

Neurodiversity at Work

Neurodiversity at Work

*Drive innovation, performance and productivity
with a neurodiverse workforce*

*Theo Smith
Amanda Kirby*



DEDICATION

*We have written this book through a global pandemic,
for our families, children, and all those who each and
every day get up and swim against the tide.*

*This book is for you. May you no longer have to
swim so hard so often, with so little support and
recognition for how truly brilliant you are.*

Together, we shall overcome...

Publisher's note

Every possible effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this book is accurate at the time of going to press, and the publishers and authors cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions, however caused. No responsibility for loss or damage occasioned to any person acting, or refraining from action, as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by the editor, the publisher or the authors.

First published in Great Britain and the United States in 2021 by Kogan Page Limited

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms and licences issued by the CLA. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside these terms should be sent to the publishers at the undermentioned addresses:

2nd Floor, 45 Gee Street
London
EC1V 3RS
United Kingdom
www.koganpage.com

122 W 27th St, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10001
USA

4737/23 Ansari Road
Daryaganj
New Delhi 110002
India

Kogan Page books are printed on paper from sustainable forests.

© Theo Smith and Amanda Kirby

The rights of Theo Smith and Amanda Kirby to be identified as the authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

ISBNs

Hardback 978 1 3986 0026 3
Paperback 978 1 3986 0024 9
Ebook 978 1 3986 0025 6

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

[to follow]

Typeset by Hong Kong FIVE Workshop, Hong Kong
Print production managed by Jellyfish
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

CONTENTS

About the author xi

Preface xv

Introduction 1

01 Why neurodiversity is important 10

Introduction 10

Why do we exclude some people from the conversation? 11

Why should employers be more neuro-inclusive? 12

Developing creative and innovative solutions and having more
effective neuro-complementary teams 16

What neurodiversity as a concept means to different people 16

Notes 19

02 Labels: what do they mean? 21

Introduction 21

Getting the words right or wrong 23

What is neurodiversity? 24

Why do we like labels? 28

Changing perceptions 30

Changing labels over time 31

So... is it a good thing or not to have a label? 32

Notes 37

Further reading 39

03 Categories and spiky profiles 40

Introduction 40

Categories 40

Spiky profiles 45

MAD abilities 46

Time for change; time to change 54

Notes 59

04 Eliminating kryptonite and enabling superheroes 61

Introduction 61

Eliminating kryptonite 62

Enabling superheroes 62

Note 67

05 Pre-employment: the lost demographics 68

Introduction 68

Why do some people miss out on getting support and where have they been? 69

Who else gets missed in school and what's the potential fall-out for some? 72

What can we do to change this? 74

What about universities? 82

Some concluding thoughts 83

Notes 84

06 Policies and procedures 86

Introduction 86

Putting in the policies and procedures 92

What's the key legislation? 95

Putting something in place 100

Performance appraisals 105

How confident are you of your knowledge relating to neurodiversity and the actions you would take? 109

Notes 111

07 How can employers attract neurodiverse talent in recruitment? 113

Introduction 113

Bidirectional communication strategy 114

One of the simplest things you can start doing today! 116

General recruitment guidelines 117

Notes 124

Further reading 124

08 Apprenticeships, internships, work placements and hiring schemes 125

Introduction 125

What to consider if setting up a neurodiversity placement or internship scheme 130

Considering your selection process 131

Onboarding – making the first day a good one 133

In the placement 134

Note 136

09 Interviews and assessments 137

Introduction 137

Who is the perfect candidate? 140

Hiring diverse talent 147

Assessments and skill tests 149

The future of assessments 151

How ‘game based’ assessments are widening the talent pool 155

Notes 156

10 Making workplace adjustments 158

Introduction 158

What are workplace adjustments? 160

Taking a person-centred approach 165

Generic principles 167

Notes 182

11 Induction and onboarding 183

Introduction 183

Induction 185

Notes 197

12 Line management means having good conversations 000

Introduction 198

So where do we start in having a conversation and how do we get it right? 199

Notes 208

13 Everyday meetings, conferences and seminars 210

Introduction 210

Conferences 211

Meetings 217

Notes 221

14 Champions, staff networks and communities 222

Introduction 222

Taking an all-inclusive approach 224

How do we succeed in being an inclusive workplace? 226

Setting up networks 232

Building and engaging with communities 237

Notes 246

Further reading 247

15 Future workspaces and workplaces 248

Introduction: So what is the future for workplaces? 248

Inclusive environments and accessibility 250

Big new world is not all about big business 253

Jack of some trades and not master of all 255

Notes 256

16 Next Steps! Inclusion, equity and diversity = belonging 257

Introduction 257

Nancy Doyle 258

Atif Choudhury and Raphaële Von Koettlitz 269

Alan Kriss 272

Paul Sesay 2273

What have we learned? 279

Notes 280

*Appendix 283**Glossary 295**Index 303*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Theo Smith

Theo has worn many hats in his life, from fairground operator to actor, from salesperson to poet and from failure to success many times over.

More recently he has been a Talent Acquisition leader and a member of the Resourcing Leaders 100, working with other recruitment leaders to improve the in-house recruitment industry for all, and of course a passionate advocate for the neurodiversity movement.

Theo led recruitment strategy at NICE: The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. He is also neurodiverse; dyslexic, personally associates with ADHD, and has a child and relatives who also identify as neurodiverse.

Theo didn't find out he was dyslexic until he attended university with no formal qualifications as a mature student at the age of 21. He often found himself either on the wrong side of trouble as a boy or being revered for an outstanding performance, or obscure piece of work; sometimes he fell between the two.

In primary school in Barry Town, South Wales, he was on one of many occasions caught not concentrating in class, or at least not concentrating on what the teacher expected him to be focused on.

When the teacher challenged him on why he wasn't listening, he replied, 'because I've been watching those girls practising that welsh poem "Y Lein Ddillad" (Welsh for "the washing line") in the other partition.'

Theo then went on to say, 'and now I can recite it too!'

The teacher, thinking he was being clever, asked him to recite it there and then.

And so he did.

When Theo's parents got the call to explain their son hadn't been concentrating in class, they didn't expect to be told, 'but whilst not listening in class he's learned a poem that he'll be reciting to the whole school during assembly tomorrow morning.'

So it is with some irony that it has taken him over 15 years of work experience within recruitment and the birth of his son and daughter for Theo to realize that he also identifies as ADHD and who knows what else! The brain is after all, unique.

It is no surprise then that Theo is highly creative and adaptive to change and loves the challenge life has thrown at him.

It was with this new-found knowledge and energy that he explored what information and support was available on the subject of neurodiversity at work. Unfortunately he couldn't find enough information and guidance as a point of reference to help him on his journey.

That's why Theo set out on a mission to influence the world of work to make the required changes to support the inclusion of those who think and act differently and do not fit the current rigid paradigm of the education and employment system.

He now produces a podcast 'Neurodiversity: Eliminating Kryptonite and Enabling Superheroes' and also writes regularly for various publications and is often invited to speak with global in-house recruitment teams on the subject of neurodiversity in the workplace.

He also felt impassioned to create a legacy for his kids and for the children of all the parents who have struggled, like he has, to connect the dots between their children's incredible abilities versus what's being asked of them and expected of them throughout academia and into employment.

The real change must start here; it must start now. If not for the sake of our own sanity, for the sake of future generations, who'll hopefully love and lead the new world to becoming a more inclusive place for all.

Professor Amanda Kirby

Professor Amanda Kirby is unusual, as she is a GP, experienced researcher, clinician and most importantly has many family members who are neurodivergent. This provides her with an understanding of neurodiversity and co-occurrence from differing perspectives and a drive to raise awareness and champion best practices.

While writing this book she started thinking a lot about herself and her family. She often describes herself as an 'oddball'. In school, she never quite fitted in. She didn't always feel she belonged and was never in the 'in crowd' or wanted to be! She was quite mature compared to some of her peers and often found older friends to be better companions. Her hobbies were a little out of sync with others and she could never remember lyrics to any songs being sung, or know who the artist was apart from Simon and Garfunkel and Elton John despite everyone else being seemingly able to do this so easily! She was super organized for future planning but also very disorganized

in the present. Amanda was better at playing one-to-one sports, such as table tennis or doing gymnastics and swimming, but found it much harder in big teams and tended to be put in goals!

One thing she was able to do was talk and as long as she talked about ideas she was fine and would come up with some whacky connections! But she found it much harder to get thoughts down onto paper. She was often told her exam results were disappointing. She fidgeted in class and would be the first to get up to help (being a helper has always been a strategy to be able to move around) and an endless doodler!

As she grew up, she knew she wanted to be a doctor, but had to work very, very hard in medical school to remember endless facts and found lectures a very hard way to absorb information. She would have to work all hours instead of going out to drink and party with her friends. She loved being on the wards in the hospital and as soon as she was with patients, she was off and away and could remember every patient and their lives. Real-life engagement for her was 100 times easier than trying to learn abstract information. Listening to someone telling their ‘story’ has always been humbling for her in that someone is sharing this with her and feeling they are in a safe space to do so.

Why is this important in the context of this book? She has a very spiky profile and only has put the pieces together as an adult. In her late teens, she had an eating disorder and was very anxious about exams, and had an overwhelming fear of failure. But as a female no one suggested that this could be a part of neurodiversity or her traits could be associated with ADHD at all. She thinks at her age and stage she has coping mechanisms in place but it seems a real shame that it has taken 30 years working in the field of neurodiversity for this to happen.

As a consequence of her personal experiences, more than 20 years ago she set up The Dyscovery Centre, an interdisciplinary centre of health and educational professionals. As a result of her research and clinical work she became a professor at the University of South Wales and has lectured to more than 100,000 individuals worldwide, written over 100 research papers and nine books which have been translated into more than five languages. Her books include: *How to Succeed in Employment with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Autism and ADHD* and *How to Succeed in College and University with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Autism and ADHD*.

During this time Amanda has been an advisor to the Department of Works and Pensions on neurodiversity, is the chairperson for Movement Matters (the UK umbrella organization for DCD/Dyspraxia) and became a

Disability Confident Leader, trying to raise awareness among employers about the importance of reducing the disability employment gap and why this was good for business. She also is an advisor to a number of organizations supporting people with autism spectrum conditions, ADHD, dyslexia and DCD in the UK and New Zealand.

Amanda is CEO of Do-IT Solutions, a tech-for-good company. The company has developed a unique person-centered computer profiling system used to help map strengths and challenges and map out other people's spiky profiles and highlight their strengths. It is used in schools, universities, apprenticeships, colleges, employment, offending and into-work and employment settings in the UK and internationally (www.doitprofiler.com (archived at <https://perma.cc/CG8B-P8RN>)). She launched the neurodiversity work tools and apps to help adults to gain practical guidance to maximize their talents and minimize challenges. Amanda has won a number of accolades over the years including in the past being voted the UK GP of the year. In 2019 she was a runner up for a lifetime achievement award at the UK Inclusive Awards and was voted one of LinkedIn 2020 UK Top Voices.

PREFACE

Why have we created this book?

Although neurodiversity has been discussed and debated across a range of platforms more recently, many people within the neurodiverse community remain with limited opportunities to translate and amplify their messages to a mainstream audience. We saw an opportunity to bring together these disparate discussions, ideas, case studies, research, and evidence in one place with the central theme of ‘Neurodiversity at Work’.

We see the workplace as an important and influential arena of change. It is our belief that organizations can play a pivotal role in changing society’s paradigm of the ‘ideal employee’ and bring about wider societal reform and acceptance for those who are neurodiverse. This task assumes great importance given that education systems, health systems, political systems and our built environments are often too complex and slow to change to accommodate those who do not fit into the defined norm.

In an ideal world, educational reform would be brought about for ‘its own sake’ as ‘intrinsically worthwhile’ and ‘for the greater good’. Sadly, this is often not the case. Government systems and agendas are transient and politically expedient; hence, not committed to the level of influence and long-term change required to transform our education systems to be more inclusive and to give those who are neurodiverse an equal opportunity to learn and work.

In this book, we seek to highlight how organizations can improve business outcomes, employee satisfaction and brand impact by recruiting, supporting, and valuing neurodiversity in the workplace. Thereby, we postulate how this ‘modus operandi’ could be used on a macro level, when considering how we educate and train our children and build our social structures.

By coming together and writing this book we bring different parts of our professional and personal lives together, allowing us to challenge our own perspectives and, we hope, yours.

Who is it for?

We hope many people will find value in what we discuss in this book, including:

- Parents and employees
- Human Resources (HR) managers
- Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) leaders
- Recruitment professionals
- Employers
- People working in Further (FE) and Higher education (HE)
- Apprenticeship providers
- Employment agencies
- Occupational psychologists
- Workplace assessors