


Chapter 18

Neurodiversity at the Workplace: The New Paradigm of Talent Acquisition and Retention

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ABSTRACT

The importance of neurodiversity in the workplace has gained popularity in recent years. Companies can access a pool of distinctive skills and viewpoints that can stimulate innovation, creativity, and productivity by embracing neurodiversity in the workplace. This chapter examines the idea of neurodiversity in relation to hiring and retaining talent, emphasizing the advantages for both companies and workers. It covers methods for establishing welcoming environments at work that support neurodiverse workers and help them reach their full potential. It also looks at how corporate culture, HR regulations, and leadership all contribute to creating a welcoming workplace for individuals who are neurodiverse. Companies can promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at the workplace in addition to attracting and retaining neurodiverse employees (NDEs). A conceptual framework has been proposed to demonstrate the influence of various factors like awareness, perceived benefits, accommodation, organizational policy, stigma, and unconscious bias on retention of NDEs.

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INTRODUCTION

Come to think of it, there is nothing in this world which can be called ‘normal’. We all carry our own ‘normality’ within ourselves. Or, maybe we are all at different points in the continuum of ‘normality’. Also, come to think of it, Nature also did not intend its design to be normal. There is no particular default design in Nature. The infinite diversity that exists in the cross-section of Nature bears ample testimony to the fact that there is no ‘normal’ default design in Nature.

The phenomenon is perhaps as old as the hills, but the nomenclature is new. Neurodiversity is a contemporary concept that has emerged in response to a strong and persistent need of the hour. The need to acknowledge and encourage the inclusion and participation in the workforce of people whose minds are wired differently. Neurodiversity is an official and formal acceptance on the part of society at large and the working world in particular that there exists a wide variety and diversity in the functioning of human brains, although they might biologically consist of the same cells and tissues. In fact, this term can be seen as the neurological counterpart of ‘biodiversity’ (Walker 2014). Just as there is an immeasurable amount of diversity among flora and fauna and all other life forms dotting the earth, similarly there are innumerable individual differences among minds of people populating the plane. The explicit and manifest affirmation of this reality is what the sum and substance of neurodiversity is all about. But the phenomenon does not end there. Autistic sociologist Judy Singer coined the terms ‘neurodiverse’ and ‘neurodivergent’ in the nineties to substitute the discriminatory (and also derogatory) word ‘disorder’. The idea was to bring into prominence the salient attributes of autistic individuals like their capabilities of concentration, identification of patterns and retention of facts and figures. A ‘neurodivergent’ individual is one who lies somewhere on the autism spectrum. Neurodivergent people’s brains process things in a manner quite unlike the brains of the majority of people. Neurodivergent individuals may be found to experience and exhibit learning disabilities, attention deficit and anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder and Tourette’s syndrome. Looked at from a neurodiversity standpoint, these are not ‘abnormalities’ but just different shades of normality (Singer, 1998; Singer, 1999).

About 15–20% of people worldwide fall under the neurodiverse spectrum. Their general IQ scores are greater than those of the general population, and they are endowed with a unique competency in pattern recognition, memory, and mathematical abilities. Research indicates that teams with a neurodiverse composition tend to be 30% more productive and make fewer mistakes (Montvelisky, 2021). However, because they continue to face the stigma of not being seen as having “neurotypical” qualities, they also have a very poor employment situation. According to mydisabilityjobs.com, their unemployment rate is three times higher than that of those with any other type of disability and eight times higher than that of people without any form of impairment. The justification for the urgent need for increased participation and inclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A wide cross-section of studies have explore and unearthed different aspects and dimensions of the phenomenon of neurodiversity in all its manifestations. Some of these studies have been summarized her.

First of all, the social model of disability had an influence on the formulation of the fundamental concept of “neurodiversity” (Kreck, 2012; Shakespeare & Watson, 1997; Charlton, 1998). This idea’s roots can be found in the concept of “biodiversity,” which was developed with the goal of preserving the

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