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NEURODIVERSITY,

Knowing, Understanding,
Recognizing and Valuing
cognitive diversity
in the workplace.

“Promoting Diversity and embodying Inclusion in our daily actions are central to Ipsen’s ambition, reflected in our HR policies and organizational culture (EVP*, recruitment process, onboarding programme, career development, professional opportunities, etc.). Different backgrounds, profiles, and talents enrich our perspectives and diverse lived experiences. With more than one in six** individuals identifying as neurodiverse in the general population, neurodivergence is both unique and widespread, and Ipsen is dedicated to both recognizing and supporting neurodiversity in the workplace. With this goal in mind, Ipsen has developed this guide for managers, HR and all our teams. Our objective is to enhance collaboration by providing tools for better understanding of daily situations. By supporting neurodiversity within teams and being an inclusive organization, we are making a real impact.”

Cyrille Debar Vice-President, Human Resources for France, UK and Ireland.

(*) Employee Value Proposition. (**) Sources : french government : handicap.gouv.fr

“By acting responsibly and inclusively, we are all committed to building a future where every difference is valued and celebrated.

Ipsen’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team, along with our disability coordinators, is available to support you and help identify the best solutions. At Ipsen, we are committed to ensuring a safe and respectful work environment, with zero tolerance for any form of discrimination. Together, we can create lasting change. Authentic. Real. By being ourselves.”

Roxane Pitie Diversity and Inclusion/Quality of Work Life and Working Conditions, France

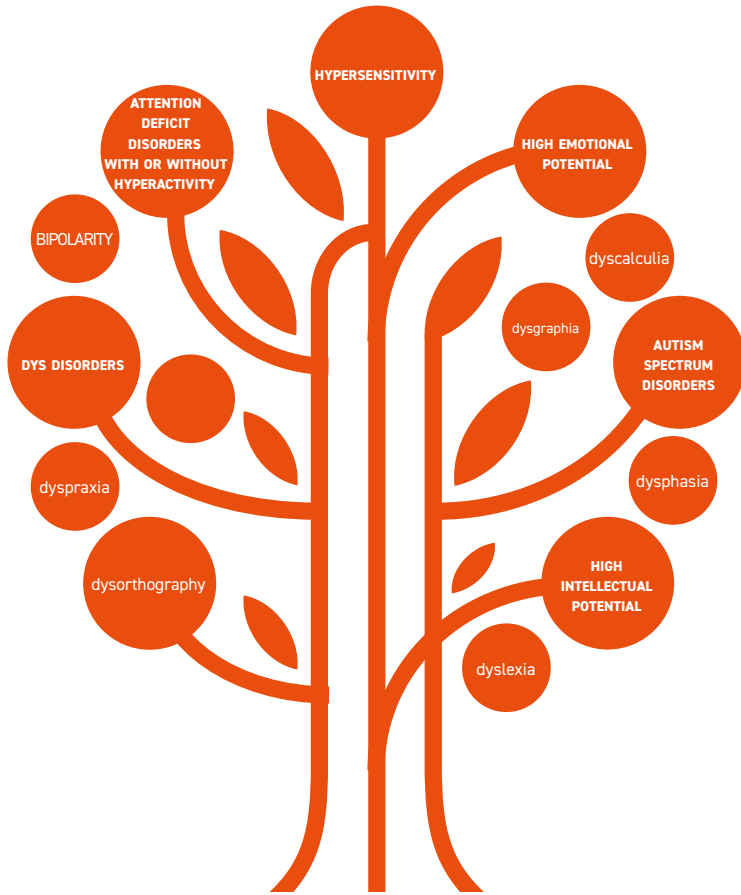
Who created this guide?

This guide was designed by HandiEM and IPSEN with the expertise of Stéphanie Fouquet, founder and CEO of Asperteam.

Graphic design: © Sabooj EA, 2024.

Our thanks go to the Ipsen employees who have made valuable contributions to this guide, as well as to the HR, Diversity, Disability Mission, Occupational Health and Safety, and Medical Affairs departments for their input.

Special thanks to the Île-de-France Autism Resource Centre (CRAIF, Centre Ressources Autisme Île-de-France) for reviewing the Guide and providing their advice.



“Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many ways; there is no one «right» way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.”


Pharmaceutical companies affirm their commitment to inclusive employment for individuals with disabilities, specifically by initiating actions targeting those with **neurodevelopmental** disorders.

Neurodivergent employees are an asset to companies since they can share new perspectives, challenge the standard quo and offer novel problem-solving abilities.

This guide is the result of a collaborative effort, and includes testimonies from various stakeholders and neurodivergent employees, to help us better understand neurodivergence and shift perceptions.

The HandiEM team



Words accompanied by a pictogram  are explained at the end of the guide on page 16.



Introduction

While a neurological and cognitive norm exists for most individuals, differences are present within the human population. “Neurodiversity” refers to diverse ways in which a person’s brain processes information, including how they perceive, feel, think, and act within the human species.

People with less common ways of functioning are considered part of **neurominorities** and are often described as neurodivergent.

As with any unique trait, cognitive differences can lead to misunderstandings and may give rise to

stereotypes or even discrimination. However, like all forms of diversity, cognitive diversity is part of the richness of life.

This cognitive diversity is also an asset for fostering collective intelligence, which is a source of innovation. It contributes to improving both the well-being and the performance of the group. From a Corporate Social Responsibility perspective including neurodiversity is fundamentally about promoting equal opportunities for all.

Please note:

Neurodiversity is a recent area of research that continues to evolve with advancements in multidisciplinary approaches: neuroscientific, psychological, medical, sociological, peer-expert, and more.

The approach outlined in this guide is simplified, aiming to raise awareness among employees in the pharmaceutical sector; it is designed to evolve over time as research in the field advances.

This guide was developed through a collaborative effort and incorporating insights from various stakeholders (HR, Diversity and Inclusion, Disability Mission, Occupational Health, Medical Affairs, and HandiEM) as well as neurodivergent employees, will help you to better understand neurodiversity and shift perspectives.

Neurodiversity touches everyone

People with less common cognitive functioning are described as neurodivergent: autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit disorders with or without hyperactivity, dys disorders (dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia...), and others.

You likely know and interact with one or more neurodivergent colleagues.

Or perhaps this applies directly to you?

Maybe you don't know?

This isn't surprising: these differences are often poorly understood or recognized by those around the neurodivergent person, making neurodiversity less visible than physical disabilities.

Neurodiversity may manifest in various behaviors or thought processes that can seem surprising or lead to misunderstandings in both work organization and social interactions.

What appears "obvious" might be challenging, while what is usually considered "complicated" may be easy.

Thus, to collaborate effectively and value these functional differences, it is best to understand and acknowledge these cognitive particularities.

DISTRIBUTION OF Neurotypical and Neurodivergent



Neurotypical

80%

Neurodivergent

20%

Among neurominorities, only a few individuals are aware of their specific traits (whether "officially" diagnosed or not).



A few key figures

The prevalence of neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD) in the general population is significant.

Approximately 5% of school pupils in each age group are estimated to have dyslexia, 5% to have attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity (ADHD), 3% to have dyspraxia, and 2% to have dysphasia. Autism spectrum disorders are thought to affect 1–2% of the students in each group.

In total, NDDs account for 15% of the paediatric population. Between 40% and 90% of this group continues to experience symptoms into adulthood.

These epidemiological data highlight that neurodevelopmental disorders in adults are common, with varying impacts on daily life. Yet these conditions are often under-recognised or underestimated in adults, even when diagnosed in childhood.

Jean-Yves Loze

Director of Medical Affairs, Neurosciences

Interesting facts



Over **15%** of the paediatric population is affected by neurodevelopmental disorders.

Between **40%** and **90%** of this population remain symptomatic into adulthood.

66% of individuals with atypical functioning fear workplace discrimination if they disclose their differences.

Neurodiversity: What Are We Talking About?



Neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD) are numerous and complex.

They arise from disruptions in brain development that begin in utero and can continue into adulthood, affecting neural connections, neurotransmitters, sensory perception systems, etc. In France, 600 researchers from the Autism and NDD Scientific Interest Group (Autism and NDD GIS, *Groupe d'Intérêt Scientifique*) are working to better understand these [mechanisms](#).

Neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD) manifest differently depending on genetics, the prenatal and birth environment, and the context in which the individual grows. They are not static; their manifestations evolve throughout a person's life. Individuals perceive the world through particular "filters" and often react in ways that may seem "too much" or "not enough" compared to the majority of the population. No one displays all characteristics of a single profile, which is why these are described as heterogeneous disorders.

NDDs are diverse. More than half of individuals with one NDD have at least one additional disorder. One may cover another, or conversely, reinforce or contradict it depending on the situation.

These disorders are not diseases. They are characterized by syndromes —combinations of signs and symptoms. They may cause or be associated with other conditions that can mask them: sleep disorders, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, depression, and even epilepsy.

These NDDs create specific needs in the workplace, often centred around common themes such as communication, work organization, time management, level of attention, and sensory sensitivities.

Having a neurodevelopmental disorder presents both strengths and challenges.

Certain work contexts demand greater adaptation efforts, which can lead to challenges and, at times, create disabling situations. However, these contexts can also reveal strengths associated with specific ways of functioning, such as attention to detail, creativity, and responsiveness.

ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorders

ASD is often characterized by differences in social interactions and communication, along with a possible preference for repetitive activities and unchanging environments.

Detail-oriented thinking,
sensory particularities

ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ADHD is often marked by differences in the ability to regulate attention and planning functions, which can lead to difficulties with time management and impulsivity.

Hyperfocus
Concentration, and
responsiveness

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a learning disorder that primarily affects reading and writing skills; it also impacts processes related to information integration.

Entrepreneurial mindset
Reading and concentration

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia involves differences in learning and understanding arithmetics, including mathematical calculations.

Innovative

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia involves differences in learning manual skills, which result in variations in movement and coordination.

Verbal communication

Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a difference in handwriting ability, which stems from physiological differences in hand functioning and the sequencing of words and sentences.

Creativity

How can neurodiversity impact professional life while going unnoticed?



Invisible doesn't mean non-existent.

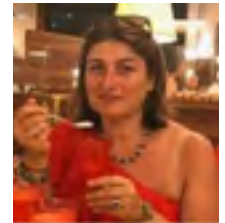
When I'm in a state of hyper concentration, I forget everything around me. If I'm interrupted, for example, when a colleague comes up to me and tries to talk to me, I startle and often react confusedly, sometimes even with annoyance or anger.

I can sometimes be mentally and physically exhausted. When I wear a social mask, I unconsciously monitor my environment and everything my body does: Does my leg move? Am I smiling enough? Am I showing that I'm really paying attention? Have I really been paying attention? I'm constantly thinking about how I'm perceived by others and whether I'm doing something that might upset or annoy them.



Miriam
Employee

My colleague is absent from all informal gatherings and leaves as soon as there's even a little noise. I think it's not necessarily that they're unapproachable, but rather that they may have sensory particularities. In a meeting, someone makes a sharp remark that can come across as hurtful. They don't filter their responses and are very direct. This is misunderstood by the team. I think perhaps this person has an atypical profile and may not grasp social cues.



Agnès, Executive Assistant
Parent of a neurodivergent child



Why is it essential to discuss this, _____ even in a professional environment?

A catalyst for well-being and a driver of performance: the diversity of individuals is a valuable asset to the workplace, hence the importance of recognizing and appreciating cognitive differences.

There are compelling reasons to break the taboos surrounding various neurodevelopmental disorders and to acknowledge these challenges in the workplace:

“Everyone stands to benefit.”

Benefits for colleagues working with a neurodivergent team member:

- Learning to interpret sometimes unexpected behaviours and feeling more at ease.
- Gaining insights to communicate more effectively, thereby improving efficiency.

Benefits for a neurodivergent individual:

- Feeling recognized and understood in one's identity and way of functioning, without needing to mask or play a role.
- Being better able to manage the fatigue which can arise as a result of the (often unconscious) over-adaptations.
- Maintaining motivation and having the opportunity to leverage one's strengths and creativity without feeling held back.
- Benefiting from reasonable adjustments at work, such as adjustments in organization (scheduling, tasks, remote work) and/or in the environment (noise-cancelling headphones, workspace adaptations).
- Receiving tailored support measures (if needed): facilitating integration, assisting with social skills and/or work organization.
- Sharing knowledge on the topic to promote a neuro-inclusive culture within one's team and organization through awareness-raising.

Benefits for managers of a neurodivergent team member:

The symptoms associated with neurodevelopmental disorders in adults are varied and often non-specific.

As a manager, it is essential to create a supportive environment for open dialogue to better understand the specific challenges the individual may experience, allowing for appropriate adjustments to their role and tasks. Some tasks may be completed more quickly, while others may require more time, often needing tailored support.

Together, let's support the inclusion of individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions into the workplace.

Jean-Yves Loze
Director of Medical Affairs, Neurosciences



- **Ensuring the well-being** of all team members by addressing their specific needs.
- **Organizing a team awareness workshop** to enhance understanding of neurodevelopmental conditions and establish collective best practices.
- **Adapting management style** and communication methods to each individual's cognitive specificities.
- **Recruiting talented individuals with unique profiles** by creating a supportive and inclusive environment.
- **Strengthening team cohesion** by fostering collaboration with greater empathy and authenticity, thereby enhancing collective intelligence.
- **Continuing to innovate and perform with a motivated, long-term engaged team.** Promoting psychosocial well-being helps reduce unexplained absences, turnover, burnout, boreout, and extended sick leave.

To achieve this, managers should stay informed and trained to deepen their understanding of neurodevelopmental conditions.



Talking about it: yes, but How?

If you are directly affected

Why bring it up?

Speak up to avoid feelings of chronic fatigue or even burnout, as well as to address relational, emotional, or sensory tensions that impact your quality of life, health, and working conditions.

When discussing it, be sure to:

- **share your specific needs**
 - highlight the situations and contexts that can lead to significant and chronic stress,
 - communicate any specific difficulties, along with frequency and/or intensity (if higher than average)
 - identify the pragmatic impact on your work and personal life
- **identify specific and necessary adjustments to your workstation**, and, if needed, consult a third party to help identify solutions: the disability adviser and/or Occupational Health Services (doctor, nurse, social worker). They will assist in identifying services or support that can address your needs to maintain good working conditions.

Who to talk to?

The following resources are recommended as first points of contact:

- If your organization has a designated person to support access needs, such as a disability champion (usually part of the HR team), they are likely to be the best person to contact.
- In addition, the organization's occupational health nurse or doctor will be additional sources of support.



“Our role is to work with employees to define the necessary adjustments to facilitate adaptation in the workplace and/or tailor work requirements to individual needs. This may involve specific equipment (ergonomic chair, software), adapted work organization (flexible hours, remote work), or personalized support (occupational psychologist, social worker, coaching, training). These supports, if needed, can be combined as necessary.”

Delphine
Occupational Health Nurse

Then consider sharing your diagnosis with other people

- Someone whom you trust.
- Your manager and potentially your manager's manager at an appropriate time; if you would like some support for this conversation, you can ask the disability adviser or the occupational health nurse to accompany you.
- The HR department, who can serve as a trusted point of contact.
- Your managers and the HR department are obliged to maintain confidentiality with regards information of this nature .

Depending on the country, local associations and organizations can support businesses in making their work environments more accessible to neurodiverse individuals. These organizations provide guidance and resources to adapt spaces, tools, and workplace practices.

Globally, the Neurodiversity Foundation is a key resource, offering comprehensive support to foster inclusion and nurture the growth of neurodiverse talents. To benefit from tailored assistance, it is recommended that you connect with local organizations or the foundation.

Can I qualify for workplace accommodations for a neurodevelopmental condition?

In many countries, neurodevelopmental conditions are increasingly recognized as cognitive disabilities, making individuals eligible for workplace accommodations or support services. The specific process and terminology vary by country.

For instance, applying for official recognition of disability status (or an equivalent designation) through local disability support agencies or governmental bodies can provide access to accommodations and services designed to mitigate the impact of these conditions in the workplace. It is recommended to consult local resources or legal frameworks to understand the specific steps and benefits available in your region.

Key Points to Remember:

Individuals affected may experience a wide range of symptoms and numerous evolving situations over time, with varying levels of impact in adulthood. It is not possible to propose a single approach that suit all the different situations. As with any person who may face vulnerability, understanding, listening, and support are the primary keys to establishing a space of trust and implementing the necessary adjustments to minimize the daily impact of these disorders.

www.handiem.org



For managers

You can take action by...

- **Identifying the individual's specific strengths.**
- **Enquiring about the challenges and potential difficulties, focusing on the context, needs, vision, and feelings.** To facilitate discussions and identify solutions, ask open-ended questions and show genuine interest in your colleague. Listen and rephrase to ensure you've accurately understood the context and translated it into factual needs.
- **Gathering information, with the support of a disability adviser,** about possible workplace adjustments or seek guidance in your role as a manager.
- **Adapting your management style** by gaining a better understanding of sometimes unexpected behaviours through active listening and empathy. Explore effective communication strategies and seek support to deepen your understanding and develop a more inclusive management approach.

- **Promoting psychological safety by actively preventing psychosocial risks,** acting responsibly and demonstrating dedication to creating an environment where everyone can express themselves freely and safely.
- **Sharing and communicating best practices** both internally and externally, including through professional networks. Make sure not to isolate yourself and to connect with resourceful individuals.

For colleagues

You can take action by ...

- **Identifying situations** that have caused discomfort or recurring difficulties.
- **Asking the person how you can be helpful** in these situations.
- **Showing your openness** and offering to discuss their needs if they wish.
- **Sharing information about this guide** or other resources on the topic.



"Managers can sometimes be hesitant to engage in conversations about neurodiversity with their team. This reluctance often stems from fears such as saying the wrong thing or being asked for accommodations they may find difficult to provide (e.g., part-time work can be challenging to arrange).

To encourage disclosure, it's important to fully support the individual once they've chosen to share. Disclosure relies on the individual voluntarily communicating their diagnosis and specific needs.

As with any new topic, managers (or organizations) should first introduce neurodiversity in a general way before initiating targeted conversations with an employee. This can include communicating that neurodiversity is welcomed within the organization or sharing success stories of adults thriving in the workplace. Managers can open the discussion with their team and offer one-on-one conversations for those who wish to engage further.

If someone shares their situation, remember that they've likely thought through the conversation and what they want to say. Being a manager involves curiosity and openness toward others. Our goal is to create psychological safety while remaining genuinely curious.

A few example questions to guide the conversation:

- Would you mind if I asked you a few questions? I want to understand better, so please let me know if I ask anything awkward.
- What would you like me to know?
- What's your preferred way to communicate?
- How can I support you further?"



**Caroline, Talent acquisition,
Manager and person concerned**



Glossary

Neuromajority

Profiles with the most common cognitive functioning are considered part of the *neuromajority*. Individuals in this group are often referred to as *neurotypical*.

Neurominorities

Profiles with less common cognitive functioning are considered part of *neurominorities*. Individuals in this group are often referred to as *neuroatypical*.

Neurodevelopmental Disorders (NDD)

Neurological developmental disorders affect the acquisition, assimilation, or application of specific skills or knowledge. They may involve difficulties in attention, memory, perception, language, problem-solving, or social interaction. These disorders can range from mild, manageable through educational and behavioral interventions, to more severe forms.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is a concept and theory referring to the cognitive and brain diversity within the human species, as well as social movements aimed at safeguarding the rights of all individuals with intellectual differences.



Contact

For information and guidance in my process, these organizations can provide tailored support based on regional laws and cultural contexts:

www.thrivingautistic.org

www.theneurodiversitynetwork.com

www.geniuswithin.org

USA Understood.org provides tailored resources for individuals with learning and thinking differences, including ADHD and dyslexia, focusing on workplace and educational support.

Canada caddac.ca offers resources for ADHD awareness and accommodations in schools and workplaces.

UK Neurodiversity in Business (NiB) aims to improve workplace inclusion for neurodivergent individuals through advocacy, training, and support.

neurodiversityinbusiness.org

Ireland promotes awareness and support for neurodivergent individuals in education and beyond.

neurodiversityireland.com

Asia-Pacific focuses on regional advocacy and support neurodiversity. autismspectrum.org.au