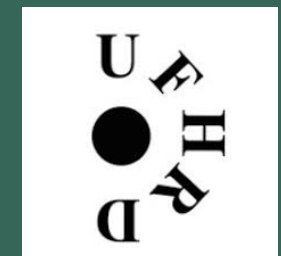# SUPPORTING NEUROMINORITIES IN A REMOTE WORK ENVIRONMENT

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NEURODIVERSITY

- Neurodiversity refers to the cognitive diversity in all humans.

- Neurominorities are an umbrella term for the subset of neurodivergent conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, dyspraxia and dyslexia

  (Doyle, 2020)

- **What percentage of population is neurodivergent?**

„THE WORLD NEEDS A NEURODIVERSE WORKFORCE TO HELP TRY AND SOLVE SOME OF THE BIG PROBLEMS OF OUR TIME" (R. BRANSON)
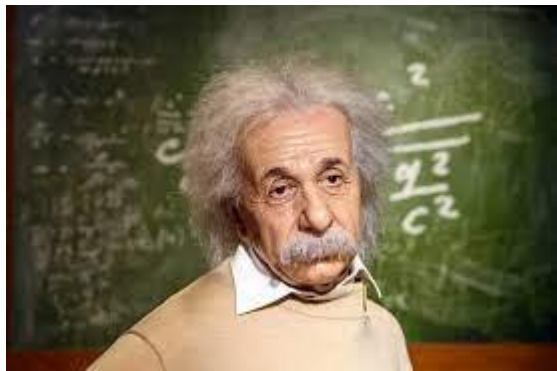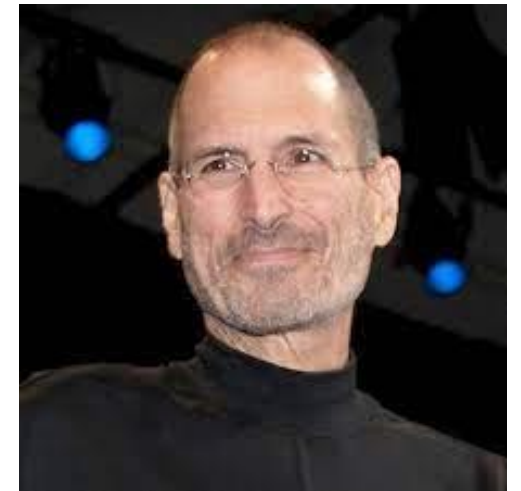
WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- **British government's** commitment to increasing **the number of people with disabilities in employment by one million by 2027** (Department for Work and Pensions, 2017)

➢ Just 16% of adults with autism are in full-time paid work

➢ 51% of these are overqualified for their job

➢ 40% of dyslexics are unemployed

➢ 90% of employers do not refer to neurodiversity in their people management practices

Sources: CIPD (2018), National Autistic Society (2019)

While the current crisis brought about many challenges to individual employees, Covid-19 was reported to have a particularly negative impact on neurominorities:

➢ increased mental health problems and anxiety levels (Davidson et al., 2021; National Autistic Society, 2021)

➢ increases difficulties in managing daily family activities (Colizzi et al., 2020)

ABILITIES

Difficulties with:

- Collaboration in virtual workspaces due to distractions during remote meetings;

- Paying close attention to non-verbal cues or being forced to interact without these cues;

- Dealing with background noises and persistent notifications across a variety of applications;

- Coordinating turn taking (negative impact of cross-talk);

- Taking notes while paying attention to the conversation.

What actions can we take?

- Routinization and synchronization of agendas, transcripts, recordings, and meeting notes;

- Sharing meeting agendas and expectations in advance of the meetings, following the agenda items during meetings, and sharing transcripts and recordings post-meeting;

- Introduction of interactive meeting materials.

MOTIVATIONS

Problems

- Lack of physical movement and cognitive break from work and working long hours and weekends may negatively impact mental health and lead to exhaustion and burnout;

- Frustration about the number of remote meetings which are scattered throughout the day and result in insufficient transition time between the meetings and a lack of blocked time slots for undistracted work.

What actions can we take?

- Encouraging self-care activities such as physical exercise, walks, meditation, or yoga;

- Monitoring stress and exhaustion levels;

- Introduction of asynchronous modes of communication such as emails or pre-recorded videos that can be conveniently accessed at one's own time;

- Meeting breaks to desensitize;

- Raising neurodiversity-awareness among organizational members.

(FURTHER) OPPORTUNITIES

- Offering flexible hours of work

- Setting up support groups as platforms for questions and feedback and as a place to share strategies for remote work and negotiations for accommodation

- Introducing and supporting mentoring and coaching (e.g., team buddies, job coaches)

FURTHER READING

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Towards Accessible Remote Work: Understanding Work-from-Home Practices of Neurodivergent Professionals

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Working from home has become a mainstream work practice in many organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. While remote work has received much scholarly and public attention over the years, we still know little about how people with dis... means in this context. To understand a... work-from-home practices of neurodive... Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, learning... depression). We report on interviews ... during the pandemic. Our findings reve... accessible physical and digital worksp... tensions between productivity and wel... for neurodivergent professionals and o... improvements in remote collaboration t...

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered con...**
in collaborative and social computi...

Neurodiversity and remote work in times of crisis: lessons for HR

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Abstract

Purpose – The rich qualitative study builds on 11 semi-structured interviews with nine neurodivergent employees and two business professionals supportive of neurodiversity to understand the lived experiences of dealing with crisis in a remote working environment.

Design/methodology/approach – The purpose of the reported research is to understand how neurominorities experience remote working in the times of crisis and what the implications of this are for human resource (HR) professionals.

Findings – Moving to remote work resulted in a lack of routine, distractions and working long hours, which can all be difficult for line managers to monitor. Further problems with communication in a virtual environment and lack of understanding by others were found to be particularly burdensome to neurodivergent individuals. On the positive note, remote working in the times of crisis allowed for avoiding sensory overwhelm and was seen as an important step in creating a healthy work–life balance (WLB).

Practical implications – The findings of this study point HR practitioners' attention towards building a more neurodiversity friendly post-pandemic workplace and prompt employers to offer working arrangements, which better suit employees' domestic and personal circumstances.

Originality/value – This study addresses the lack of research on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on neurominorities. In doing so, it answers recent calls to move away from universal HR as a route to positive employee outcomes and facilitates a more accurate reflection of organizational reality for disadvantaged members of society.

Keywords Qualitative, Human resource management, Work–life balance (WLB), Neurodiversity, Remote work, Covid-19 crisis

Paper type Research paper