



THINKING AND BEHAVIOURAL DIVERSITY

MAXIMISING THE POWER OF YOUR PEOPLE



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Introduction

Many organisations are now realising that diversity of cognitive function and behaviour amongst their workforce holds great potential.

Our people are our greatest asset, particularly when we accommodate their diversity and enable them to play to their strengths. As we navigate through and beyond the COVID -19 pandemic, understanding neurodiversity is the key to unleashing people assets in an organisation.

This white paper introduces the topic as well as some practical advice on how to harness the power of neurodiversity.

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are recognized and respected as any other human variation.

The term emerged in the late 1990's, following an explosive decade of study into how our brains function.

Neurodiversity was first used in relation to neurological conditions [such as Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, ADHD, Autism, Tourette Syndrome, and others] and the movement to embrace these natural forms of human diversity.

Neurodiversity
'the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population'

Today the term is used more broadly beyond recognised neurological conditions and regarded as part of the normal variation in the human population.

The idea embraces the variation in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood, and mental functions in a non-pathological sense. From a viewpoint where brain differences are normal rather than deficits.

We are more aware that the idea of one 'normal' type of brain, or a 'right' style of thinking, is no more helpful than the idea that there is one 'normal' or 'right' ethnicity, gender, or culture.

Human Brains in Business

We now know organisations can be challenging for human brains to operate effectively.

A few million years ago our ancestors lived in smaller social groups [\[around 50 or so\]](#) with relationships built on trust over a lifetime. Today, we choose to live and interact in larger communities, around triple that of our ancestors.



We also live in an era of the 'transient lifestyle'. Where we are more likely to live away from the family unit and change jobs more frequently. This situation presents a challenge for organisations who wish to sustain and build trust relationships in the workforce.

Human beings have a natural survival instinct. This means our brains are tuned to automatically distrust and see danger. When work-life demands a faster pace or adjustment to change, as well as greater outputs, our brains are wired to look for ways to remove stress. We activate our fight, flight or freeze response and often swap social cooperation for social competition.

When we embrace neurological differences, we generate trust, respect and recognition between people.

Negative events also have a greater impact on our brains than positive ones. This is often referred to as our negative bias. It means we tend to dwell more on negative stimuli or events and remember the sting of a rebuke more powerfully than a stroke of praise.

If negativity and social competition are left to intensify within the work environment, it is likely to lead to distrust, inefficiency and unhappiness.

On the other hand, if we can generate respect and recognition between people to embrace their neurological differences, there is huge potential.

If people with diverse thinking and behavioural preferences can be supported to work together in a complimentary way, we uncover an asset that has previously been left unexploited. Could there actually be a “free gift” staring us in the face - one that will bring ourselves and those around us more joy and mutual well-being?

Smart organisations are already utilising contemporary research that describes thinking and behavioural diversity in human beings to create positive and productive working cultures. They are offering this understanding to their people, leaders and teams to support them to work more effectively. Geil Browning, CEO of Emergenetics, eloquently describes this vision for an organisation in her recent book *Work That Works* (2017).

Why Harness Neurodiversity?

Why should we invest time and energy in helping our people utilise the neurodivergence that is embedded within them and their colleagues?

Here are some simple but powerful statistics that illustrate the business case for using our knowledge of neurodiversity to improve communication and relationships.

Tone and Body Language Matter

WORDS 7%

The human brain builds trust by sharing feelings and the workplace is no exception. This is a characteristic of our “social brain”.

TONE OF VOICE 38%

Mehrabian’s famous research (*Silent Messages*, 1971) indicates these three elements of communication that contribute to how much we connect with someone when they communicate about their feelings.

BODY LANGUAGE 55%

People understanding how they could use different words and behaviours to communicate feelings becomes critical in ensuring effective workplace communication.

Maximise the move to remote working

According to the [ONS](#), in the last decade [from 2008 to 2018] the number of employees working remotely has increased by nearly a quarter. 16% of the total UK labour force now work from home or use home as a base to undertake a proportion of their work.



Many more employers have been forced to embrace remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using video conferencing services and electronic communications to keep in touch and enable business continuity. The legacy of this unexpected event is likely to result in a higher proportion of the workforce becoming remote workers, whilst a smaller proportion return to the workplace. Colleagues will have spent and may continue to spend more significant times apart from each other, much longer than they have ever previously been used to.

We know remote working creates social distancing and this separation can lead to employees feeling both isolated and excluded from each other. By understanding more about how colleagues think and behave, a new and improved approach to electronic communications can be adopted. One that considers interaction preferences and caters for the diverse needs of an organisations people.

Make the most of email communication

[Research](#) at Loughborough University (Jackson, 2009) showed the costs of providing email for an employee is in excess of £10,000.

Email misunderstandings often result from poor written quality of messages, where the sender writes in their own preferred communication style, not the preferred style of the recipient.

People can now learn how to write effective emails in a style that will deliver their intended outcome.

Email cost
£10.000
per employee



Positive relationships retain talent

CIPD Research (Health and Well-Being at Work Survey, 2019) indicates the top three causes of stress related absence are unmanageable workloads, management style and relationships at work.

Other CIPD research (Annual Survey, 2016) also indicates over 75% of managers have difficulty retaining staff. We know some of the top reasons people leave roles is due to their relationship with their manager or colleagues. Relationships rely on effective communications between people who will think and behave very differently – this takes understanding, willingness to adapt and practice to get it right.

Leaders must build trust

In [the 2019 Trust Barometer](#) (Eldeman's 19th Annual Trust and Credibility Survey) three-quarters of people (76%) believe that how a business treats its employees is a key indicator of trustworthiness.

However, CIPD research (UK Working Lives, 2019) reports three in ten employees in the UK, lack confidence in their senior leaders and nearly a quarter do not trust them.

A thriving business is built on a foundation of trusting relationships

In addition, we find that almost one in four employees feel they do not work in inclusive environments, agreeing with a statement that their colleagues 'sometimes reject others for being different'.

A thriving business is built on a foundation of trusting relationships. The ability to trust is influenced by people's willingness to embrace neurodiversity.

We know that trust is built largely on communication effectiveness and that communication must be delivered in a style to suit the recipient, not the way that is easy for the communicator.



It is reassuring that we are starting to see an awareness of this issue filtering into guidance documents issued by bodies that support effective organisations. For example, the Code for Sports Governance, issued by UK Sport and Sport England (2016), calls on national governing bodies to recognise "diversity of thought". The code advises "organisations should seek to recruit to their Boards, people who think in different ways as well as those who have different backgrounds.

What Are Successful Organisations Doing?

High performing organisations embrace diversity in all forms, both the legally protected characteristics and neurodiversity.

This can be implemented by giving people the skills (and confidence) to use language and appropriate behaviours that respect other individuals and the differences of colleagues. Creating a language of communication that celebrates very varied thinking (and behavioural) preferences, will allow every individual to feel connected and valued.

It is more likely to make them confident to contribute, without needing to become a clone of the organisation or to feel their individual authenticity is being threatened.

At ROOTBALL, this practical approach is the basis for the work we do with organisations and teams of all sizes.

Using Emergenetics and a combination of ROOTBALL's own tried and tested methods, our approach proactively encourages and utilises neurodiversity in a group, supporting them to perform more effectively.



There are [numerous examples](#), from a wide range of sectors, where previous frustrations within (and between) teams were resulting from a misunderstanding of thinking (or behavioural) diversity. Through working with Emergenetics principles, tools and techniques, these frustrations have been evolved into a positive transformational energy, where people are excited to use the neurodiversity that is available in colleagues.

Here are some examples where the consideration of neurodiversity can benefit organisations.

INNOVATION

One person is rarely going to be exceptional in all stages of innovation. Teams with complementary strengths, thinking styles and behaviours will be more effective than any one person can ever be. Innovation must be a team sport in most organisations.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment of people who have motivations and preferences that align to the specific role they have been selected for, rather than recruiting based on emotive perceptions, is now clearly identified as the route to recruiting effective people, but also to keeping them.

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

By understanding more about how a person likes to receive feedback, leaders can adapt performance feedback styles to better motivate action. They can also gain a greater understanding of a team members thinking and behavioural preferences to understand how best they adapt and learn new skills. This can make a significant difference to how a person then chooses to perform.

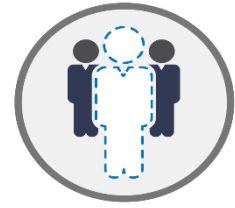
WELL-FORMED OUTCOMES

Setting team goals that deliver outstanding outcomes are rarely achieved by one person. Teams who harmonise their thinking and behavioural attributes and play to their strengths are more effective in the development, planning and delivery of well-formed outcomes. The more team members understand how to get the best out of each other, the better the outcomes.

Our experience suggests that this transformation can begin at any part of an organisation. Role modelling from the top is an excellent place to start, but only if the executive team are willing to challenge themselves. Alternatively, starting with the customer interface can provide obvious and immediate financial returns on training investment. A third approach is to target the core of the organisation, building neurodiversity communication skills into core leadership and team development activities, focusing on managers and team leaders.

What Practical Actions Can You Take?

1 Make the pro-active decision to use the full neurodiversity of the human talent pool that exists within your organisation. Extend this approach to candidates as you recruit.



2 Train people to recognise and utilise diversity of thinking and behaviour in others. As a result, people will be equipped to work more effectively with colleagues who are different and customer facing teams will understand how individual customers have very diverse communication requirements.

3 Evolve from using dated psychometric profiling tools that remain in the filing cabinet after a training or coaching session. Instead, utilise modern, accessible, robustly researched tools that reflect our current knowledge of neurodiversity and are provided to people through brain friendly training.



4 Utilise smart-phone technology that provides communication tips for sustainable reinforcement. Use an app that provides real-time advice on how to communicate with colleagues based on each individual's actual thinking and behavioural preferences.

Our understanding of neurodiversity and communication effectiveness is 21st Century. If you seek to create a workplace that works and want to learn more about how Emergenetics psychometric profiling and online interactive workshops can benefit you and your team, then [Contact me](#) and join one of our FREE one-hour webinar, [INTRODUCTION TO EMERGENETICS](#).

Workshops can also be delivered in a face to face environment.

ABOUT ROOTBALL. Stemming from a successful background and over twenty years' experience in corporate senior leadership, management and coaching across large global hotel groups, regional transport operators and authorities. ROOTBALL provides internationally renowned accurate and versatile Emergenetics psychometric profiling, deep-rooted support and high-energy thinking and behavioural leadership programmes, plus 1-2-1 coaching to help drive individual, team and organisational performance.



GET IN TOUCH

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