarsony, C. (2021). Young adults on the autism spectrum and early employment-related experiences: Aspirations and obstacles. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *51*(1), 88-105. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3218-x

Davies, J., Heasman, B., Livesey, A., Walker, A., Pellicano, E., & Remington, A. (2023). Access to employment: A comparison of autistic, neurodivergent and neurotypical adults' experiences of hiring processes in the United Kingdom. *Autism*, *27*(6), 1746-1763. https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221145377

Basto, A. T. O. D. S., & Cepellos, V. M. (2023). Autism in organizations: perceptions and actions for inclusion from the point of view of managers. *Cadernos EBAPE. BR*, *21*, e2022-0061. https://doi.org/10.1590/1679-395120220061

Johnson, T. D., & Joshi, A. (2016). Dark clouds or silver linings? A stigma threat perspective on the implications of an autism diagnosis for workplace well-being. *Journal of applied psychology*, *101*(3), 430. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000058

Khan, M. H., Grabarski, M. K., Ali, M., & Buckmaster, S. (2023). Insights into creating and managing an inclusive neurodiverse workplace for positive outcomes: A multistaged theoretical framework. *Group & Organization Management*, *48*(5), 1339-1386. https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221133583