

GALLUP®

Neurodiversity in the Workplace

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What Is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is broadly defined as naturally occurring diversity in human cognition and is an umbrella term used to describe an assortment of neurocognitive conditions. While there is currently a debate surrounding what should be classified as neurodiverse,¹ the definition commonly includes autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, learning disabilities and Tourette syndrome.^{2,3} Importantly, when referring to neurodiversity, individuals should focus on using inclusive language and allowing individuals to define themselves.

The neurodiversity (ND) paradigm was developed as a counter to a medical model that characterizes conditions like autism and ADHD as disorders that need to be fixed. The medical model tacitly assumes all humans should experience the world in the same way.^{4,5} The ND model instead recognizes that people experience reality through their own sensory inputs, then filter and process those inputs in unique ways. Neurodiversity advocates argue that society has benefited greatly from the contributions of ND individuals and would gain much more from acknowledging and valuing the strengths of ND employees.

An increasing demand for talented and productive employees elevates the importance that employers learn how to recruit, hire, engage and develop ND employees. Neurodiverse individuals comprise an estimated 15% to 20% of the population⁶ but as a group they are underemployed.^{7,8}

Why Is it Important to Study Neurodiversity in the Workplace?

In the workplace and other social institutions, neurotypical behaviors supply the norms. Neurodivergent people, like other minority groups before them, are often misunderstood, ignored or otherwise considered a special class of person for whom the ordinary benefits of full membership in society may often be out of reach. The general reliance on neurotypical (NT) norms occurs as early as the diagnostic phase, with many of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) criteria for ADHD, autism and other ND diagnoses relying on NT norms as references. For instance, one of the diagnostic criteria for autism includes, "Deficits in developing, maintaining and understanding relationships, ranging, for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers."⁹ But some of the norms used for diagnosis are social constructs and might better be understood as measures with natural variation in what it means to be human. The reliance on NT behaviors continues beyond diagnosis and impacts individuals' experiences in every aspect of their lives.

1 Dwyer, 2022

2 Khan et al., 2022

3 Volpone et al., 2022

4 Baumer & Frueh, 2021

5 Dwyer, 2022

6 Doyle, 2020

7 Roux et al., 2015

8 Taylor & Seltzer, 2010

9 American Psychiatric Association, 2013

The increased awareness around neurodiversity encourages society to accept and embrace that everyone contemplates, experiences and interacts with the world in a unique way. This is important, as recent estimates suggest that 15% to 20% of the world's population is neurodiverse.¹⁰ (In this study, 17% are ND.) However, despite representing a large population, neurodiverse individuals have been subject to considerably higher levels of un- and underemployment, with some experts estimating rates as high as 85% to 90%.^{11,12}

Many organizations around the world are examining their hiring processes and assessing their workplace cultures to better understand how they can attract and retain top talent.

Importantly, neurodiverse individuals represent an untapped pool of talent that often possesses the skills organizations desire — including innovation, creativity and problem solving.¹³

Understanding the Current Experiences of Neurodiverse Individuals

This research study is an attempt to amplify the voices of neurodiverse individuals and offer solutions for organizations to better serve this often-overlooked population. Gallup recently fielded an opt-in survey of 6,305 adults who have previously taken Gallup's CliftonStrengths® assessment (formerly known as StrengthsFinder®). One-sixth of the individuals who completed the survey (1,051 respondents) reported they identify or have been diagnosed with a neurodiverse condition¹⁴ — a proportion similar to estimates of neurodiversity in the general population. The majority of the neurodiverse sample reported having attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; 80%) with other types of neurodiversity like dyslexia and autism represented to a lesser extent.

In general, the overall sample skews female (61%), older (M=33.9 years, SD=11.5 years) and highly educated (82% had a bachelor's degree or higher). Additionally, 30% of respondents who completed this survey reside in a country other than the United States.

The aims of this paper were:

- 1 To study the relationships between CliftonStrengths and neurodiversity.
- 2 To better understand the experiences of ND job applicants as they navigate the hiring process.
- 3 To better understand the work experiences of ND employees in comparison to their neurotypical (NT) peers.
- 4 To learn how ND employees view their employers.

¹⁰ Doyle, 2020

¹¹ Roux et al., 2015

¹² Taylor & Seltzer, 2011

¹³ LeFevre-Levy et al., 2023

¹⁴ Please refer to the methodology section at the end of this report for a detailed explanation of how respondents were classified as neurodiverse or neurotypical in this research.

CliftonStrengths and Neurodiversity

CliftonStrengths is an assessment that measures naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling and behavior. It was designed to empower individuals to discover and cultivate their natural strengths. Individuals who complete the assessment are given a personalized CliftonStrengths report that provides insights on how they can make the most of their strengths and manage potential weaknesses in life, work, school and relationships. Many also receive coaching on how to interpret their report or leverage their results to create actionable experiences.

Strengths can be used to foster an inclusive workplace by establishing commonalities across perceived social differences, like neurodiversity, and break down stereotypes by revealing aspects of people that were previously unrecognized or misunderstood. (See [here](#) for resources on CliftonStrengths.) Strengths development drives culture in two key ways that align with the neurodiversity movement:

- 1 Understanding strengths is about celebrating individuals and encouraging them to bring their authentic selves to the workplace.
- 2 Strengths provide a common language for individuals to use when describing their naturally occurring thought and behavioral patterns, which differ among all individuals regardless of neurodiversity.

Gallup sought to understand the relationship of neurodiversity to one's strengths by comparing the average rank of all 34 CliftonStrengths themes across the neurodiverse and neurotypical populations. We found that neurodiverse (ND) individuals do not generally have significantly different CliftonStrengths (CS) profiles than their neurotypical (NT) peers. The differences we observed are of small magnitude with limited practical significance.¹⁵

On average, ND respondents had higher scores on the [Ideation](#) and [Strategic](#) themes — themes that connote talents for divergent thinking and overcoming knowledge constraints. (See Table 1 for a list of the themes with the highest relative differences.) This finding is consistent with other research showing that those with ADHD perform better on some measures of creativity.¹⁶ Similarly, those with the CS themes of [Ideation](#) or [Strategic](#) are more attracted to novelty and divergent ways of thinking. People with dyslexia have been shown to have exceptional visual-spatial abilities.¹⁷ These are only two examples of ND traits that would have provided evolutionary advantages throughout human history.

¹⁵ Previous research has also found that race, gender and nationality are also poor predictors of an individual's strengths.

¹⁶ White & Shah, 2011

¹⁷ von Károlyi et al., 2003

NT respondents scored higher on Achiever, Discipline, Responsibility, Harmony and Consistency. It is perhaps not surprising that NT respondents score higher on themes like Discipline, which imply lower distractibility and a talent for sustained attention. Likewise, there is research linking neurodiversity to lower extrinsic motivation, contrary to what is generally important to those with the themes of Achiever and Responsibility.^{18, 19} For example, individuals with the Responsibility theme might find more motivation in the expectations others have of them and the trust placed in their reliability, while those with the Achiever theme might be motivated by deadlines, targets or a clear list of tasks that allow them to measure their progress and feel a sense of accomplishment.

TABLE 1
Themes with the highest rank differences when comparing neurodiverse and neurotypical respondents

Neurodiverse Respondents		Neurotypical Respondents	
CliftonStrengths Theme	Rank Difference	CliftonStrengths Theme	Rank Difference
Ideation.	+3	Achiever.	+3
Strategic.	+2	Discipline.	+3
Command.	+2	Responsibility.	+2
		Harmony.	+2
		Consistency.	+2

Table 1 shows the themes which had statistically significant differences in average rank between ND and NT respondents. For example, the average ND respondents' Ideation theme ranked three spots higher than that of the average NT respondent. One output of the CS assessment is a ranked ordering of all 34 themes for the respondent. Out of 34 total themes, a difference of three ranks (say, from No. 7 to No. 10) is generally considered to be of moderate difference, at most. For many people, these differences would be negligible, although for some the difference between a theme ranked No. 1 and No. 4 might be notable. That is, Table 1 shows differences that are identifiable as statistically different, but not necessarily practically different, in terms of the respondent's everyday experience.

It is important to note that results regarding differences in average CliftonStrengths theme ranks should not be used to generalize across all ND or NT individuals. Our study identified many ND individuals who have Achiever, Discipline, Responsibility, Harmony and Consistency in their top five. Similarly, many NT individuals had Ideation, Strategic and Command in their top five.

¹⁸ Grove, et al, 2018
¹⁹ Goldfarb, et al, 2021

Neurodiversity in the Hiring Process

To begin to understand ND candidates' perceptions of the employment process, all respondents were asked how easy or difficult it would be to find a new job, if they wanted to. Gallup found that 44% of ND respondents stated that it would be somewhat or extremely difficult for them to find a new job, compared to 39% of NT respondents. To help organizations and leaders understand why ND candidates are having more difficulty with the application process, Gallup asked questions regarding applicants' decisions on whether to disclose their condition, whether they sought any accommodations in the hiring process and their attitudes on hiring assessments.

Disclosure in the Hiring Process

One of the many challenges that ND applicants face is deciding whether to disclose their neurodivergent status to their potential employer. This is anything but a simple decision. ND candidates must disclose their condition if they want to receive accommodations during the application process. Example accommodations include providing the name of the interviewer, how long the interview will take, and a description of the subjects that will be discussed, in advance of the interview.²⁰ However, disclosure is not without risks,²¹ with candidates often concerned about experiencing negative reactions or discrimination. Candidates must balance receiving the help they need to successfully complete the application process with the fear that asking for help may reduce their likelihood of receiving a job offer. As such, it may be no surprise that many neurodiverse individuals apply for jobs without requesting accommodations.



Only 5% of neurodiverse respondents reported having previously asked for accommodations when applying for a new job.

When asked if they thought disclosure to a potential employer would be an advantage or disadvantage, only 3% of ND respondents said that it was an advantage to tell a potential employer while 46% stated it was a disadvantage and 51% said it would depend on the employer, indicating that candidates are often looking at organizational factors to determine whether they should disclose their neurodiverse condition.

Why Have You Never Asked for Accommodations?

Many ND respondents were concerned that sharing their neurodiverse status with potential employers would harm their chances of receiving job offers. They expressed:

- 1 concerns for the impact of biases and stigmas surrounding their condition
- 2 fear of being labeled "difficult," "high maintenance" or "needy"
- 3 a general worry they would be perceived as less valuable or incapable of performing the job requirements

²⁰ <https://www.specialisterne.ie/faqs/>

²¹ Kidwell et al., 2023

Many ND respondents noted that they have not sought accommodations because it is difficult to navigate the process — either they are unaware of what the company offers or what type of accommodations would best help them. For instance, ND respondents noted that it can be difficult to ask for accommodations when they do not know the details of the hiring process ahead of time. They may require an accommodation for one assessment type while they can complete another without any additional assistance — something individuals often do not know prior to beginning the assessments.

Some respondents did not request accommodations because they do not feel they need an accommodation during the application process, they have learned to adapt themselves, their ND condition is a strength, or they felt like an accommodation was an unfair advantage or special treatment. They felt they should be able to perform well in the application stage to demonstrate their capabilities on the job.

Finally, other respondents shared that previous negative experiences with requesting accommodations led them to refrain from asking for such assistance and resources when going through subsequent hiring processes.

What Can Organizations Do to Help Applicants?

An inclusive workplace would not require ND people to conform to all NT norms but would rather be more accepting of differences. This would improve the wellbeing and performance of ND and NT employees alike.

Despite the rise in individuals identifying as neurodiverse, there is a shortage of research supporting both ND applicants and organizations trying to ensure a fair hiring process. As such, there is a lack of concrete advice geared toward helping organizations. Gallup recommends that organizations consider the following to promote a fair hiring process for ND individuals:

- 1 Make the process easier for applicants.** Applicants should have the opportunity to identify as ND in their application — an often-missing component of the application form. This will not only make the application process easier for ND candidates but may signal that the organization may be a good match for them. Additionally, when contacting applicants for interviews or additional assessments, organizations can explain the upcoming steps that will take place. This can include simple things such as explaining how long the process will take, whether there is anything that they should do to prepare and what to expect during the interview or assessment. Knowing this additional information can help ease nerves of every applicant — not only those who are neurodiverse.
- 2 Make information easily available on hiring website.** Organizations may consider examining their website to ensure that information surrounding the hiring process is easily available. This could include an overview of any assessments that an individual will take during the application process, information about readily available accommodations, and how to receive those accommodations or request a different one. Providing an overview of the job application process will help all applicants — not just those who are ND — know what to expect and reduce stress associated with the hiring process.

3 Ensure applicants know the organization is open to discussing accommodations.

Job advertisements are another opportunity for organizations to signal their willingness to accommodate ND individuals in the workplace. Providing evidence that the organization is willing to discuss needed accommodations may signal to applicants that this organization will be a good match for them. This can help to ensure that the organization is not missing out on ND talent who do not apply for fear they will not be a good fit within the organization.

4 Evaluate job advertisements — do they encourage ND candidates to self-select out of the application process?

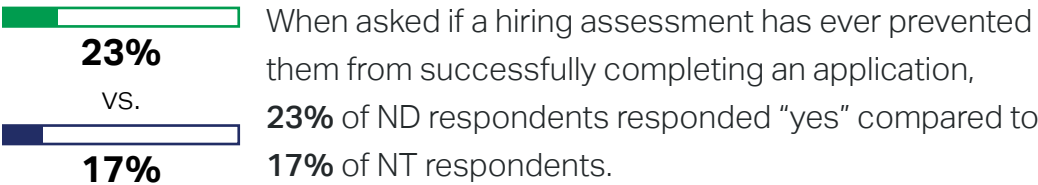
Some ND individuals may be self-selecting out of the job application process because they do not believe their skills match the job. If organizations provide similar job descriptions, such as broad competencies, across advertisements for different roles there is a risk of ND applicants being excluded from positions they are well suited for. It is important for organizations to distinguish between the essential skills and expertise required to complete a job and the qualities that are merely preferred.

5 Examine use of jargon in job advertisements.

The use of non-job-related jargon in job postings has been suggested to be problematic for individuals with certain neurodiverse conditions who tend to interpret things literally.²² It may encourage ND applicants to disqualify themselves. Importantly, limiting non-job-related jargon will benefit all candidates — not just ND applicants.

Assessments

Assessments are a fundamental component of many organizations’ hiring processes; however, the characteristics of some assessments can be unnecessarily burdensome to neurodiverse applicants and negatively impact their performance. Organizations must consider the characteristics of assessments and ensure they are equitable for everyone. Example assessment characteristics include mode of test, time and item format.



22 Association for Talent Development, 2018

When asked to describe the test or assessment that prevented them from completing a job application, ND and NT respondents discussed several challenges. First, many reported they struggled with assessments that featured challenging portions related to math, statistics or another technical skill. Several ND and NT respondents also voiced displeasure with personality-related assessments, tests of cognitive abilities, tests seemingly unrelated to the job and assessments they deemed excessively long. For example, one ND respondent explained that personality-related assessments are often looking for a personality that is not inclusive of those that are ND. While most respondents did not enjoy taking excessively long assessments, some ND respondents explained that long, drawn-out assessments amplified the existing challenges they experience when trying to stay focused.

ND individuals also brought up unique concerns regarding their experiences with assessments. They frequently reported that assessments featuring a timed component were exponentially more difficult for them, often causing distress that ultimately impacted their performance. Similarly, many respondents reported that being ND impacted their ability to focus and perform well during interviews (in person or video) or role-play-based assessments. Some ND respondents noted that they struggled generally with the selection process, and especially ethics-based assessments, because they interpret questions very literally and struggle when they are prevented from answering a question with the nuance they desire. Finally, individuals with dyslexia or dysgraphia reported being burdened by assessments that featured long portions of unaccommodated reading or writing.

Organizations must continually evaluate their hiring assessments to ensure they are fair for all applicants, including those who are ND. Gallup recommends organizations consider four standards when they are reviewing their hiring assessments:

1 Examine whether a time limit is necessary. Organizations may consider utilizing a time limit on an assessment to mimic on-the-job conditions. However, time limits can negatively affect individuals who have learning disabilities and other ND conditions, leading the organization to infer that the ND applicants are not suited for the job.²³ If they are not willing to remove time limits for all applicants, organizations could inform applicants via the job advertisement that they are willing to accommodate ND applicants.

2 Consider alternatives to in-person interviews. Most applicants are stressed by in-person interviews. This anxiety may be heightened for ND candidates who struggle with NT norms regarding social interaction, maintaining eye contact or going to new places. One alternative would be to conduct more interviews on the phone, so interviewers do not look for (nor can they see) physical attributes such as body language or eye contact.

Other organizations are also moving away from traditional interviews. The professional service firm EY has replaced traditional interviews with job samples that are focused more on assessing the technical skills needed for the job.²⁴

²³ McMillan et al., 2023

²⁴ Ovaska-Few, 2018

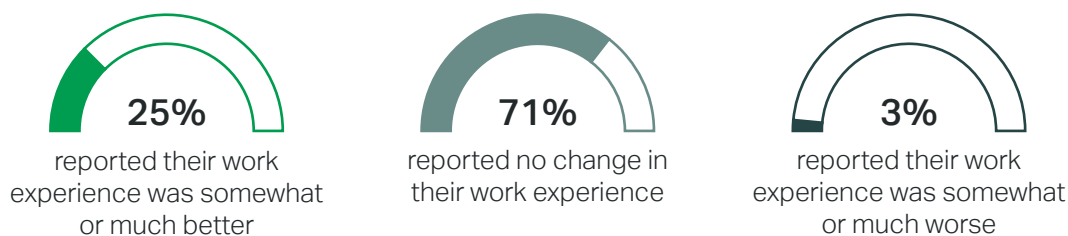
German software company SAP has also made modifications to their interview process. In 2013, SAP launched their Autism at Work program, which aims to support applicants on the autism spectrum during the hiring process by tailoring the experience to better fit their unique needs.²⁵ The program involves an extended interview process to ease applicants in and minimize strain, as well as prioritizing technical samples and practical assessments over more traditional interviews. Additionally, they offer applicants various accommodations, such as quiet and sensory-friendly environments to complete assessments and interview coaching.²⁶

- 3 Train interviewers to concentrate on job-relevant behaviors.** All employees conducting interviews should be trained to ensure they are concentrating on behaviors and responses relevant to the job. This is even more critical for in-person interviews. If the organization is unable to transition away from in-person interviews, interviewers should be trained to avoid judging applicants on behaviors or actions that deviate from what is traditionally expected during an interview (e.g., avoiding eye contact, atypical speech cadence).²⁷
- 4 Examine impact of new technologies on neurodiverse applicants.** Organizations across the globe are integrating new technologies into their hiring process, including utilizing game-based assessments and artificial intelligence. However, there is a lack of research on whether these assessments adversely impact neurodiverse applicants.²⁸ Organizations should consider refraining from embracing new technologies without understanding how it will affect neurodiverse applicants.

Disclosure in the Workplace

Disclosing to Specific Employees

Some neurodiverse (ND) employees choose to disclose their status to particular people within the organization. Gallup wanted to understand if that impacted their experience at work.



... after they shared they are neurodiverse.

²⁵ Annabi et al., 2019

²⁶ Louks et al., 2022

²⁷ Brinzea, 2019.

²⁸ McMillan et al., 2023

To better understand the experiences of those who disclose to other employees, we asked them to describe how other people reacted and how, if at all, things changed for them at work. Gallup found that experiences of disclosing their ND status varied among respondents when interacting with clients, coworkers, peers, friends, and supervisors or managers. Many responses depicted positive encounters, citing supportive and understanding reactions from supervisors and coworkers upon disclosure. For instance, some respondents noted that after disclosing coworkers asked how they could best support them and increased their level of patience and understanding of their work process. Such positive outcomes included improved collaboration (as others knew how to better understand the ND respondents), provision of accommodations and a better grasp of individual working styles.

Conversely, many respondents indicated a reluctance to disclose their ND status, as that was driven by feelings of shame or fear of different treatment. Some reported being selective in disclosure, waiting for cues from others or revealing their condition only when they felt it would be necessary to help them with their work.

Some respondents noted that nothing changed after their interactions. Interestingly, some respondents were pleased that their coworkers or managers continued to interact with them in the same way, while others wished to have seen improvements in their interactions. Finally, several respondents shared negative disclosure experiences that involved a lack of understanding among their coworkers and managers. Some even noted their coworkers continued to joke about characteristics related to their ND status or minimize their ND experiences.

Masking

In our study, 37% of ND employees chose not to disclose their condition to any coworkers at work. Many ND individuals have found that their natural ways of thinking, feeling and behaving are stigmatized by peers and leaders both in school and the workplace. The lack of acceptance or inclusion as students or employees leads many to adopt a practice of “masking” or “camouflaging” their identities to better pass as neurotypical. This can be a lifelong pattern that is difficult to break; disclosure adds an unknown risk, compared with the known downsides of masking.²⁹

Autistic populations are particularly adept at masking and can skillfully mirror or adopt traits of the surrounding group so that how they’re acting “feels” like their normal self and less of a challenge. However, several studies have shown that this masking comes at the cost of increased risk of burnout, anxiety and other difficulties, as it demands far more energy to mask and “blend in.”^{30,31}

29 Kidwell et al., 2023

30 Cassidy et al., 2018

31 Mitchell et al., 2021

Masking also hinders the social development of NT individuals by preventing them from learning how to interpret the social cues of their ND coworkers and friends. By masking their behaviors and feelings, ND employees can make it hard for NT coworkers to develop empathy for their situation, and consequently, they may be adding to their own stress in the long run.^{32,33}

ND people experience the world and express emotions differently from NT people. These differences lead to unique life experiences, which in turn means that ND and NT people may find it difficult to empathize with each other. This has even led some to believe that ND people (particularly those with autism) don't have emotions or feel empathy. This is called the "double empathy problem."³⁴

While the "empathy problem" goes both ways, it is the ND minority that is expected to conform to NT norms. Ironically, the practice of masking requires a great study of NT behaviors that may give ND individuals a much better understanding of NT culture than vice versa.

Engaging Neurodiverse Employees

The work does not stop at ensuring hiring processes are equitable and fair. Organizations must continue to focus on their environment, culture, policies and procedures to ensure every employee is set up to do their best work.

Gallup asked a series of questions about common workplace experiences. All respondents were asked to rate the difficulty of each situation or experience, on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1=extremely difficult, 2=somewhat difficult, 3=somewhat easy and 4=extremely easy.

We found that neurodiverse (ND) and neurotypical (NT) respondents shared a similar list of workplace challenges. Likewise, these two populations found the same activities easier to do or manage. The main distinction between ND and NT respondents is the relative intensities of those challenges. If ND respondents rated a situation as difficult, there tended to be a subset of them who rated it as much more difficult. In addition to the frustrations produced by these difficulties, another consequence is that ND individuals report spending less time using their strengths to do what they do best.

Tables 2 and 3 show the five easiest and most difficult activities among those surveyed. Both ND and NT respondents are further grouped by their most dominant CliftonStrengths domain (Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building or Strategic Thinking).

³² Mitchell et al., 2021

³³ Cook et al., 2021

³⁴ Milton, 2012

TABLE 2

Five Easiest Activities for Each Domain

		EASIEST → LESS EASY				
Executing	neurodiverse	Understanding and following written instructions	Working from home or working remotely	Understanding and following verbal instructions	Understanding the emotions of others	Working closely with others to get something done
	neurotypical	Understanding and following written instructions	Understanding and following verbal instructions	Working from home or working remotely	Staying focused when working on basic tasks	Working closely with others to get something done
Influencing	neurodiverse	Understanding and following written instructions	Socializing with coworkers	Building relationships with coworkers	Working from home or working remotely	Being with other people for an extended period of time
	neurotypical	Understanding and following written instructions	Understanding and following verbal instructions	Socializing with coworkers	Building relationships with coworkers	Working from home or working remotely
Relationship Building	neurodiverse	Understanding and following written instructions	Understanding the emotions of others	Working from home or working remotely	Building relationships with coworkers	Working closely with others to get something done
	neurotypical	Understanding and following written instructions	Understanding and following verbal instructions	Working from home or working remotely	Understanding the emotions of others	Working closely with others to get something done
Strategic Thinking	neurodiverse	Understanding and following written instructions	Working from home or working remotely	Understanding and following verbal instructions	Understanding the emotions of others	Working closely with others to get something done
	neurotypical	Understanding and following written instructions	Understanding and following verbal instructions	Working from home or working remotely	Working closely with others to get something done	Knowing when to seek help on work-related tasks

TABLE 3

Five Most Difficult Activities for Each Domain

		MOST DIFFICULT → LESS DIFFICULT				
Executing	neurodiverse	Having little control or oversight over your work	Being productive in a noisy setting	Working in a shared or open office space	Navigating office politics	Working on tasks or projects without clear direction
	neurotypical	Having little control or oversight over your work	Being productive in a noisy setting	Navigating office politics	Working on tasks or projects without clear direction	Working in a shared or open office space
Influencing	neurodiverse	Having little control or oversight over your work	Being productive in a noisy setting	Working in a shared or open office space	Staying focused in meetings	Working on tasks or projects without clear direction
	neurotypical	Having little control or oversight over your work	Being productive in a noisy setting	Working on tasks or projects without clear direction	Navigating office politics	Working in a shared or open office space
Relationship Building	neurodiverse	Having little control or oversight over your work	Being productive in a noisy setting	Working on tasks or projects without clear direction	Working in a shared or open office space	Staying focused in meetings
	neurotypical	Having little control or oversight over your work	Being productive in a noisy setting	Working on tasks or projects without clear direction	Navigating office politics	Working in a shared or open office space
Strategic Thinking	neurodiverse	Being productive in a noisy setting	Having little control or oversight over your work	Working in a shared or open office space	Navigating office politics	Working on tasks or projects without clear direction
	neurotypical	Having little control or oversight over your work	Being productive in a noisy setting	Working in a shared or open office space	Navigating office politics	Working on tasks or projects without clear direction

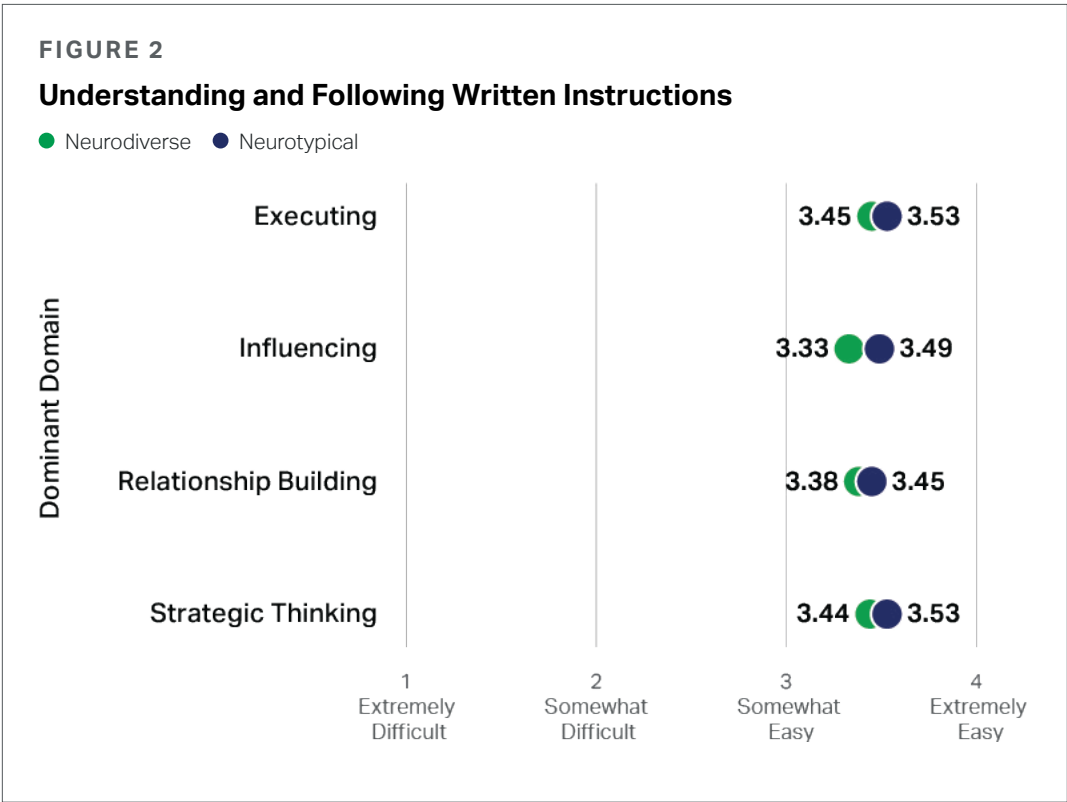
Reflecting on Tables 2 and 3, ND and NT employees generally provide similar rankings for the relative difficulties of common workplace activities, even when moderated by their dominant strengths. This refutes the general proposition that ND employees expect very different things from the workplace. Nearly all these groups of employees felt that they could work closely with others to get things done or understand and follow instructions. All groups similarly found it difficult to have little control or oversight of their work or be productive in a noisy setting.

While all employees sort these activities similarly, ND employees tend to describe them as slightly more difficult, with the degree of that “extra” difficulty varying by task and person. The only non-significant difference between ND and NT employees was understanding the emotions of others.

Figure 1 illustrates this pattern for an issue that was generally considered difficult.



Switching to the easiest issue — understanding and following written instructions, as shown in Figure 2 — the ND population again rated it slightly less easy, but not to a meaningful extent.



When considering the heterogeneity of the responses to these questions about work experiences, the differences between the ND and NT populations become more nuanced.

It is very important to understand that an employee’s strengths describe their work styles and preferences in ways that are additive to their ND or NT status, and both sets of information help to form a more complete picture of their likely thoughts and feelings regarding common workplace experiences or environments.

How Does Neurodiversity Affect Regular Work Activities?

Respondents were asked an open-ended item on how their ND condition affected their regular work activities, if at all. A total of 622 ND respondents provided a text response that was analyzed using a topic model. Some of the responses were specific to their conditions:



7% noted their dyslexia, though many also said it was a minor issue for them. Nearly all said they need more time to process written information, while several mentioned technologies and strategies they use to help.



18% detailed their struggle to focus. Respondents described behaviors like job crafting,³⁵ where employees fit their jobs to their knowledge, skills, preferences and needs.



15% noted they grapple with task management or executive function. Many emphasized this was an occasional or situational problem — they can often compensate by working harder or longer hours, or by planning ahead.



12% emphasized the difficulties caused by their work environment. This included noisy or distracting surroundings or insensitive coworkers. Several said working from home is much more productive.



10% focused on the adaptations they have made to be able to do their job, even restructuring their daily lives to navigate work needs. While some found extraordinary success fitting in, others are more likely to be tired or stressed.



11% were ADHD respondents who noted the troubles they have maintaining focus and attention — not just at work, but everywhere.



10% said their main problems are sensory issues. These could be lights, noise, social interactions that seem unnecessary, or processing emotions differently than coworkers.



6% noted the unique challenges presented by their ADHD. Many emphasized it is particularly hard to focus during meetings that go on longer than necessary.



6% detailed how they navigate the workplace. Many prefer to work alone because they work at a different pace, learn much faster, or do not value extended socializing.



6% said their condition does not affect their regular work activities.

35 Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001

A prevalent concern among ND respondents was the challenge of staying focused on tasks, often described as “time blindness,” yet some also highlighted the ability to hyperfocus on specific details. Many respondents cited difficulties in meeting deadlines, maintaining productivity, completing tasks or transitioning between responsibilities. Overstimulation was frequently mentioned as a hindering factor, with the open layout of workplaces being a particularly distracting factor.

Respondents also noted the need to work at their own pace to minimize errors, especially with repetitive tasks like data entry. Interpersonal interactions posed challenges as well, with many expressing difficulties in reading social cues and engaging with colleagues and managers.

On a positive note, numerous respondents viewed their ND condition as a “superpower,” enabling them to think creatively, innovate more than their peers, exhibit meticulous attention to detail in specialized tasks and excel in their work. For instance, while an individual may hyperfocus on their tasks, causing them to move slower on other tasks, they can develop a deep understanding and expertise in this area and often point out things that others overlook, or come up with creative solutions to solve problems. Another respondent noted that while they struggle to maintain relationships, they can quickly understand how to complete a task at hand. Structuring work in a way that enables all employees — regardless of their status — to do what they do best every day can help make workplaces that are more inclusive, creative and productive.

Accommodations in the Workplace

Some of the difficulties expressed by ND respondents can be ameliorated by providing workplace accommodations. To better understand the accommodations available for ND employees and what ND individuals wished was available, we asked respondents two open-ended questions: (1) “What policies, adaptations or accommodations does your employer have for neurodiverse employees” and (2) “What policies, adaptations or accommodations would you like your employer to establish.”

Many respondents expressed their appreciation for flexible work arrangements that allowed them to set their schedule based on their own personal needs. This included taking breaks and completing their work outside of normal business hours, taking time off for appointments or the ability to work from home. Additionally, some respondents stated their organization allowed them to make changes to their physical workspace. Examples included providing dimmable lights, standing desks or access to a quiet work environment. Other important materials and equipment included audible readers, apps (e.g., Headspace), and other learning aids that can assist employees.

Respondents also noted their organizations often took an individualized approach to making accommodations. They examine the needs of the individual and determine the best path forward together. Some respondents also noted simple things as particularly beneficial, like receiving an email summarizing the important tasks from a meeting and clear guidance from their managers.

When describing what they wish their employer would establish, many responses reflected what was described above. Additionally, people requested that employees in their organization gain a better understanding of neurodiversity in general and how they can best support the individual employee. Many ND respondents were unsure what accommodations they would like their employer to establish or had no new requests.

What Can Organizations Do to Help With Accommodations?

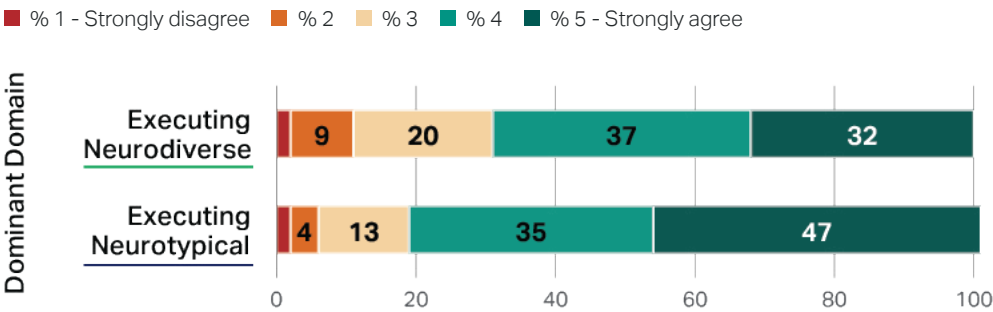
- 1 Train managers to have conversations about accommodations.** Gallup found that 52% of ND respondents did not know if their employer offered accommodations for those who are neurodiverse. Organizations should help prepare managers to have discussions with any individual who struggles with a distracting work environment, navigating office politics or any other common workplace challenge. While ND employees are more likely to find some of these situations challenging, NT employees also expressed difficulty with them as well. Managers need to be knowledgeable about accommodations that may be available within their organization. This information could also be included in the onboarding process and organizations could periodically remind employees what accommodations are available. ND individuals may feel more comfortable asking for accommodations after they are hired.
- 2 Support managers in creating an inclusive work environment.** Managers should be prepared to nurture an inclusive work environment for all employees and know how to take an individualized approach to the needs of each ND or NT worker they supervise. Simply asking every employee if there is anything they could do to help them be more productive could go a long way in ensuring both NT and ND employees perform their best and feel supported. This does not need to be a one-time conversation, but rather a continual feedback loop to ensure all employees are receiving the support they need.
- 3 Examine the organization's office space and equipment for potential accommodations.** Often, accommodations that will be beneficial for ND employees will also benefit the rest of the organization. For example, organizations could work to ensure they have a less noisy or distracting work environment. A noisy workspace may simply be annoying to some NT employees, but disrespectful to an ND employee and/or impede their productivity — in ways that make it seem like their employer does not care about their wellbeing. Organizations can create collaboration spaces for employees to work together to help minimize distractions in other people's offices. If the organization cannot separate where collaboration occurs due to budgetary or space restrictions, they can use other approaches to better allow for concentration in a noisy environment. For many employees, all it takes to improve their workspace is an appropriate amount of light, a little empathy from their coworkers or a set of noise-cancelling headphones.
- 4 Ensure consistent and clear communication.** This would be beneficial to all employees and could be achieved by establishing clearer expectations surrounding an individual's behavior, more explicit performance expectations and simple instructions around deadlines. This clear communication helps avoid misunderstandings and ensures everyone is on the same page. Additionally, providing regular feedback keeps both managers and individuals informed on goal progress, so they can adjust tasks as needed.

Organizational Perceptions

Gallup asked all respondents about their perceptions of their organization and how they have been treated during their tenure. Example topic areas included their organization’s commitment to strengths, whether they receive the needed support from their manager and whether they are treated fairly at work. On many issues, ND employees are not generally differentiated from their NT peers in their assessments of their employers. There are two items where ND employees provided somewhat lower ratings: (1) “At work, I am treated with respect” and (2) “My organization cares about my overall wellbeing.”

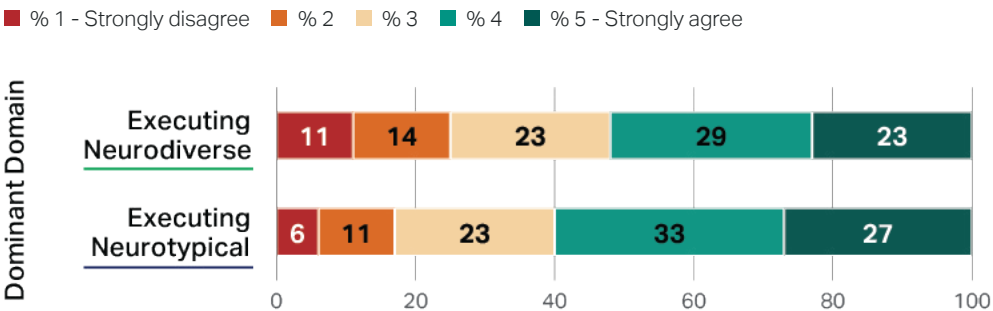
ND employees are more likely to say they do not feel treated with respect at work and also more likely to say their employer does not care about their wellbeing. As shown in Figures 3 and 4, these issues are particularly acute among ND employees who lead with Executing themes.

FIGURE 3
At Work, I Am Treated With Respect.



Note: Due to rounding, totals may not sum to 100%. Percentages less than 2% are not labeled.

FIGURE 4
My Organization Cares About My Overall Wellbeing.



Employees who lead with Executing themes can often be more task-oriented. In this study, ND employees who lead with the Executing domain had more difficulty with:

- a lack of control over what they were doing
- working in a noisy setting
- working in a shared or open office space
- navigating office politics
- working on tasks or projects without clear direction

One other hypothesis is that those who are more driven to be busy and accomplish tasks are likely to be more frustrated when their progress is impeded. This frustration could further manifest as feelings of disrespect or a lack of concern about their overall wellbeing. An ND condition could exacerbate these feelings in various ways — for example, by heightening the frustration associated with frequent interruptions or adding to the stress caused by a greater intrinsic distractibility. Other researchers have found that anxiety is generally a more persistent issue for adults with autism, and report higher levels of increased stress from unpleasant events, sensory contact and other presenting issues.³⁶

What Can Organizations Do to Improve Work Environment and Culture?

Managers play a crucial role in shaping the work environment and culture for their employees. They can provide clear expectations, regular feedback, recognition, and opportunities for growth and development. They can also foster trust, collaboration and inclusion among their team members. Managers who understand and appreciate the differences of their employees, including their neurodiverse conditions, can help them leverage their strengths and overcome their challenges. Only 45% of respondents said they have told their manager or supervisor about their neurodiverse condition, so active listening and an openness to individual differences is important when managers do not have all the information they may want when addressing workplace conditions. Organizations must ensure managers are properly trained to discuss neurodiversity and foster an inclusive culture:

- 1 Equip managers with the tools to hold meaningful conversations.** Organizations must teach managers skills to have meaningful conversations with each of their employees. Meaningful conversations focus on five key concepts: (1) providing recognition or appreciation for recent work, (2) collaboration and relationships — connecting the right team partners, (3) discussing their current goals and priorities at work, (4) their strengths or the things they do well, and (5) the length of the conversations.³⁷ The beauty of the neurodiversity movement is that it promotes the idea that everyone is unique and possesses their own talents. Managers can take an individualized approach and recognize these abilities through meaningful conversations.
- 2 Focus on mitigating office politics.** Managers can lessen negative office politics by acting as translators and narrators of their organization's policies, balancing team member expectations with leadership confidence and tempering their own policy preferences. Additionally, setting clear expectations and providing ongoing support

³⁶ Gillott & Standen, 2007

³⁷ [A Great Manager's Most Important Habit \(gallup.com\)](https://www.gallup.com/186321/a-great-managers-most-important-habit.aspx)

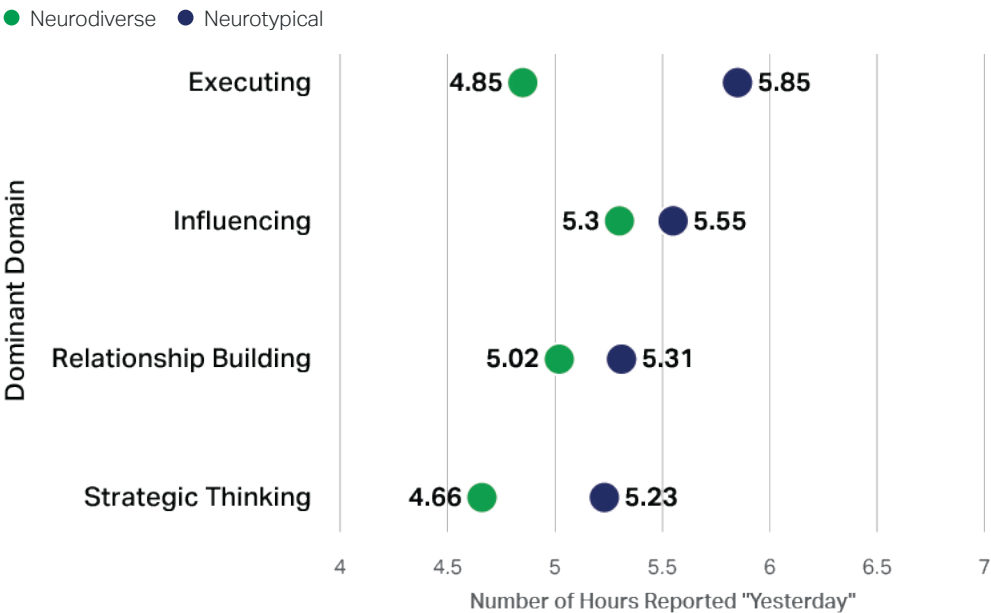
can help alleviate the pressures of office politics and foster a more positive work environment. This will be beneficial for all employees — regardless of neurodiverse status.

3 Host team training sessions. Managers can help facilitate an inclusive work environment by holding a learning session to help team members understand neurodiversity. Educating employees can help debunk common misconceptions surrounding neurodiversity. Organizations that use CliftonStrengths could have a team strengths session to understand how individuals can best partner together, which can benefit all employees.

Unlocking the Strengths of Neurodiverse Workers

One way to foster engagement is to ensure employees have an opportunity to do what they do best each day. Employees report having a significant difference in the number of hours they were able to use their strengths to do what they do best the previous day, with some of those differences attributable to their dominant strengths and some to neurodiversity (See Figure 5).

FIGURE 5
Hours in One Day Employees Use Strengths to Do What They Do Best



On average, ND individuals are not able to spend as much time using their strengths to do what they do best.

For those who lead with Influencing strengths, the difference between ND and NT strengths usage is approximately 15 minutes per day — and similarly, 17 minutes for those who lead with Relationship Building strengths .

For other domains, the gaps are larger:

- Strategic Thinking = 34 minutes
- Executing = 60 minutes

The average for the sample was 5.3 hours, with the bottom 10% of respondents reporting they were only able to use their strengths for an average of 0.4 hours compared to 14.9 hours for the top 10%. ND respondents, and those who lead with Strategic Thinking or Executing strengths, report lower strengths usage — the interaction of neurodivergence with strengths varies by profile as well. In general, ND respondents report 32 fewer minutes of strengths usage per day.

The range in daily strengths usage has many implications. All respondents were asked whether they felt the following feelings a lot of the day yesterday: enjoyment, happiness, worry, sadness, stress, anger, boredom and loneliness. Each year Gallup asks adults in 142 countries and areas whether they, on the previous day, experienced five positive experiences (rest, respect, smiling and laughing, learning, and enjoyment) and five negative experiences (physical pain, worry, sadness, stress and anger). Gallup found that experiences of stress, sadness, anger, worry and physical pain each took a downturn in 2023.³⁸ Stress had the greatest decline among the five negative emotions. In the United States, 51% reported experiencing stress the previous day and 41% experienced worry.³⁹

While our sample is not representative of the general population, with many participants being older and better educated, it is important to note that ND respondents experience a slightly more challenging set of emotions daily — less enjoyment and happiness, and more stress, worry, anger, loneliness, boredom and sadness (See Figure 8). For the negative emotions measured, both ND status and strengths were important in determining daily experiences for all groups. For example, ND people who lead with Influencing themes reported more enjoyment than some of the NT groups.

³⁸ [Negative Emotions Take a Positive Turn \(gallup.com\)](#)

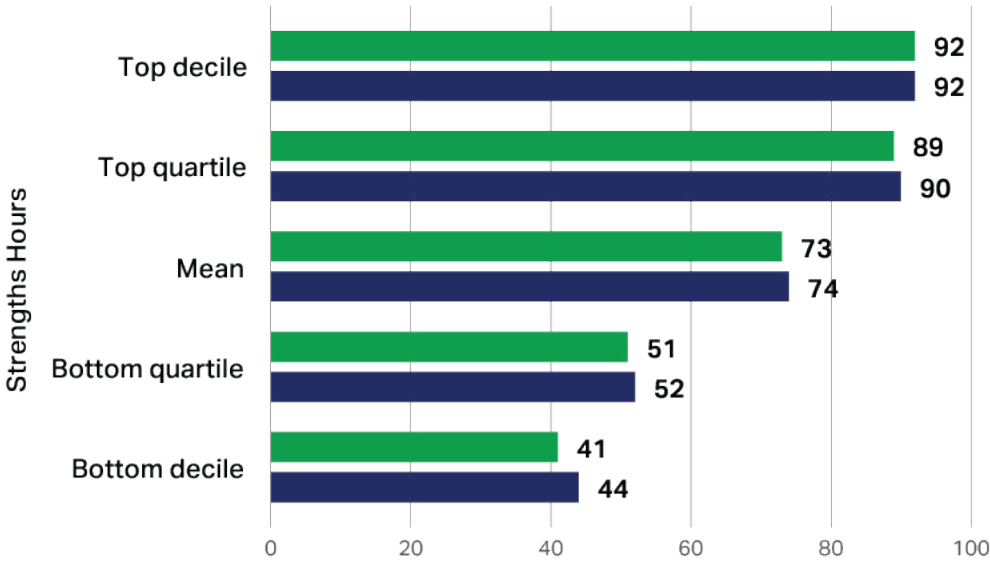
³⁹ [What Is the World's Emotional Temperature? \(gallup.com\)](#)

FIGURE 6

Positive Emotions by Strengths Hours

% Experienced "the previous day"

■ Enjoyment ■ Happiness

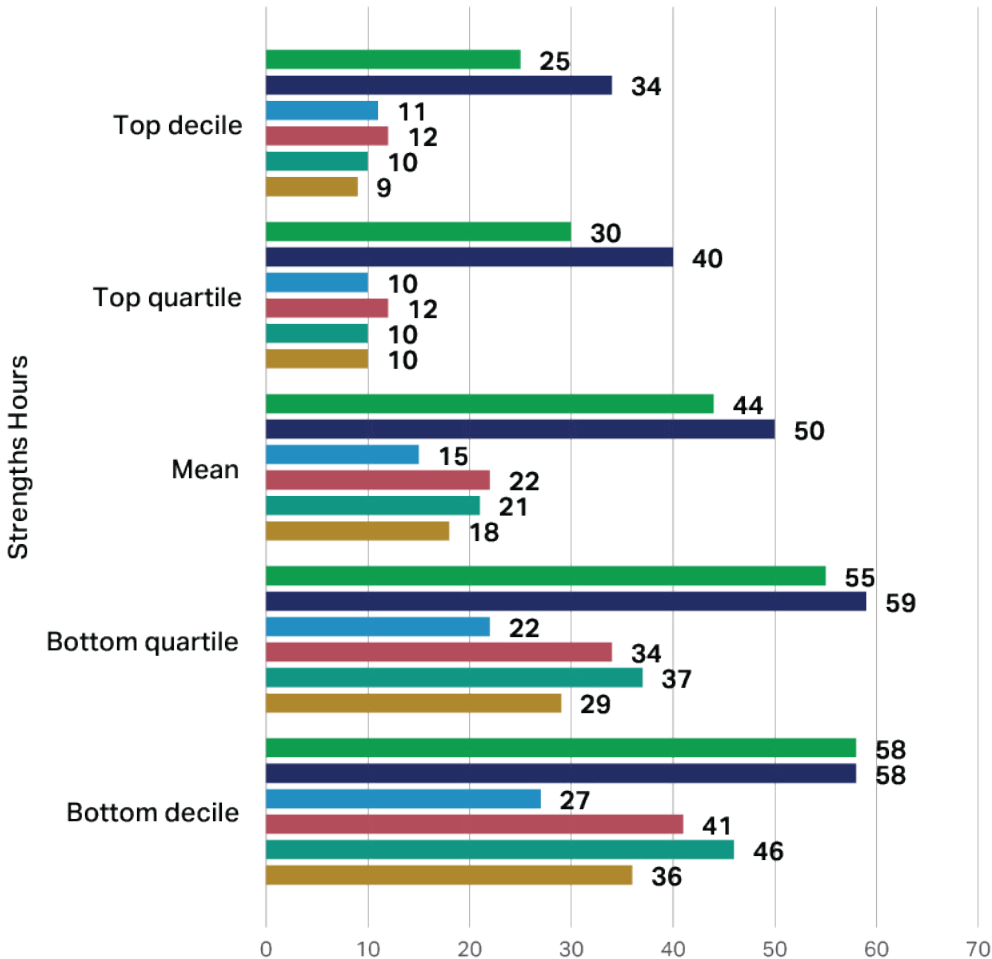


Respondents who spent more time doing what they do best the previous day were more likely to report having experienced enjoyment and happiness.

FIGURE 7
Negative Emotions by Strengths Hours

% Experienced "the previous day"

Worry Stress Anger Sadness Boredom Loneliness

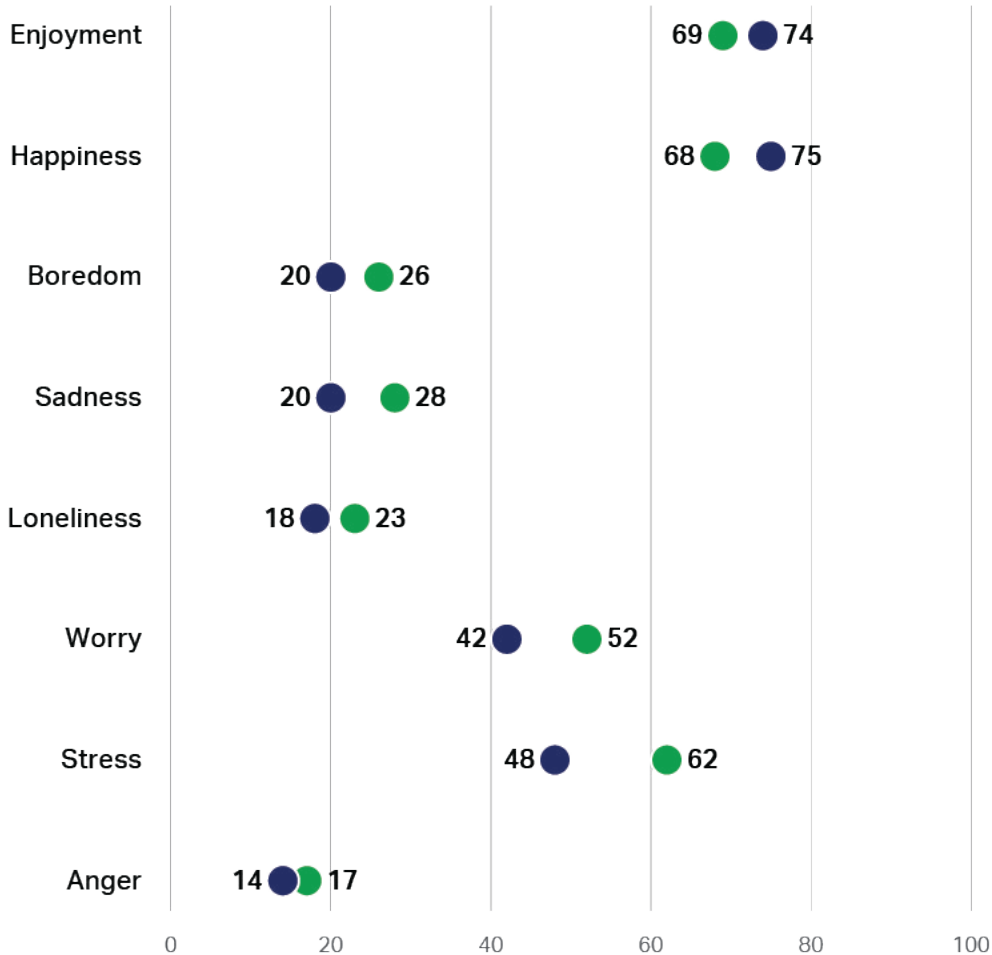


Respondents who spent more time doing what they do best the previous day were less likely to report having experienced negative emotions.

FIGURE 8
Emotions Experienced by ND and NT Respondents

% Experienced "the previous day"

● Neurodiverse ● Neurotypical



Neurodiverse respondents were more likely to report experiencing negative emotions. These include but are not limited to stress, worry and sadness.

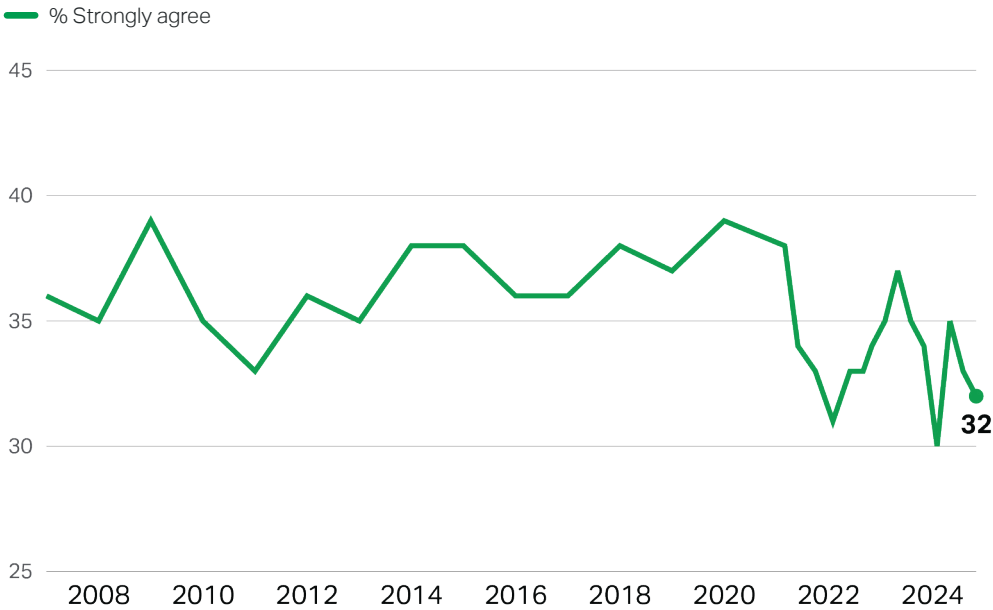
Neurodiverse respondents were also less likely to report experiencing positive emotions like happiness and enjoyment.

On the negative side of the emotional ledger, ND employees are struggling more than their NT peers. They are more likely to be bored, lonely, sad, worried, stressed and angry.

Organizations should empower managers to align their employees' work with their strengths. Only 32% of the U.S. workforce strongly agrees that they have the opportunity to do what they do best at work.⁴⁰ This represents a significant drop in the percentage of people who feel like their job makes the best use of their talents, signaling decreased wellbeing at work as well as poorer relations with customers and reduced productivity.⁴¹

FIGURE 9
The Underutilization of Americans' Talents
Among U.S. employees, Q1 2024 saw a decrease of 9 percentage points since historic highs in 2009 and 2020.

At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.



40 [Global Indicator: Employee Engagement \(gallup.com\)](#)

41 Harter & Tatel et al., 2024

Gallup's Perspective

This study illustrates the difficulties faced by ND employees, as well as the many ways they have learned to use their strengths to survive — and occasionally thrive — in workplaces that present an array of challenges. This research also indicates that the strengths, workplace experiences and concerns of neurodiverse respondents are not qualitatively different from those of their neurotypical peers. Therefore, making workplace cultures more inclusive will not require leaders to compromise the needs or resources of their NT employees. Rather, addressing the needs of ND employees will improve work conditions for everyone.

It should be noted that the ND respondents in this study were a relatively successful subset of the ND population, given their employment histories. Their experiences are not necessarily representative of the entire ND population, however they constitute a suitable population of interest when discussing the challenges they faced in achieving success in the workplace. In that regard, the data provided by these ND respondents paint an informative and hopeful picture for those interested in improving the experiences of ND employees and employing more ND people in the future.

It may be useful to think of ND employees as exemplars around whom workplace conditions should be designed. They share the same set of workplace challenges with their NT peers, but their greater sensitivity to and understanding of some of those challenges means that what works better for them will often create an improved experience for all employees.

Organizations that are interested in building inclusive cultures need to embrace individuals' unique talents and encourage them to bring their authentic selves to work. This is true for both ND and NT populations. Consequently, the overall solution to improving neurodiversity in the workplace is similar to the solution for improving diversity.

Organizations need to understand that they are already employing ND individuals, whether they are aware of it or not. Seventeen percent of the sample in this study was comprised of employed ND individuals, some of them highly skilled or in very senior roles (17% of the ND sample is in a senior leadership role). As a group, they have described work experiences that are needlessly stressful and disengaging, often due to circumstances that can be modified or corrected without a great deal of cost or effort. A more fundamental change is required in how organizations manage the unique needs of every employee — a change in mindset from one that looks at deviations from the norm as exceptions to one that strives to capitalize on the unique talents and needs of every employee to maximize engagement and performance.

Many employers make it too hard for their employees to be productive. Most of the challenges ND employees cited in finding a job and in their daily work are not difficult for organizations to fix. Moreover, improving those experiences for ND employees helps their NT peers as well.

Rather than define who an employee should be, it is better to clearly specify what it is you want them to accomplish, and then let them define who they are and what they need from you to meet their obligations. Employees who are included and accepted can be given more accountability for their work.⁴² They will be less likely to quit, and they will be better at innovating, collaborating with others, engaging customers and generating superior financial benefits.

As a philosophical concept, neurodiversity is simply the recognition that there is a natural, healthy and valuable diversity in how people think and interact with others, and that has been evident throughout human history. Embracing that diversity presents some challenges, but also many benefits. Leaders and managers can start to improve their connections with ND employees in a few simple ways:

- Self-awareness: Reflect on your own strengths and biases to test your assumptions about neurodiversity.
- Listen: Learn more about your employees — their strengths, their needs and their goals. Ask them about the organization's culture, how they feel about it and what you can do to help make it better.
- Treat everyone with decency and respect: Ninety percent of those who say they are not treated with respect report at least one of 35 different discrimination or harassment experiences at work.⁴³ If you do respect them, they will contribute more and share new ideas.
- Transform your managers into coaches by teaching them to meet these three requirements:
 - Establish expectations.
 - Coach continuously.
 - Create accountability.
- Value employees for their strengths. Employees who know and develop their strengths are more engaged and productive, and they also help establish a more inclusive culture.

⁴² [5 Ways to Promote Accountability \(gallup.com\)](#)

⁴³ [About a Third of Faculty Report Being Treated With Respect at Work \(gallup.com\)](#)

Methodology

Respondents self-reported neurodiversity by answering this survey question:

Neurodiversity describes the range of differences that humans have with brain functioning, behavioral traits and interacting with the world around them. This term is used commonly to describe the experiences of people with autism, Asperger’s syndrome, ADD/ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome and others.

Have you ever been identified or diagnosed as having any of the following conditions?
Please select all that apply:

- Autism
- Asperger’s syndrome⁴⁴
- ADD/ADHD
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Tourette syndrome
- Other type of neurodiversity, please specify: [open-ended, 100 characters]
- None of the above [exclusive]
- Prefer not to answer [exclusive]

TABLE 4
Respondents With Neurodivergent Conditions

Number of respondents who indicated each type of neurodivergent condition:

Neurodivergent condition	N
Autism	103
Asperger's syndrome	84
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder	837
Dyslexia	180
Dyspraxia	16
Tourette syndrome	8
Another type of neurodivergent condition	112

⁴⁴ Gallup understands that Asperger’s is no longer considered separate from autism. In an effort to be inclusive, we chose to include it in this survey to accommodate those who identify with it, especially older respondents who were assessed and diagnosed many years ago.

Researchers opted to ask whether respondents have been identified or diagnosed with a neurodivergent condition to reach a broader group of people who may have been told they have one of the aforementioned conditions but have not been clinically diagnosed by a healthcare professional.

Gallup researchers reviewed the open-ended responses and recoded them according to lists of neurodivergent conditions provided by Cleveland Clinic and Oxford University. Examples of write-in conditions that were recoded as neurodivergent include synesthesia, hypersensitivity and dysgraphia. Examples of write-in conditions that were not recoded as neurodivergent in our analysis include anxiety and depression.

Of the 6,305 individuals who completed this survey, 1,051 respondents (16.5%) were categorized as having a neurodivergent condition, 5,254 respondents (82.7%) were categorized as not having a neurodivergent condition (that is, neurotypical), and 48 respondents (0.8%) did not provide enough information in the survey to be classified as neurodivergent or neurotypical.

Results are based on a survey conducted July 26-Aug. 18, 2023 with 6,305 adult (18+) respondents from an opt-in sample of individuals who previously completed the CliftonStrengths assessment and expressed an interest in participating in future Gallup research. Seventy percent of respondents reside in the United States, and the survey was fielded in English. The margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level for neurotypical respondents is ± 1.4 percentage points for response percentages around 50% and is ± 0.8 percentage points for response percentages around 10% or 90%. The margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level for neurodivergent respondents is ± 3.0 percentage points for response percentages around 50% and is ± 1.8 percentage points for response percentages around 10% or 90%.

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