



UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE OF NEURODIVERGENT EMPLOYEES IN THE INVESTMENT AND SAVINGS INDUSTRY

NEURODIVERSITY EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS

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UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE OF NEURODIVERGENT EMPLOYEES IN THE INVESTMENT AND SAVINGS INDUSTRY

During the summer, the Diversity Project conducted a survey of neurodivergent individuals working in the investment and savings industry. The objective was to better understand their experiences, provide useful insight to those individuals on how those experiences compare with others, and help improve the understanding of our member firms and the industry as a whole.

We received responses from around 120 neurodivergent individuals. We acknowledge this is a relatively small sample size (particularly if our industry is indicative of the UK population, where an estimated 15% are neurodivergent).

Nevertheless, based on the collective knowledge and experiences of our neurodiversity workstream, we believe the findings broadly reflect the experiences of neurodivergent individuals, with the responses to the open-ended questions offering particularly relevant insight. The results are also consistent with the recent doctoral research findings of Dr Ian Iceton, senior HR practitioner and neurodiversity advocate.

This report provides key takeaways, the full findings and guidance to firms looking at how to approach data capture of their neurodivergent employees.



KEY FINDINGS



“I find it hard to 'sell' myself in interviews, which means employers often don't see my full potential.”



of respondents who have disclosed found their employers to be supportive

Respondents highlighted specific and unique skills that can make them highly valuable employees given the right work environment and support. These skills include creative thinking, problem solving, and hyper focus.

Over half of respondents have faced challenges at work or with recruitment due to their neurodiversity.

Over half of the respondents have yet to disclose their condition to their employers, with the main reason given that they believe doing so would limit their career prospects.

However, 70% of respondents who have disclosed found their employers to be supportive.

When asked what single change the investment industry could make to improve the experience of neurodivergent individuals, respondents cited fairness, flexibility and embracing neuroinclusion as the key areas to focus on.

RESPONSES

When we asked our participants if they had received a formal diagnosis, 65% said yes and 35% no.

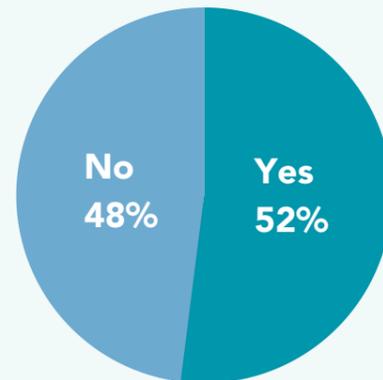


51% of those asked have disclosed their neurodiversity to their employer

The top reason for not disclosing neurodiversity to their employer was the concern that it may limit career prospects (37%), 25% answered that they would prefer to keep it private, 14% said it wasn't relevant to their role, 10% specified that they were concerned at how their colleagues would react and a further 14% chose the option 'other'.

However, out of those that have disclosed their neurodiversity to their employer 37% said that their employer had been very supportive, 33% said that their employer had been mildly supportive, 21% 'neutral' and a further 9% were split between mildly unhelpful and very unhelpful.

When participants were asked if their neurodiversity had caused problems at work or with recruitment? 52% answered yes.



It is well-established that traditional recruitment and work practices can present significant challenges to neurodivergent individuals. The open-ended responses to this question highlighted two of the biggest:

- Interviews / Recruitment
- Difficulties navigating the corporate world

"I find it difficult to indulge in the pointless small talk that seems to be necessary to get ahead."

"I've never disclosed my neurodiversity during recruitment, since it may be interpreted as "will do half the job and not be able to tolerate stress."

"I am never considered for roles or positions that I am perfectly qualified for. I'm not immediately "likeable", and it takes too long for hiring managers to understand me. I struggle to put words or conversations together when put on the spot, especially regarding my personality."

"There are only certain environments in which I know I can work productively. If that changes, roles can become untenable. I now only select roles in firms which I know will suit me and when the way my brain is wired will be advantageous as opposed to a weakness."

Which named conditions do you associate with?

Autism/Asperger's/ASD	41%
Dyslexia	22%
Dyspraxia	10%
ADHD	45%
Other	18%

The responses exceed 100% as some neurodivergent individuals associate with more than one condition

RESPONSES

"My neurodiversity brings enhanced problem-solving skills, empathy, big picture thinking and resilience under pressure."

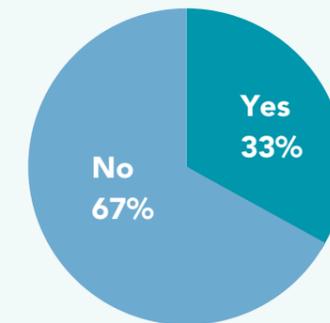
"My autism allows me to be extremely focused on a target and also be persistent. It allows me to filter out irrelevant data and other people's emotions when solving problems."

The survey asked participants if they consider neurodiversity a disability and 54% of participants answered yes.



of those surveyed consider neurodiversity a disability

The next question asked participants to consider whether their neurodiversity has benefited their role. Only 33% answered yes.



The answers to these two questions are interesting. While acknowledging the very real challenges caused by the way neurodiversity presents itself in some individuals, there are many others who do not consider their neurodiversity to be a disability; on the contrary, many view it as a 'superpower'.

Of those who answered yes to neurodiversity benefiting their job, some key themes emerged in the open-ended responses:

Ability to think outside the box

"Dyslexia makes me a more visual thinker. This is a great benefit in visualising client journeys and experiences."

Knowing the detail

"My autism allows me to be extremely focused on a target and also be persistent. It allows me to filter out irrelevant data and other people's emotions when solving problems."

Solving problems

"My neurodiversity brings enhanced problem-solving skills, empathy, big picture thinking and resilience under pressure."

Hyper focus

"The best ideas come from a variety of perspectives. When my ADHD works with me, the hyper focus can get a lot done!"

RESPONSES



We asked our participants if they had ever asked for reasonable adjustments to be made at work because of their neurodiversity, to which 72% answered yes.

Following this question, we asked them how easy it was to get the reasonable adjustments, the table below displays their answers.

Very difficult	14%
Somewhat difficult	24%
Neutral	6%
Somewhat easy	24%
Very easy	30%

The open-ended responses to our question on what kind of reasonable adjustments people have asked for varied from technology-based solutions to more flexibility around working hours. Here are just a few of the sort of requests neurodivergent individuals have made (none of which are 'unreasonable'):

- *“Lighting and seating away from noisy areas.”*
- *“More warning and time to prepare for things.”*
- *“As far as possible, I have asked to have the detail before meetings, especially if my input is needed.”*
- *“I asked for Mind manager software to help me organise my thoughts and stay on a plan.”*
- *“I’m allowed to continue working from home post-pandemic.”*
- *“I was allowed to bring in my own patio furniture (specifically umbrellas) to help with light sensitivity; essential oil diffusers to help with my smell sensitivities; and personal music speaker and headphones.”*

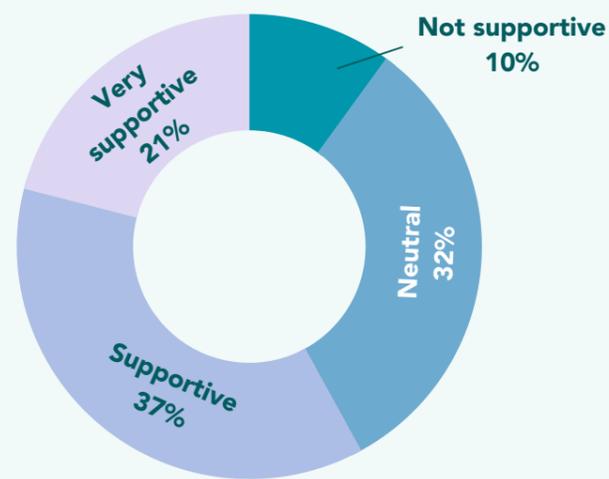
One of our respondents offered a different and thought-provoking take on how to ask for reasonable adjustments:

“I never ask for adjustments because of a disability, I link my request to being more productive or to role requirements. I get my adjustments because I am good at my job and further adjustments simply make me better at it. That is a business case that makes sense to most managers rather than flagging a weakness that management then feel responsible for.”

“Obsession with fairness is one corollary of my condition. I default to honesty and a fair characterisation of my contribution vs puffery, but conventional practice involves more puffery. Therefore, others with (for instance) lesser accomplishments can appear to have more, unless the manager does thorough due diligence. In my experience, they do not.”

RESPONSES

To conclude the survey, we asked our participants three more questions, the next two focus on how supported they feel in their workplace. The below graph demonstrates how supportive our participants perceive their employer to be.



The following question asked how supportive the participants' colleagues are of their neurodiversity, you can see the results below:

Not supportive	6%
Neutral	35%
Supportive	32%
Very supportive	27%

What one change in the investment industry would improve your working experience as a neurodivergent person?

Our last question was open-ended and received the most passionate responses of all. The big positive is that awareness of neurodiversity is growing; the flip side is that we have a lot of work to do to make this industry truly neuroinclusive. Here, we break down the responses into the following themes:

Embrace neuroinclusion

- *“Being different isn’t a negative; it’s a huge bonus to have a diverse thought process challenging the status quo. If companies are encouraging people to bring their best self to work, that has to be their whole self not just the bit their manager prefers.”*
- *“Firms need to encourage individuals to be more open and share their stories, particularly from the perspective of the positives of neurodiversity in teams.”*
- *“Employers should actively seek neurodivergent people for certain roles that they are very capable of fulfilling.”*
- *“Offer training around the different neurodiversity conditions for everyone. My manager has been very supportive but other colleagues have not had the same experience.”*

Be flexible

- *“The increased flexibility around working from home/ office has been hugely beneficial. One size does not fit all in terms of working environments, especially for the neurodiverse. Allowing people to work in environments and ways that suit them can only lead to a better work experience and better outputs for the business.”*
- *“Look at other methods of assessment in recruitment rather than interviews - not every job requires great social skills. I can be a valuable employee whilst still being introverted and having less-than-perfect social skills.”*
- *“Discuss accommodations with all employees without the stigma of a diagnosis. Humans are diverse and even neurotypicals have lagging skills. Everyone could benefit from broader acceptance of accommodations.”*

Fairness

- *“Enactment and enforcement of basic, well-researched interventions that ensure basic fairness in recruitment, advancement, pay, etc. My experience shows political manoeuvring plays too large a role and this undermines diversity of all kinds. I say this as someone who has been a beneficiary of politically motivated decisions at times.”*
- *“Provide the things that we all want: recognition for achievements, and patience/understanding when having an off day.”*
- *“Employers need to learn to listen to the needs of their staff. If they meet those needs, the staff will return many times the value of that expense.”*

GUIDANCE FOR FIRMS ON DATA CAPTURE AND SUPPORT FOR NEURODIVERGENT EMPLOYEES

While most employers will diligently collect information on the diversity of their workforce, this will almost always exclude anything meaningful relating to neurodiversity.

As a result, it becomes all too easy for the scale of neurodiversity to go unrecognised. And if this absence of evidence isn't seen as a problem, there is little chance of an employer seeking a solution.

There are two distinct routes to recognising a company's neurodiversity presence – employees' individual profiles and anonymous surveys.

The latter has been shown to be a quick and successful way to get a handle on the size of the issue. Employees are encouraged to complete an online survey that is best sent to an external party. This can ask any number of questions around ethnicity, gender, disability, social mobility and neurodiversity.

The aggregated results can then be extrapolated and underpin diversity related decision making. This survey is likely to ask fairly high-level questions so as to make it short enough to encourage high rates of completion.

In respect of neurodiversity, the survey might simply say "Are you neurodiverse?" If yes, please indicate which of the following conditions you identify with: Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, Other, with the ability to tick more than one box if applicable.

An important step to providing support and understanding at an individual level is to capture neurodiversity status within HR profiles. Currently, there is an HR package in common usage which requires an autistic person who wishes to disclose their condition to first tick a box to say they have a disability and then to identify this disability as 'cognitive/intellectual'.

A highly intelligent employee faced with this wording is likely to conclude that their employer was not really looking for ways to provide neurodivergent people with support or protection.

A useful set of questions might begin by asking if the individual considers themselves to be neurodiverse and if so, whether they also consider themselves to be disabled. This will show that the two categories overlap, rather than automatically considering neurodiversity to be a disability. Of course, this will not necessarily correspond to the definition applied in disability discrimination legislation, but it will still be a useful record of how the person sees themselves.

At the next level can be a list of the most common types of neurodiversity, with an opportunity to enter any excluded categories within an 'Other' box.

It may also be helpful to have in respect of each ticked box the opportunity for the individual to state: "I have received a formal diagnosis", "I am seeking or awaiting a formal diagnosis" or "I am not seeking a formal diagnosis".

This will show that a person is free to disclose their neurodiverse status without the assumption they will at some point be expected to provide any medical certification.

Having upgraded the disclosure form, there would need to be a campaign to encourage staff to complete or update their profile. This might finally give the employer some relevant insights and provide the impetus necessary to amend working practices to become far more inclusive and empathetic towards neurodivergent colleagues.

"I have never got through any personality test-type interview. I was fine whenever anyone tested my ability to actually do the job."



KEY SUMMARY POINTS

“Interview processes have been difficult because my working memory isn’t great. It takes me a while to process things and respond with structured answers.”



For employers wishing to demonstrate good practice and realise the unique talent of neurodiverse employees, we recommend they:

- Be supportive, understanding and open minded with neurodiverse colleagues, and strive for neuroinclusion.
- Be flexible about what and how to provide reasonable adjustments and a suitable working environment. The aim should be to make this process as easy as possible for neurodiverse colleagues and their line managers.
- Treat neurodivergent colleagues fairly. This might require changing existing policies and processes, and training for line managers and colleagues to better support neurodivergent colleagues.

- Be willing to learn by capturing data on neurodiversity within their business.
- When done sensitively and appropriately, this may help existing neurodivergent employees feel confident enough to start sharing their experiences and further improve understanding.
- Despite companies making significant strides in championing diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, many organisations still lack a specific inclusion strategy for neurodiversity in the workplace - now is the time!

For further resources and information please go to:
www.diversityproject.com/neurodiversity

If you have neuroinclusion case studies, please send them to
info@diversityproject.com



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