

Supporting the Wellbeing of Neurodiverse Colleagues Webinar

Questions from the audience (in Q &A)

Q: Do you have any recommendations for training for the colleagues/ reports of neurodiverse employees, so that they are more understanding and supportive of their colleague(s)?

Angela Armstrong answer:

Attending neurodiversity awareness training that is specifically mapped against the standard management competencies and where some of the challenges/advantages might come would be very informative both in terms of understanding but also equipping people with the models and language for talking about the subject. You could go as far as a bespoke session where a 360 feedback, or similar, report is used to prioritise the areas to focus on.

A facilitated dialogue so that participants feel 'safe' and supported to discuss neurodiversity and neurotypical differences to assist exploring the subject for a team, again it helps with having the 'permission' and the 'language' to talk about the subject respectfully. Happy to discuss further.

Caroline Eglinton answer (Note: throughout this document, Caroline's answers represent her opinion and refer to the types of resources that she has found useful when doing her work – rather than a Network Rail viewpoint): I would consider the size of your organisation, and the numbers of people you would like to get awareness training. If you wanted small scale awareness training for teams to help specifically when there is a neurodiverse colleague working within, you could consider the 'Access to Work' assessment for an individual, Access to Work can supply team and line manager awareness and coaching alongside the strategy coaching for the employer. There is no cost to the business or to the employee.

For larger scale, all-business awareness, you could consider one of many providers in this area – leaders in the field include Genius Within ([Awareness training - Genius Within](#)) and Do-IT> ([Neurodiversity awareness and accredited training programmes \(doitprofler.com\)](#)) (I have no affiliation with these organisations, I see them as best in class examples). If you already have disability equality training for managers, you could incorporate this into it. If there is no general disability equality training, then this would be a great time to consider it, society should be more understanding of everyone's different needs, not just in the subject of neurodiversity.

Matthew Trerise's answer: This has been well answered by Angela and Caroline, there are an increasing number of providers but happy to discuss individual training needs.

Q: What's meant by spiky profiles?

A: Answered live

Angela Armstrong answer: This graph image from [geniuswithin.co.uk](#) is a visual representation of there being a more marked difference between different types of cognitive capability, due to hard-wiring in the brain. Spiky profiles are fundamental to understanding a neurodiverse brain (across many of the diagnoses, not just dyslexia) because the neurotypical experience is that people have 'strengths' and 'development areas' but they're within a smaller range (less spiky) and that if learning effort is applied they'll be able to 'knock the rough edges off' a development area so that it is not detrimental to performance, at least 'performance' as defined by a world that is dominated by neurotypical behaviours.

Whilst everyone's brains are capable of learning in general (neuroplasticity), there will be some cognitive capabilities that someone who is neurodiverse just won't be able to be effective at because

their brain is literally not wired to do it, so their strengths are often stronger and take less effort, but their so-called 'development areas' are no-go zones. It's likely that through necessity they use their strengths, or technology, or other people to work around those things they find challenging, or that they could do so given the opportunity.

WHAT IS Dyslexia?

- 1% of corporate managers are dyslexic
- 35% of entrepreneurs are dyslexic
- Over half of the UK population has a very limited understanding of dyslexia and think it's just about getting letters back to front.
- 20% believe dyslexics would do better if they just worked HARDER. **This is not True**
- Dyslexia is about abilities being out of balance**
 - While dyslexics may struggle with: Organizational skills, Planning and prioritising, Time keeping, Background noise.
 - They may be brilliant at: Connecting ideas, Thinking outside the box, 3D, Seeing the big picture.
- Dyslexia is NOT tied to IQ**
 - Your overall IQ can be anywhere in the range. The key difference is the spikes in the profile.
- It is estimated that **1 IN 10** people have dyslexia.
- Einstein was dyslexic** (IQ = 160* estimated)
- Unlock your hidden genius by compensating for your weak points and learning to play to your strengths.

Visit geniuswithin.co.uk to find out more about unlocking your inner genius.

Q: I'm interested to hear about any programs / coaching that help neurodiverse individuals leverage their strengths in their jobs. I am newly diagnosed and wouldn't be able to articulate what strengths there are in my difference.

Caroline Eglinton answer: Access to Work provides grants for individuals/employees to access neurodiversity specific strategy coaching, to identify strengths and capitalise on them, as well as recognise barriers and put in place strategies. The individual has autonomy on the provider, so you don't have to use a specific provider, you can use a private coach (Angela's business offers this) if you like. You do not need a diagnosis.

Angela Armstrong's answer: There are a number of online psychometrics and strengths finder tools on the market that can direct you towards your innate strengths if you're unclear what they are; some offer a superficial instant assessment for free, but it's well worth the money for an in depth report as long as it's the right tool for what you're trying to discover. Many organisations have something they offer in-house already, ask if it's a tool that reports on who you are 'day-to-day' as well as your 'innate' behaviours as those tools help in figuring out what is a natural strength vs learned behaviours or masking. Depending on your diagnosis there may also be online cognition tests specifically for your diagnosis for a modest fee (circa £20)

I'm a performance coach and certified to interpret and debrief a wide range of tools. I would be happy to offer you a 30-min discussion to help you decide whether or not assessment tools and/or coaching is right for you. As Caroline mentioned you may be able to get a grant to cover the fee.

Q: What are your thoughts on Predictive Indexing

Angela Armstrong's answer: I haven't used the Predictive Indexing website, but it appears to use psychometric and cognitive assessment tools to inform team dynamics, something coaches and facilitators have been doing successfully for years to help people to achieve high performance collaboration. Of course the assessments are really useful (I use many myself) but gathering people with the right blend of capabilities and preferences for the job are only the 'ingredients' of a recipe. I see that PI also offers facilitation and coaching - which is how to apply the information in the reports in practice, that bit is necessary in my view as humans are far more complex than mere 'ingredients'.

Q: On the topic of stigma in neurodiversity, does the panel have a view on the level of intersectional stigma for individuals who are both neurodiverse and have another form of disability?

Caroline Eglinton answer: From personal experience, as someone who has Cystic Fibrosis and ADHD, the fact that I have CF has benefitted me and lessened the stigma as it were.

People tend to see CF (or other physical conditions) as a 'real' condition, and make adjustments because they can imagine or understand the impact. For ADHD this is more difficult for people to understand. I was diagnosed with CF in childhood, and started getting workplace adjustments in about 2014. I was diagnosed with ADHD in 2020, on reflection, all of the adjustments I had were for my undiagnosed ADHD, and very few were purely related to CF. I am certain without my CF adjustments, I would have been labelled as a 'difficult' employee.

I hope we get to a place in future when it's as easy for employers to make adjustments for all conditions and employees get the support they need.

Matthew Trerise answer: As Caroline mentioned from her own experience, and through other people I am in contact with who have multiple diagnosis'. Having a more obvious (to other people) physical condition can be beneficial in having adjustments made, but equally, for some people this is likely to create further barriers or increased exclusion in multiple areas of life.

If we keep raising awareness and providing practical guidance, hopefully more people will get the support they need in education, employment, health care and meaningful inclusion in society.

Q: Personalisation is the key! When workplaces get this basic understanding then we can move forward

A: Completely agree

Q: How can communications specialists better support neurodiverse colleagues? E.g when shaping messages or language or using more creative content such as videos?

A: Caroline live answered

Caroline Eglinton answer: Business Disability Forum (I have no affiliation) has excellent resources available to member organisations - [Business Disability Forum](#)

Angela Armstrong's answer: If you're after some quick tips before diving into the BDF website...

- **Simple** - Use [Plain English](#)
- **Short**, use as few words as possible, as many as necessary. Use visuals/infographics.
- **Specific** and literal language (avoid metaphors and idioms) e.g. rather than "taking an entrenched position" use "unwilling to consider alternative suggestions"
- **Space** - use plenty of sub-headings, paragraphs and white space to convey separate ideas
- **Sensory**
 - Minimise contrast and/or bright colours

- Use movement/animation/video only if it adds clarity to the message
- **State** what you **do** want, not what you **don't** want, so there's less need for interpretation
 - e.g. instead of "don't spread germs" use "please wash your hands"

Matthew Trerise answer: Absolutely yes to the above points. Also consider providing information in different formats to meet a broad range of processing styles.

Q: How does an individual find out if they are neurodiverse?

Angela Armstrong's answer: There are lots of online self-diagnostic quizzes that can be used to get a steer on whether or not you're neurodiverse - individual tests for different conditions e.g. ADHD, Autism etc. Make sure that they are tests designed for adults. Do a few different tests and take an 'average'. If you recognise traits speak with your GP to refer to NHS diagnostics or go privately for an assessment (circa £1500)

Caroline Eglinton answer: also worth pointing out:

The NHS has a system called 'Right to Choose' around ADHD assessments, you may be able to receive a free private assessment and subsequent treatment paid for by the NHS if you live in England under your Right To Choose. You can read more here : [Right To Choose - Psychiatry-UK \(psychiatry-uk.com\)](https://www.psychiatry-uk.com/right-to-choose-2019-01-15).

Matthew Trerise's answer: Following on from Angela and Caroline's points, I would suggest using the online assessments to identify neurodiversity traits or characteristics, and considering whether these have been present over the course of the person's whole life. If the person then feels that a formal assessment for a neurodevelopmental condition e.g. autism, ADHD... would be beneficial, a discussion with a GP is a good starting point, and they should be able to provide information about local diagnostic services and make referrals. These will differ in each local area, but I would always recommend accessing statutory multidisciplinary diagnostic services if possible. Although there are likely to be significant waiting lists for assessment services, which could influence the decision to seek private assessment.

Q: How do we define 'neuro-typical'? Isn't everyone 'wired' differently to a greater or lesser extent?

Angela Armstrong's answer: Great question - it often comes up at some point in our training! This video is a great explainer for the well-intentioned statement "["isn't everyone a bit autistic"](#)". If you say "isn't everyone a bit autistic/dyslexic/OCD" etc to someone who is neurodiverse it seems like you're trivialising their challenges, or at the very least do not understand their difference.

Matthew Trerise's answer: Great question indeed, and it does come up often in training as Angela mentioned. Everyone is 'wired' differently to some extent, but we do see very similar thinking styles in the majority of people - 'neurotypical'. The issue is that society is set up for the majority in terms of how we communicate, behave, learn and process the sensory environment. Which then leads to significant exclusion and barriers for people who think, behave, communicate or respond to the environment differently.

Q: I manage a small team and have a member of the team who is neurodiverse with a confirmed diagnosis. This individual is less adaptive in the current extended lockdown period and therefore their work product is suffering compared to their peers. Supporting this individual is a focus of mine but do you feel this should be reflected in their review?

Caroline Eglinton answer: Employers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments for any disabled person who is having significant problems at work whether or not they have explicitly

told you about their disability, including in performance reviews. ACAS has information on this [Measuring staff performance | Acas](#) as well as a specific guide on Neurodiversity [Neurodiversity in the workplace | Acas](#)

Matthew Trerise's answer: Fully appreciate the needs of the business, but would be inclined to consider whether they usually work to an acceptable standard and take this into account given current circumstances. Identifying individual support needs is essential to ensure that everything possible has been done to enable the person to perform to the best of their abilities, in a hugely challenging time for everyone. If the difficulties are discussed in a formal review, this should be done in a positive and supportive way. Especially if their difficulties relate to a neurodevelopmental condition. Hopefully the difficulties are circumstantial and the situation will improve as lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Q: I wonder whether it would be a great idea to place a first aid mental health course for neurodiversity, as like in the MHFA curriculum. I'm not in the UK so probably you already have something similar. Does it make sense to you? The stigma reduction would be amazing and this webinar is an eye-opener

Caroline Eglinton answer: The Neurodiversity Aware[®] Award is an accredited programme for those wanting to gain a greater understanding of supporting people who have neuro-divergent 'conditions' in a workplace perspective. Completion of the course and work associated with it, leads to an OCN Level 4 qualification. [Neurodiversity awareness and accredited training | Do-IT \(doitprofiler.com\)](#)

Q: Sensory concept is so good to know

Glad to be of help, it's an internal sensation so not observable by others which can make it tricky to explain!

Q: Will a copy of the transcript be sent to attendees? Some brilliant information being shared here!

Yes, a transcript will be shared.

Q: If an employee/colleague has not disclosed/is not diagnosed, how to tell if 'challenges' are a neurodiverse trait or are actually a lack of engagement / poor attitude / something to be managed and changed?

A: Live answered

Caroline Eglinton answer: First thing I would do is ask if there are any adjustments that could help, employees may seem to have challenges with performance or have 'an attitude' because they haven't got any (or the right) adjustments in place. Business Disability Forum have a great 'Helping to manage performance' guide within their Neurodiversity Toolkit that we use at Network Rail.

Matthew Trerise's answer: Yes I would suggest asking them if they can identify any specific challenges they experience, then offer your insights (don't mention diagnosis/conditions unless they do) and offer support to develop strategies. Most people want to do the best job possible, and through discussing this in a positive way it will give the person the opportunity to engage and hopefully demonstrate a good attitude.

Q: Are there any developments within the diagnostic community to provide a suite of self assessments to enable people to at least reflect what works and what doesn't for their 'style' of functioning so they are empowered to understand themselves better ? clearly assessments are

'protected' by professionals but there is something about self discovery that helps people to articulate their own requirements

Caroline Eglinton answer: I'm not a psychologist or expert in any way, but useful tools I have used include

The Genius Within Adjustments Screener (geniusscreening.com)

Use this to explore the common work-related strengths and struggles common to neurodiverse adults.

Each item comes with the most popular strategy to enhance abilities or resolve issues, based on our 20 years' experience working with clients and discovering 'what works'.

These may not solve all problems, but they get you some quick wins while you work on bigger things.

By ticking those that apply to you, you get a free, personalized report at the end, full of 'life hacks' that can support you to be at your best, more of the time. You can use your results to prompt a conversation about the strategies, space and tools that will work best for you.

There are 65 questions which need a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

It should take around 5-10 mins. Taking the test and getting your report is FREE

Access to Work provides grants for individuals/employees to access neurodiversity specific strategy coaching, to identify strengths and capitalise on them, as well as recognise barriers and put in place strategies. The individual has autonomy on the provider, so you don't have to use a specific provider, you can use a private strategy coach if you like.

You do not need a diagnosis.

Q: Do you have guides you can share for helping companies understand how to help anyone with a neurodiverse condition during the recruitment and new starter process?

Caroline Eglinton answer: BDF has an excellent guide. ACAS too [Neurodiversity at work | Acas](#) and I like this straightforward article from People Management [Why employers should be hiring with neurodiversity in mind \(peoplemanagement.co.uk\)](#)

Q: I was really interested in what you just said about those with neurodiverse conditions who assume that their current mental health state is due to their hard wire (you had a fancy name for it, which i can't remember!) - any advice on how you might go about a discussion with that staff member to help them unpick what is their hard wire and what is their changing mental health?

Caroline Eglinton answer: ACAS has an excellent structured guide [Tips on how to sensitively talk to a neurodivergent team \[95kb\] \(acas.org.uk\)](#)

Matthew Trerise's answer: I think I mentioned diagnostic overshadowing in the session, whereby mental health difficulties are often assumed to be part of a neurodevelopmental condition, or vice versa. I would suggest firstly discussing whether a person experiences symptoms of anxiety or low mood, offering support to develop strategies to manage these in the workplace. And then possibly a wider discussion about whether these also relate to their diagnosis, if they have one.

Q: Is there any research you are aware of so far on neurodiversity and the impacts of Covid specifically in relation to mental health please?

Caroline Eglinton answer: There is some data from Office for National Statistics - [Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/disabilityandlongtermhealth/articles/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/2020-07-27) which includes people with all types of conditions, it found that disabled people with mental health, social or behavioural or learning impairments tend to be most concerned about the impact of the coronavirus on their well-being.

Q: My daughter has a diagnosis of dyspraxia and dyslexia and has a complex EHCP but we have had to take the local authority (LA) to a tribunal to get her the education she needs. We have won our case but it cost ca.£20k to do so which is wrong on many levels as there are many who can't afford this. I understand that LA has a budget but there seems to be a standard response/process from them. Do you know of any independent programmes which can help others with this?

Matthew Trerise answer: Unfortunately I'm not aware of any independent programs to assist families to advocate for diagnostic assessments or increased support in education. An all too familiar scenario for a lot of people, but completely agree that it is unacceptable and significantly excludes low income families if legal charges are incurred.

Q: How much does my employer have to change aspects of my job so I can do it with my ADHD? Most people do about 100 exam scripts. I can only deal with 25. Is this reasonable or does this mean I can't do the job (I am really good at all other aspects and they acknowledge this) If I had a work coach I may be able to do 50 - can I ask them for this support? It's so frustrating as I am so good at the rest of my job, and so intelligent but I may have to leave if they dont support me :(

Caroline Eglinton answer : If you are in the UK, Please consider finding out how Access to Work can support you, more information here : [Get support in work if you have a disability or health condition \(Access to Work\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-support-in-work-if-you-have-a-disability-or-health-condition) The can supply work coaches at no cost to the employer.

Matthew Trerise answer: It's great that they acknowledge you are really good at the other aspects of your role, it could be beneficial to discuss 'job carving' with your employer and colleagues. Possibly suggesting that you could do more of the aspects you excel at than colleagues, and they do more exam scripts?

Q: I'm neurodiverse (dyslexic) and the shift to working from home really isn't working for me. I'm an extrovert and I prefer F2F interaction rather than written. I know a lot of others are struggling with this shift as so much more work info is written. What advice would you give employers to help those who are neuro-typical and also advice for people who have dyslexia to help with shift in working?

Caroline Eglinton answer: Having the right home-office set up, and assistive technology can make a big difference whilst working from home, removing some of the stress as well as simple things like noise cancelling headphones. At Network Rail we have allowed employees to come into our COVID secure workplaces where it is important to their mental wellbeing, as a reasonable adjustment.

Angela Armstrong answer: Caroline's answer is great. Some other practical tips. Are you able to do video-conferencing? Collaborating remotely using virtual whiteboards? Use an app that reads email messages to you, or ask people to send you a voice-message instead of an email? For the more social aspect and keeping energy up, what about finding another colleague who is missing the social interaction and variety and arrange a non-work chat on video conference at lunch? Or organise a

post-work social/quiz via video conference so you can still enjoy some banter and personal engagement with colleagues?

Matthew Trerise answer: Both answers are great, it sounds like assistive technology could be useful if not already in place e.g. voice to text or text to voice software

Being an extrovert is extremely challenging in the current situation, but as Angela mentioned there may be others feeling the same. Maybe speak to colleagues and friends about the challenges, and increasing the use of video chats until F2F is a possibility again?

Q: I work with a neurodiverse colleague who is frequently over-working and at (what I believe) to be an unsustainable fast pace that other colleagues find difficult to keep up with. This often is counter productive as she is so focused and determined on getting the job done, it doesn't always allow time for ideas to settle, or for a healthy collaboration / diverse approach. How can I encourage her to slow down, take breaks and be less demanding of others time? Do I meet her with the same honesty she presents with?

Caroline Eglinton answer: Deep-rooted working styles are difficult to change for some, particularly when it is the way they have always worked or they enjoy the fast pace you describe. Although a quiet word may lead to an immediate change, there is a possibility that the employee may either circumvent the structures you put in place, or go back to old ways quickly. You could talk to the employee about whether expert strategy coaching could help and if they agree get it in place. This is likely to have a better lasting impact. It can be provided at no cost through Access to Work.

Angela Armstrong's answer: Yes having sensitive, but direct, transparent and honest conversation is really helpful. **Empathy:** It's possible that she might not be aware of the impact her pace and approach has on colleagues without being given an explicit explanation of the adverse consequences for others (or being asked open questions to help her discover it for herself). **Outcome:** Also being clear that "what good looks like" is not only the solution and pace, but also achieving stakeholder buy-in. Consider too that she may just be doing a job where she has an **innate strength** in being able to progress the thinking very quickly, faster than average, and so she may not actually be 'over-working'. If she understands (intellectually and emotionally) the necessity to work at the group pace and it's a **skill issue, rather than a will issue**, it could be that collaborating well with others is something she needs to develop, or maybe is not wired-up to do well. Is she a strong communicator or is the information she shares hard to understand? If she's not over-working but finds intellectual stimulation satisfying and adds great value, is there a '**side project**' that would play to her strengths and maybe have someone else complement her skills who is a stronger people-person? As Caroline suggests, working with a coach would help to sort through the above questions to determine a workable solution. Happy to discuss further.

Q: I have a client with a diagnosis. We are supporting him to find new employment. He believes that there will always be someone better than him "without his problems" applying for the same job . A job application obviously has additional challenges during the pandemic. Do you have any advice on how I can support him with interviews and job applications? Is there groups or organisations with specialist knowledge of autism that could help him with job application and interview.

Caroline Eglinton answer : If you are in the UK, Access to work can provide support at a job interview, based on the individual's needs. You could also approach companies working with [National Autistic Society - Autism support - leading UK charity](#) through their Autism at Work programme.

They also have a page with lots of great info here : including interview support examples [Employing autistic people – a guide for employers \(autism.org.uk\)](#)

Angela Armstrong's answer: Above, and also, [Remploy](#) are very good (I have no affiliation), they offer free and confidential support to people with all sorts of disabilities to find work, including neurodiverse conditions. The few people I know there are pragmatic and realistic but also talk about successful case studies, which may help with self-belief and perseverance too.

Matthew Trerise's answer: Yes local employment support services will differ in each area, and unfortunately there are very few who specialise in supporting autistic people. There are often organisations who provide more general support to develop interview skills and write job applications though, which could be helpful. Lots of encouragement, reassurance and confidence building to focus on strengths. Asking them specifically about any things they find particularly challenging about applications or interviews, developing strategies to use, or giving advice around how to disclose and ask for adjustments to be made.

Q: Could you share some tips/resources on how to establish neurodiversity networks in an organisation?

Caroline Eglinton answer: [How to set up an employee network - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) this guide is a great starting point for consideration, helping you have a structured approach. Setting out expectations for those volunteers is really important, it's easy to get frustrated or dis-illusioned if the group think their aim is 'this', but the business or organisation has different intentions or doesn't allow changes to be made based on the recommendations or feedback from the group.

Angela Armstrong answer: Expectations, as Caroline mentioned. Here are a few other ideas:

- Make it safe: Ask someone who is neurodiverse to be more visible about their difference, it's important that they are also visibly and positively supported by their neurotypical peers.
- Establish the network alongside a wider awareness campaign, maybe alongside [World Autism At Work week](#) - next one is 29 March - 4th April 2021
- Get the individuals who come forward first to decide what type of network involvement would best suit them. Successful ones are often a regular, video conference, approx 1 hour a week. Happy to discuss further

Matthew Trerise answer: I would just add trying to get senior support for this to ensure that it is properly supported within the organisation.

Q: This part is really interesting as well in supporting people in returning to the workplace following working from home - Any further information and advice on how this can be achieved would be really useful

[Here's an article Matt and I wrote previously on the subject](#)

Q: How can you help a staff member who is neurodiverse (autistic spectrum) but they don't know what adjustments would be good for them? We are assuming people are self-aware, but this isn't always the case. What support can be provided to them so they can become more aware of what would be helpful for them?

Caroline Eglinton answer : a good starting point might be [The Genius Within Adjustments Screener \(geniusscreening.com\)](#), or suggest a menu of adjustments: "would you like me to put any of these in place for you?" [Common adjustments that might be appropriate for a neurodivergent team member \[112kb\] \(acas.org.uk\)](#)

Angela Armstrong: I agree with Caroline's suggestion. Also, if the individual is not very self-aware at all ("thinking about how you think" can be a challenge for some neurodiverse people) then personal coaching would help them to be able to identify their strengths and challenges in a different way.

If you are in the UK, Please consider finding out how Access to Work can support you, more information here : [Get support in work if you have a disability or health condition \(Access to Work\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/get-support-in-work-if-you-have-a-disability-or-health-condition) They can supply work coaches at no cost to the employer - you can choose a private coach. Happy to discuss.

Matthew Trerise's answer: Also, consider the language being used when asking the person what they need. Try to avoid open questions such as "What adjustments would be helpful?", closed or specific questions are often much easier e.g. "Would you find it easier if you had instructions in writing?" or "Would you find it helpful to have a clear timetable for the working day?"

Q: What are the panel's views on how to best operate a 'self-disclosure' function across an organisation?

Caroline Eglinton answer: Difficult one to answer, we do collect data anonymously on protected characteristics including disability status, but this is not in terms of 'disclosure'. We do not have a list or register of disabled employees, this would not be appropriate. At Network Rail we simply have anonymous data. We try to encourage a culture of psychological safety where people can share with their line manager or other trusted person and get adjustments in place where required. But there is no requirement to tick a box or 'declare/disclose' in order to do this.

Q: Also interested to see people experience around diagnosis..understand its very individual, is there a place to have this conversation with other people

Caroline Eglinton answer : In the workplace, groups such as employee networks or yammer groups often discuss this topic, they do at Network Rail . Outside of this I have found many useful Facebook groups that I identify well with and discuss these topics.

Angela Armstrong: In addition, there is a discussion thread for community members on the autism.org.uk website - it's always a live topic! The charity *Mind* often sponsor neurodiversity peer support groups locally (currently via video conference during covid).

Q: Could you do a follow-up webinar to dive into things more (perhaps a series even?) or repeat some stuff?

Angela Armstrong: We can ask MAD World to circulate our flyers to prompt thoughts and test appetite for other sessions. Matt and I are also happy to discuss a bespoke session.

Q: Open questions

Matthew Trerise answer: Many autistic people find it difficult to answer open questions, but this is often how professionals are trained to ask questions. Asking very specific or closed questions is often much more effective

Q: What support can be put in place for a staff member on the autistic spectrum who is struggling with personal hygiene and who says 'they've tried everything'. It's affecting their working environment and colleagues in a negative way unfortunately and mentioning it everytime does not change their behaviour (obviously).

Caroline Eglinton answer: Workplace strategy coaching may be useful. I wouldn't focus it on that one issue when you discuss it, it's likely that strategy coaching could help with other areas that in turn, could improve this area.

Angela Armstrong. Agree - personal coaching will help get to the bottom of why previous attempts have been unsuccessful or behaviour change has not 'stuck' and create a strategy that works for that individual, if it's behavioural, it might also be a medical condition.

Matthew Trerise's answer: Also agree, there could also be potential for practical difficulties with daily living skills for people with executive functioning difficulties. Some people benefit from simple things like having visual prompts at home to remind themselves to do tasks, or the step by step process to complete them. But do be aware it could be due to a separate medical condition, as Angela stated.

Q: <http://https://dma.org.uk/talent/neurodiversity-initiative> this link does not seem to be working i hope i typed it in right!

<https://dma.org.uk/talent/neurodiversity-initiative>

Q: **Stuart - In the technology space, do you think that WCAG2.1 (web content accessibility guidelines) sufficiently covers everything that needs to be considered for neurodiverse users? If not, what's missing?**

Stuart Blair: The WCAG guidelines, which are now supported by the more recent EU Directive, are fairly complex. I believe that they cover around 380 different potential accessibility issues that could be present on a website.

For organisations that view digital accessibility as a tick box exercise then achieving AA standard will be sufficient. For those organisations that want to take a real proactive approach to ensure their content is accessible to all their users, they should be aiming for AAA standard but also providing enhanced accessibility features such as Text to Speech, Screen Masking and Translation.

Q: **Does anybody have good advice/materials on really highlighting disability support/ND support as part of the recruitment process and how to really promote Access to work, to try get steps in place before a colleague arrives? Ideally we want to identify those who need adjustments ASAP (in HR) and access to work benefits. both for colleagues and managers knowledge.**

Caroline Eglinton answer : Create a supportive culture where candidates are encouraged to ask for reasonable adjustments at every stage, best practice would be not to make it about being 'disabled' per se, but an open invitation for anyone who needs adjustments to any part of the recruitment process to ask for them, and make the way to ask simple and easy. Some people will not be comfortable sharing until they are appointed, if at all, and this is their choice.

Angela Armstrong: Also giving examples of reasonable adjustments available for the interview process as 'tick box' or 'other (please specify)' helps to normalise the request for reasonable adjustments and some people 'won't know it til they see it'.

Q: **How can we request a demo for our colleagues? Should we email Stuart or one of his colleagues?**

Stuart Blair: Happy to be contacted via email s.blair@texthelp.com

Q: **Stuart- does it have a dictate function?**

Stuart Blair: Yes, Read & Write has a dictation feature

Q: In a traditional male dominated organisation, were there particular challenges in influencing managers of the importance of supporting employees who have "different" challenges when it comes to mental health support and conditions ? How has progress been measured?

Live answered

Caroline Eglinton answer : We measure our progress in this area mainly through our employee engagement surveys which ask specific questions on these subjects.

Q: Very interesting approaches Caroline, how have you engaged those working on sites/stations during COVID restrictions i.e. in the absence of face to face opportunities?

Caroline Eglinton answer: in a variety of ways, such as 'stand downs' where teams are asked specifically to discuss a D&I or wellbeing moment (such as the Ask Twice video I shared a slide on); making the information available on our network rail mobile devices in app format; printed versions of our business magazine to site; and allowing people to access the materials online outside of the business network/intranet.