

Neurodiversity in the Transport and Travel Industry

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Neurodiversity

- Dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADD/ADHD, Asperger syndrome
- Conventional view: mental disorders of a neurological origin
- 'Hidden disability'
- Emergent view: alternative forms of natural difference
- 'Brain different'
- People have 'impairment' but society 'disables' people
- Covered by Equality Act 2010

Objectives of study

- To explore knowledge of neurodiverse conditions
- To understand attitudes towards the notion of neurodiversity
- To determine the levels of support and perceived quality of management of employees with a neurodiverse condition

Methodology

- Seven focus groups
- Twenty three semi-structured telephone interviews

Main findings: Knowledge of neurodiversity

- Knowledge of neurodiversity typically based on just one associate condition
- Knowledge typically acquired from non-employer sources of information

Main findings: Attitudes towards 'neurodiversity'

- Neurodiversity was an unfamiliar term for most people
- Once explained most felt it was a positive term
- "I think it pretty much describes itself in terms of; you know...I'm a deep believer that people are wired in different ways" (employee with dyslexia).
- **Minority believed it to be unhelpful**
- "...it's from the anti-cure movement and there are all sorts of silly words springing up on a timely scale; neurodiversity is one of them" (employee with Asperger syndrome).

Main findings: Supporting a neurodiverse employee (1)

- Not all neurodiverse employees need support
- Evidence of awareness of support
- Problems accessing support (employee view):
- “I have asked my managers to link with *Prospects* [employment support provided by the National Autistic Society] who come in and help. It is like talking to brick wall at times. They can't take it in, they don't know how to deal with the information they have been given” (focus group one, London).
- Problems accessing support (line manager view):
- We initially send [employee with problems related to neurodiverse conditions] to Occupational Health to get their assessment...After that, no idea what support I get. I get little anyway. This is because we are not familiar with these things across the company (focus group four, York).

Main findings: Supporting a neurodiverse employee (2)

- Employee views on ideal support:
- “If I could choose, I would choose a union rep. Logically, that is where I think my first point of call would be” (focus group seven, London).
- “You want the person [with a neurodiverse condition] to know how they do things best, you want the manager to be aware, like about physical things at home. Then, you want colleagues to understand you are not getting special treatment. You want the company to be able to provide funding or resources. You don't want about five people helping; it's the support network. Would be nice if they listened to what you need, not just their ideas of what you need...” (focus group four, York).

Main findings: Managing a neurodiverse employee (1)

- **Economic climate and performance management**
- It is also having the resources in the organisation, be it an employee or a union, to assist with that. I know within (Company Z), with the last cuts, we lost the Quality & Inclusion department people. That is sending the wrong message (focus group one, London).
- I think performance management has become much more intense, being pushed to produce more and more. This brings out these issues. It creates them (focus group seven, London).
- **Disclosure**
- The problem with some people is trust. If they recognise the individual that they want to give the information to is supportive, they are more likely to give it. If they are not, they won't reveal, unfortunately, and muddle through. This doesn't always work (focus group four, York).

Main findings: Managing a neurodiverse employee (2)

- **Poor practice**
- I found with my own manager, I had to do the driving, the searching. They should be willing to have a look. I had to do everything. I got remote access in the end, but it was very painful for me to get it (focus group two, London).
- **Good practice**
- My line manager. He knows about [Asperger syndrome] and his son has it. He has empathy and I trust him. If my manager didn't have these things, I don't know how I would cope or how hard it would be (employee with Asperger syndrome).
- **Role of trade unions**
- I think it is about partnerships. If the union becomes specialised in working with neurodiverse people, they can say we can help you get the best out of your employees, who have great skills, but they might find it hard [to convince] managers (focus group five, London).

Recommendations

- Develop specific and industry wide policies and procedures to cater for unique problems
- Awareness raising and information depository
- Specialised line manager training