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Promoting Neurodiversity

Unveiling Barriers and Enablers in the Project Management Profession

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Because when projects succeed, society benefits

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About the authors

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1. Executive summary

This study investigates the strengths and challenges of neurodivergent professionals in project management, aligning with the Association for Project Management's (APM) research priorities on diversity and underrepresentation. Focusing on neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia, the research emphasises the necessity for cultural change in organisations and the project management profession to enhance inclusivity and leverage the distinct talents of neurodivergent individuals.

The analysis addresses four core themes: workplace decisions regarding disclosure of diagnoses, the role of organisational culture, shortcomings in training and development initiatives, and the unique strengths and challenges experienced by neurodivergent professionals. Findings indicate that neurodivergent individuals often excel in areas such as creativity, systems thinking and sustained focus, which are traits that significantly benefit project management. However, barriers including sensory overload, communication differences and ambiguous workplace interactions can impede performance without appropriate support.

In order to advance inclusivity, the study proposes the following measures:

- Revising recruitment practices to reduce biases and accommodate neurodivergent candidates.
- Integrating neurodiversity awareness training into employee development programmes.
- Implementing formal policies for reasonable adjustments, such as flexible hours or tailored communication methods.
- Establishing peer-led support networks to foster collaboration and mentorship. Physical workspaces should also be adapted to mitigate sensory challenges, for example, by introducing quiet areas and predictable meeting structures.

The research underscores neurodiversity as a critical component of workplace diversity, advocating for person-centred strategies that prioritise individual needs over generic solutions. By embracing these approaches, organisations can enhance team representation, drive innovation and improve project outcomes through the inclusion of neurodivergent professionals.

1.1 Project overview

This project examines the lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals in the field of project management, focusing on the challenges they face and the strengths they bring to their roles. It aims to highlight the importance of creating inclusive and adaptive work environments to support neurodivergent employees. Through in-depth research, the study investigates key factors that influence the experiences of neurodivergent professionals, including diagnosis, disclosure, organisational culture, workplace accommodations and support systems. The findings emphasise the need for targeted changes in organisational practices, policies and training to enhance inclusivity and effectiveness in project management environments.

1.2 Key findings

Diagnosis and disclosure: The diagnosis of neurodivergence is a turning point for individuals, providing a sense of validation and self-understanding. However, disclosing neurodivergence in the workplace can be a complex decision due to potential risks, particularly for those in junior roles. When done thoughtfully, disclosure can empower individuals and foster a more inclusive work environment.

Organisational culture: There is a critical need for a cultural shift in organisations to view neurodivergence as a valuable asset rather than a challenge. This change can reduce discrimination and unlock opportunities for neurodivergent individuals in leadership and innovation roles.

Training and development: A lack of neurodiversity-specific training and support in recruitment and career development processes creates significant barriers for neurodivergent employees. It is vital for organisations to integrate neurodiversity awareness and training into their standard procedures to promote inclusivity.

Strengths and challenges: Neurodivergent professionals bring valuable skills, such as creativity, systems thinking and hyperfocus, which are critical in project management. However, challenges such as sensory overload and difficulties with unstructured interactions can hinder performance if not properly addressed.

Workplace environment: A flexible and controlled work environment that accommodates sensory and cognitive needs is essential for neurodivergent individuals to thrive. This can include personalised adjustments, clearer communication and the use of assistive technologies.

Support systems and coping strategies: While neurodivergent individuals often employ self-initiated coping strategies like therapy or personal networks, organisational support and formal policies are needed to improve effectiveness and reduce stress.

Communication and meetings: Clear communication and structured meetings are vital for neurodivergent individuals, especially those with memory challenges. Predictable and accessible meetings help increase engagement and reduce anxiety.

1.3 Recommendations

A set of recommendations is included, and the essential elements of these are provided here:

- Recruitment and training processes should be modified to make them more inclusive for neurodivergent individuals. This includes offering extended interview times and alternative communication methods, ensuring fair assessment practices. Also, allowing interview questions to be sent beforehand can help those candidates who struggle with executive dysfunction.
- Organisations should consider neurodiversity training for all employees, particularly those in managerial and HR roles, to foster an inclusive environment. This training could also support a culture where disclosing neurodivergence is viewed positively. This can be particularly empowering for individuals in senior roles, who can act as mentors and role models for others.
- Formal policies for reasonable adjustments should be established and consistently applied, including the provision of tools, technology and resources (e.g. assistive software) to help neurodivergent employees to succeed. Tasks should be assigned based on individual strengths rather than job titles or hierarchical roles. This will enable neurodivergent employees to excel in areas where they are most confident, leading to better team outcomes.
- Formal and informal peer support networks, such as disability networks or employee resource groups, are encouraged and would provide neurodivergent individuals with a sense of belonging and a space to share strategies and experiences.
- Workspaces should be redesigned to support sensory needs, with quieter spaces and virtual meeting options. Meetings should be structured and predictable to reduce anxiety and ensure accessibility.

1.4 Glossary of terms

This glossary draws definitions from several existing glossary resources, including the Inclusive Employers' Neurodiversity Glossary. It also includes unique terms and definitions, particularly focusing on the intersection of neurodiversity and project management.

Accessibility[4] The practice of designing projects, tools and environments to accommodate the diverse needs of all team members, including those with sensory or cognitive differences.

Accommodations[2] Adjustments in the workplace or project environment to support the needs of neurodivergent individuals, such as flexible deadlines, noise-cancelling headphones or clear, structured instructions.

Burnout[1] A state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress, often exacerbated for neurodivergent individuals by sensory overload or constant masking.

Cognitive flexibility[2] The ability to adapt thinking and behaviour in response to changing situations or demands. It is particularly relevant in managing diverse teams where different problem-solving approaches coexist.

Communication styles[1] Differences in how neurodivergent individuals express and interpret language, tone and body language. Clear and explicit communication is key in project management.

Diversity of thought[5] The inclusion of varied cognitive approaches, perspectives and problem-solving strategies that neurodivergent team members bring to a project.

Emotional regulation[2] The ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences. Neurodivergent team members may require additional strategies for navigating high-pressure project environments.

Executive functioning[1] [2] A set of cognitive processes that include working memory, flexible thinking and self-control. Challenges in executive functioning can impact task prioritisation and project timelines.

Hyperfocus[5] An intense concentration on a specific task or topic, often associated with ADHD. While hyperfocus can enhance productivity, it may require balance in time management.

Inclusion[4] In project management, 'inclusion' refers to creating environments and workflows where neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals can contribute effectively and equitably.

Masking[1] The act of suppressing or hiding neurodivergent traits to conform to social expectations. Prolonged masking can lead to stress and burnout.

Neurodivergent (ND)[5] A term describing individuals whose cognitive functioning differs from societal norms. This includes people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, Tourette syndrome and other conditions.

Neurodiversity[4] The concept that neurological differences (such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia) are natural variations in the human brain and should be recognised and respected.

Neurotypical (NT)[5] Refers to individuals whose neurological functioning aligns with societal expectations or norms.

Quiet zones[4] Designated spaces that allow neurodivergent individuals to decompress and focus, free from sensory distractions.

Sensory processing[1] The way the brain receives and interprets sensory information. Neurodivergent individuals may experience heightened or diminished sensory sensitivities, which can affect workplace preferences.

Stimming[1] Repetitive movements or behaviours (e.g. hand-flapping, tapping) that help neurodivergent individuals self-regulate emotions or sensory input.

Strength-based approach[3] A management style focusing on leveraging the unique skills and talents of neurodivergent team members rather than emphasising their challenges.

Universal design[6] A design philosophy aiming to create environments and processes that are inherently accessible and usable by all people, regardless of neurological differences.

Workflow adaptation[3] Customising workflows to align with the strengths and needs of neurodivergent team members, such as breaking tasks into smaller, manageable steps.

[1] National Autistic Society – Advice and Guidance autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance
[2] Understood – Everyone deserves to be understood understood.org/
[3] British Dyslexia Association – Dyslexia – bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia
[4] ACAS – Neurodiversity at Work Guide and Glossary acas.org.uk/neurodiversity-at-work
[5] Inclusive Employers – Neurodiversity Glossary inclusiveemployers.co.uk/blog/neurodiversity-glossary/
[6] Centre for Excellence in Universal Design universaldesign.ie

2. Introduction

2.1 Background and significance of the study

The study presented in this report has been conducted in response to a call by APM concerning diversity and underrepresentation in the project management profession, specifically regarding neurodivergence. The research focuses on assisting organisations to implement strategies that foster a more diverse and inclusive project management profession. By unlocking the full potential of neurodivergent professionals, it aims to enhance organisational performance. This initiative aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10: Reduced Inequalities, striving to ensure social, economic and political inclusion for all.

2.2 The aim of the research

The following research questions were posed to form a basis for the study:

1. What are the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of neurodivergent individuals in project management roles?
2. How can we identify and leverage enablers in the profession to improve the representation of neurodivergent individuals in project management?
3. How can organisations implement these strategies to create a more diverse and inclusive project management team that welcomes neurodiverse perspectives?

2.3 Scope and limitations

The research scope is set in organisations related to the project management profession in the United Kingdom. Close links to project management professionals through APM have enabled contact with neurodivergent individuals who have been keen to engage with and take part in this research.

At the outset, terminology has been considered in setting the scene for this piece of work and has relied on input from the field of psychology to understand definitions and nuances in the area of neurodiversity, e.g. 'neurodivergent' or 'neurodiverse'. In setting the scene, efforts have been made to consider the wide range of neurodivergent individual experiences.

In beginning to explore the academic literature and theory around neurodiversity and project management, it was quickly realised that the lack of extant work was a limitation. This led to further exploration into grey literature where research could delve into real-world settings and experiences for neurodivergent individuals in project management, and their organisational settings and experiences.

This section provides some further discussion around these areas which have been taken into account through the development of the research.

2.3.1 Neurodivergent or neurodiverse?

'Neurodivergent' and 'neurodiverse' are terms which have been used interchangeably without providing a definitive explanation as to why. For example, Legault et al. (2021) argue that it is incorrect to use these terms interchangeably, with 'neurodiversity' being a term of inclusion and 'neurodiverse' a term of exclusion. Moreover, 'neurodiversity' and 'mental health' have been used interchangeably in some studies, which is also a limitation due to them representing completely different things; although there can be overlap in prevalence, they should be treated as distinct. Additionally, current studies in the area generalise characteristics of neurodivergent individuals and ignore variability between gender, age and type of neurodivergent condition; therefore, a more person-centred approach could be beneficial, because one size does not fit all in this type of research, which specialises in diversity. This approach leads to ignoring individual differences and grouping all neurodivergent people together, which could end up being extremely counterproductive.

2.3.2 The practice approach

Real-world implications for research into neurodiversity in the project management profession include being able to create a more inclusive and supportive environment where everyone can thrive. Neurodivergent individuals can bring many positive attributes to a workforce, and research needs to be focused on enhancing this and working on the best ways to support it. Research can include taking a more person-centred approach to find out exactly what neurodivergent people want in the project management profession so they are able to flourish; to get the maximum productivity out of their work; and to create a better environment so they can thrive on a personal level.

The research needs a practice perspective at the start, which seeks to build a view of current practice through links to the wider information source, found in grey literature in addition to established academic sources. This may be considered a weakness in the research, but the authors believe that only by seeking out those experiencing the project profession as neurodivergent individuals will it be possible to truly understand the practice from their perspective and thereby build a view of current experiences. This rich vein of individuals' experience can in turn be used to build a basis in practice to support the research methods adopted, and from there a more formal mixed-methods research approach will incorporate findings from practice into the integrated literature review, the development of incisive interview questions, and thereby valuable semi-structured interviews.

Neurodiverse thinking doesn't lend itself to a one-size-fits-all approach, and therefore the research methods will seek out similarities and patterns of what could help in better understanding barriers and enablers in the profession by asking representatives from the neurodivergent population who are involved in project-based work.

2.4 Research methodology overview

Our study combined a systematic literature review (SLR) with elements of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The PRISMA approach is deemed particularly relevant in this case, as it involves identifying relevant studies, screening them for eligibility based on pre-defined criteria, assessing the quality of the included studies, and extracting and synthesising data. This step was critical in establishing a solid theoretical foundation for the study research, allowing us to establish the current state of knowledge, understand the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals, and assess strategies that have been previously proposed.

While the SLR approach was adopted originally, there was found to be a paucity of information. This led to a change in approach, and an integrated literature review was adopted, bringing grey literature into the research and thereby providing more of a practice approach.

Based on the findings from the literature review, a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 neurodivergent project management professionals. Key themes, recurring issues and gaps identified in the literature were brought together into open-ended questions which allowed participants to share their unique experiences and perspectives. This approach ensured that the interviews were both grounded in existing scholarship, experience and knowledge from practice, and targeted towards areas of greatest potential impact.

Using this research approach, we aimed to generate insights that not only enhance our understanding of neurodiverse representation in project management but also provide actionable recommendations to improve the inclusivity and effectiveness of project management practices.

3. Research context: An integrative literature review

3.1 Understanding the concept of neurodiversity and project management

Building a neurodiverse project management team offers an opportunity to adapt to the unique needs of various stakeholders, fostering a more inclusive environment (MI-GSO & PCUBED, 2021). Although underrepresentation affects various marginalised groups in project management, neurodivergent individuals face additional barriers, with existing literature revealing the underrepresentation of neurodivergent individuals, women and minority ethnic groups (Shah & Marks, 2019). These barriers include gender bias, stereotyping, systemic discrimination, and a lack of support for the distinct strengths and challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals (Tantawi & Khater, 2020).

Despite the recognition of the strengths that neurodivergent individuals can bring to project management, Fung (2021) reveals that barriers to inclusion persist. For example, neurodivergent individuals often face challenges such as higher rates of incarceration, unemployment, and difficulty achieving their academic and career potential. However, the existing research is yet to identify the specific barriers faced by neurodivergent individuals in the project management profession. This highlights the need for further research to address the real-world challenges and opportunities related to this area.

3.2 Understanding neurodiversity: Setting neurodiversity in context for this study

With an estimated prevalence of 20% in the general population, the term 'neurodiversity' was first coined by sociologist Judy Singer in 1998 and is an umbrella term (see Figure 1), encompassing a range of conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and Tourette syndrome.

Salter & Hendrickx (2009) define neurodiversity as a way of processing information and making sense of the world that differs from the typical norm, and Yankowski & Perry (2013) emphasise that neurodiversity is not characterised by a single criterion but rather by variations resulting from different combinations of traits. It is further argued that neurodiversity should not be seen as a deficit, but as infinite variability in the human brain. While it is important not to pathologise neurodiversity, it is recognised that individuals within this spectrum may face challenges that require additional support to succeed. These challenges should not be barriers to individuals achieving their full potential, yet they often are.

People with a neurodevelopmental condition can experience a range of difficulties in their everyday lives, such as social and communication deficits (Pennisi et al., 2021), hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention (Ronald et al., 2021). On the other hand, people with neurodevelopmental conditions can experience a range of positive and underutilised traits such as strong attention to detail (Abu-Akel et al., 2020; Nocon et al., 2022), excelling in process-driven work (Hutson & Hutson, 2023), superior creativity (Cope & Remington, 2022) and being able to see projects from a different point of view, leading to quicker problem solving and increased productivity (Sutherland, 2016).

ASD is one of the most prevalent neurodevelopmental conditions and has an expected prevalence of 1% in the general worldwide population (Zeidan et al., 2022). This condition is characterised by communication impairments, difficulties with social interaction, and restricted and repetitive behaviour, along with sensory sensitivities related to tactile and audial stimuli (Baeza-Velasco et al., 2018; Bellato et al., 2020).

ADHD is another highly prevalent neurodivergent condition, with an estimated prevalence of 4% in the general worldwide population. It is often characterised by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity (Bellato et al., 2020; Mohammadi et al., 2021) in addition to educational failure, interpersonal problems, mental illness and delinquency (Sonuga-Barke et al., 2013).

Dyslexia, another neurodivergent condition, is estimated to have a prevalence of between 10% and 20% in the worldwide general population. It is known as a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects reading, spelling and writing (Snowling et al., 2020). On the other hand, a number of strengths have been identified in people with dyslexia, including excelling in disciplines such as architecture, engineering and creative arts, along with superior lateral thinking (Garner, 2021).

Dyspraxia has an estimated general prevalence of 6–10% within the general population, but with approximately 2% having severe symptoms (Gibbs et al., 2007; Kirby et al., 2010). Characterised by impairments or difficulties with the organisation, planning and execution of physical movement with a developmental origin, it is found to be more prevalent in males; however, there is a suspected underdiagnosis in females (Gibbs et al., 2007). Dyspraxia is often associated with educational underachievement, lower levels of self-worth and increased anxiety, along with a high comorbidity with dyslexia and ADHD (Clark & Khattab, 2012; Romeo et al., 2022; Walker et al., 2021).

Despite growing attention to neurodiversity in the workplace, the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) reports that the employment rate for individuals with ASD is 21.7%, while those with severe or specific learning difficulties have an employment rate of 26.5%. Additionally, individuals with mental illness or other nervous disorders have an employment rate of 33.3%, and those with progressive illnesses have an employment rate of 35.8%. In contrast, the overall employment rate for disabled individuals stands at 52.1%, while non-disabled individuals have an employment rate of 81.3% (ONS, 2021).

However, the ONS data does not provide disaggregated employment statistics for other neurodevelopmental conditions, such as ADHD, making it difficult to assess employment outcomes for individuals with these conditions. This lack of specific data presents challenges for developing targeted policies and workplace inclusion strategies. These figures highlight ongoing barriers to employment for neurodivergent individuals, including a lack of inclusive workplace environments, unconscious biases among hiring managers and systemic biases in recruitment processes (Ali et al., 2023).

However, if given adequate support, the right approach and increased awareness to hiring managers, line managers and other employees, neurodivergent individuals can thrive in the workplace (Szulc et al., 2021). More recent research is starting to refer to neurodiversity as a competitive advantage in the workplace, given the enhanced skill sets that neurodivergent individuals can possess. Examples of this include enhanced critical thinking, hyperfocus and passion in those with ADHD; innovative thinking and attention to detail in people with ASD; high verbal comprehension ability in those with dyspraxia; and entrepreneurism, creativity and visual reasoning skills in those with dyslexia (Doyle, 2020).

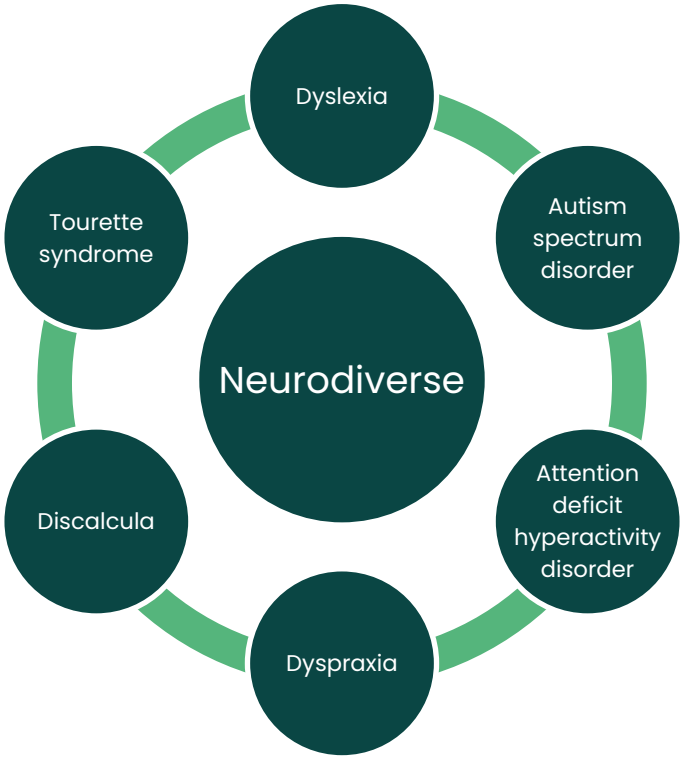

Figure 1: A range of conditions within the neurodiverse umbrella term

3.3 Recognising the benefits of working with neurodiversity

Coplan et al (2021) posit that neurodivergent people often thrive in open environments such as entrepreneurship or project-based work, where innovative thinking skills are needed. Austin and Pisano (2017) suggest significant advantages could be gained from neurodivergent individuals' distinctive abilities as problem solvers. It may be that neurodivergent workers' intrinsic ways of approaching problems could provide solutions in terms of a revised work environment in the project management space, where they could foster inclusion and succeed professionally. This will be an avenue to explore in this research project, through gaining understanding of the experiences of neurodivergent individuals in project management.

Recent publications, including that by Kirby & Smith (2021), provide an interesting and informative backdrop to this proposed research study. Thinking about why organisations, and specifically project management-based work, should value neurodiverse talent is a challenge which needs to be considered, and should include thinking around how to engender the best possible environment to support this development. By understanding how neurodiversity can benefit project management, and how working in project management can benefit neurodivergent individuals, through hiring, developing and retaining people with recognised talents, this research seeks to contribute to the advancement of inclusivity and diversity in project management.

3.4 The project management landscape and neurodiversity

The project management landscape, exemplified by the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP), containing 227 projects with a total cost of £834bn, demands a diverse array of skills and experiences to succeed (GOV.UK, 2023). While diversity and inclusion have gained prominence, neurodiversity remains an important consideration that requires further exploration. Building a neurodiverse project management team offers an opportunity to adapt to the unique needs of various stakeholders, fostering a more inclusive environment (MI-GSO & PCUBED, 2021).

Incorporating neurodiversity into project management requires employing strategies to foster greater diversity and inclusion. Literature suggests addressing implicit biases, promoting visibility of role models from underrepresented groups, tackling systemic discrimination, and enhancing understanding and support for neurodivergent individuals (Flynn & Steward, 2020; Hossain et al., 2018; Tantawi & Khater, 2020).

3.5 Strategies for encouraging neurodiversity into project management

Baker & Degen (2023) explored potential benefits which could be realised through employing neurodivergent individuals in money management. Although moral, ethical and legal views of employing neurodivergent individuals have been considered, benefits have also been recognised in view of the advantages and qualities that neurodivergent individuals can bring to a financial organisation. This research seeks to examine an organisation's culture and its role in both creating an inclusive environment for neurodivergent individuals and attracting them into the project management field.

3.6 Employment and project managers: Implementing strategies to include neurodiverse perspectives

Employees in the project management profession in the UK are protected within their employment setting under the Equality Act. This act sets out expectations for employees and employers, and employers are under a duty to make reasonable adjustments for their employees or potential employees, and to treat them fairly, through the application and recruitment process. An applicant or employee can choose to disclose their neurodiversity with the employer, and how it affects them, but may choose not to disclose this. Indeed, there isn't any obligation to disclose a neurodivergent condition (Kirby & Smith, 2021).

Kirby & Smith (2021) go on to recognise that there is a challenge here in understanding how experience and perhaps even fear could affect a decision to disclose a neurodivergent condition. Of course, it may be the case that an individual does not know that they have a neurodivergent condition. Where a neurodivergent individual does not disclose to an employer, it is clear that reasonable adjustments cannot realistically be expected to be put in place. However, where an employer has reasonable grounds to understand that a person may have a neurodivergent condition, and fail to take action to find out more, a tribunal may find that the employer should have known about the condition. So, taking action for pre-emptive adjustments is key to ensuring that no one is disadvantaged through the recruitment, induction and support processes in employment.

3.7 Working in a project team: Exploring the nature of diverse project teams

Horwitz (2015) reviewed literature on organisational psychology and management as a basis for investigating the way in which project team performance can be influenced by the diversity of the team's membership. Functional diversity, interpersonal diversity and intrapersonal diversity are considered and interesting insights developed which relate to the project management space.

Functional diversity equips a team with a broad spectrum of relevant experiences, skills and knowledge, enabling them to successfully complete projects. Numerous researchers have found that greater cognitive diversity (different ways of thinking) within a project team, along with a wide range of functional diversity, fosters creative and innovative problem-solving approaches and enhances the management of novel projects. McDonough (2000) found that, in the product development field, "obtaining the team behaviour of cooperation" was a primary factor in the success of a diverse project team. Goal setting, stage setting and project leadership were also recognised as key factors which underpin the effectiveness of a diverse project management team.

Interpersonal functional diversity among team members in projects positively influences team performance, due to the distinct yet complementary expertise and experience each member contributes (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007). While task-related diversity has been shown to enhance team performance, bio-demographic diversity, which encompasses genetic, epidemiological and evolutionary factors, does not significantly affect team performance (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007). The impact of interpersonal functional diversity on project performance is complex and yields inconsistent findings. Horwitz (2015) suggests that broadening the range of human capital in project teams can enhance performance, but this viewpoint is not universally supported.

Understanding project outcomes requires considering intrapersonal functional diversity as a potential moderator in the relationship between interpersonal functional diversity and team outcomes. Intrapersonal functional diversity provides a common ground for team members to communicate, coordinate and integrate their expertise. Huckman & Staats (2011) found that teams with vastly different experiences faced coordination challenges, while those with high intrapersonal diversity performed more efficiently, especially in rapidly changing task environments. Despite potential negative implications of interpersonal diversity, intrapersonal diversity has been observed to have a significant and positive impact on functionally diverse project teams by facilitating team processes.

The functional diversity attributes in project teams need further investigation, and the neurodiverse perspective can perhaps add further dimensions in the complex diverse project team space.

4. Research design and methodology

Here we examine the theoretical and practical benefits of the research to APM and the project management community and how will this be measured or evaluated to measure the impact of the research (contribution to theory and practice). How will impact be generated?

- The theoretical benefits of the research will include the development of new knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity in project management, which can inform future research in this area. The practical benefits of the research will include the identification of best practices for promoting neurodiversity in project management, which can be implemented by organisations to create a more inclusive and diverse workplace.
- To measure the impact of the research, the contribution to theory and practice will be evaluated using a range of metrics, such as publication in peer-reviewed journals, citation rates and feedback from industry professionals.
- To generate impact, the research team will engage with industry professionals and stakeholders throughout the research process, including data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings. The team will work closely with APM to organise seminars, workshops and presentations to share the research findings with a targeted audience and expand its reach through collaborations with corporate partners.

4.1 Research design

Our study combined a systematic literature review (SLR) with elements of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The PRISMA approach was deemed particularly relevant in this case, as it involved identifying relevant studies, screening them for eligibility based on pre-defined criteria, assessing the quality of the included studies, and extracting and synthesising data. This step was critical in establishing a solid theoretical foundation for our research, allowing us to establish the current state of knowledge, understand the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals, and assess strategies that had been previously proposed

Key themes, recurring issues and gaps identified in the literature following the completion of the integrated literature review were transformed into a set of open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their unique experiences and perspectives. This approach ensures our interviews are both grounded in existing scholarship and targeted towards areas of greatest potential impact. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the themes, codes, indicators and supporting literature on neurodiversity, which are essential for understanding the various aspects and implications of neurodiversity in different sectors.

Table 1: Themes, codes, indicators and supporting literature on neurodiversity

Theme	Code	Indicator	Literature
Conceptualising Neurodiversity	Origins and Definitions	Neurodiversity as a sociological concept and umbrella term	Singer (2016); Salter & Hendrickx (2009); Perry et al. (2013); Yankowski & Perry (2013); Legault et al. (2021)
Conceptualising Neurodiversity	Terminological Debate	Distinctions between 'neurodivergent' and 'neurodiverse'	Legault et al. (2021); Shah & Marks (2019)
Neurodevelopmental Profiles	Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Social communication difficulties, sensory sensitivities, low employment rate	Zeidan et al. (2022); Baeza-Velasco et al. (2018); Bellato et al. (2020); ONS (2021)
Neurodevelopmental Profiles	ADHD	Impulsivity, hyperactivity, focus difficulties, comorbidities	Mohammadi et al. (2021); Ronald et al. (2021); Sonuga-Barke et al. (2013)
Neurodevelopmental Profiles	Dyslexia	Spelling/reading issues; lateral thinking and creativity	Snowling et al. (2020); Garner (2021)
Neurodevelopmental Profiles	Dyspraxia	Physical coordination, anxiety, comorbid with ADHD	Gibbs et al. (2007); Kirby et al. (2010); Walker et al. (2021); Romeo et al. (2022)
Strengths and Opportunities	Unique Talents	Hyperfocus, creativity, innovation, alternative perspectives	Nocon et al. (2022); Abu-Akel et al. (2020); Cope & Remington (2022); Doyle (2020); Sutherland (2016); Hutson & Hutson (2023)
Workplace Barriers	Exclusion and Stigma	Low employment, hiring bias, limited adjustments	ONS (2021); Ali et al. (2023); Szulc et al. (2021); Fung (2021)
Project Management Relevance	Cognitive Diversity in Teams	Enhancement of outcomes from neurodiverse teams	Horwitz (2015); Horwitz & Horwitz (2007); McDonough (2000); Shah & Marks (2019); Tantawi & Khater (2020)
Inclusive Practice	Designing for Neurodiversity	Quiet spaces, predictable meetings, universal design	Szulc et al. (2021); MI-GSO & PCUBED (2021); Kirby & Smith (2021)
Inclusive Practice	Strengths-Based Management	Leverage unique traits to boost team performance	Doyle (2020); Kirby & Smith (2021); Fung (2021)

Drawing on this iterative and integrated research approach, we aimed to generate insights that not only enhanced our understanding of neurodiverse representation in project management but also provided actionable recommendations to improve the inclusivity and effectiveness of project management practices.

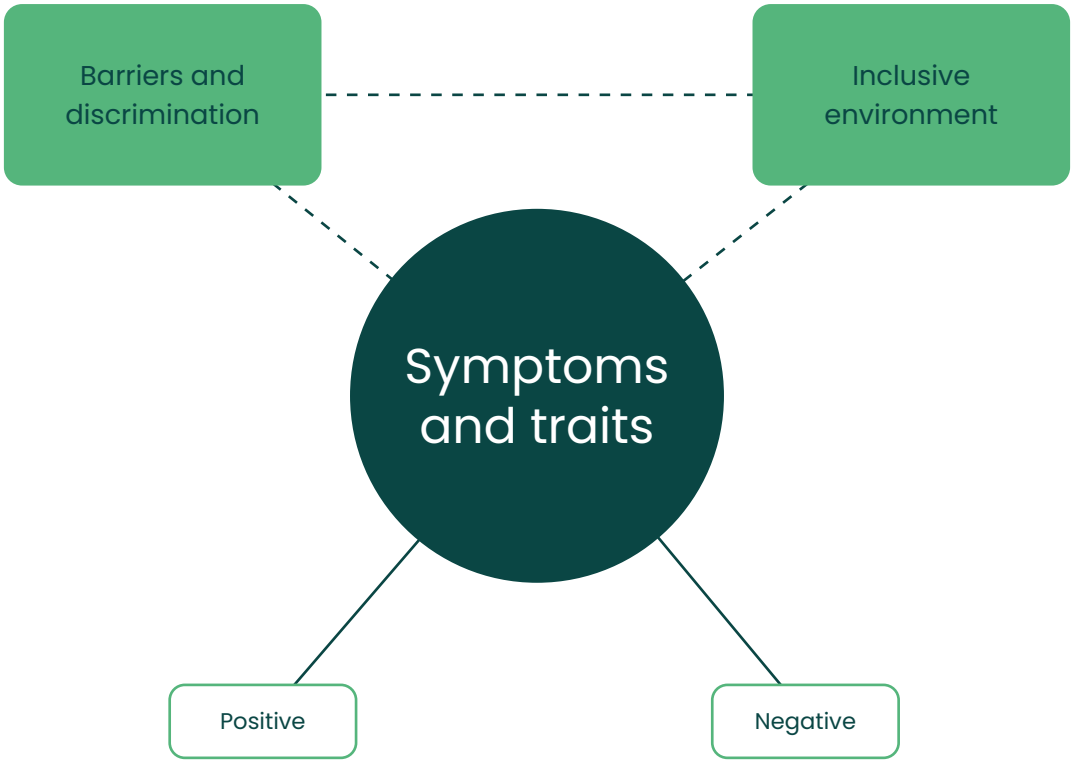

Figure 2: A systematic review and qualitative synthesis of neurodiversity in project management

4.2 Sampling strategy

In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 neurodivergent project management professionals were conducted. People who were interested in taking part in the study were found through APM. The age range of participants is 25–56 years, with a mean age of 41.60 (SD=10.26). Participants included n=10 females, n=9 males and n=1 gender-fluid person; ethnicity included n=16 white, n=2 mixed/multiple ethnicity and n=2 Black/African/Caribbean/Black British. Neurodevelopmental conditions participants disclosed were ADHD n=6; dyslexia n=5; autism and ADHD n=4; ADHD, dyscalculia and dyspraxia n=3; autism n=1; and dyscalculia and dyspraxia n=1. The final sample (see Table 2) included participants from a range of sectors, including government, infrastructure, construction, engineering, and higher education. The participants had varying years of experience, ranging from 0 to over 20 years.

Table 2: Interview participant Information

Interview ID	Approx. duration (minutes)	Industry/Sector	Approx. years of experience
001 Interview Transcript	19 min 30 sec	Government	Not Recorded
002 Interview Transcript	37 min 42 sec	Higher Education & Research	6–10
003 Interview Transcript	49 min 36 sec	Transport & Infrastructure	16–20
004 Interview Transcript	56 min 48 sec	Government	0–5
005 Interview Transcript	57 min 39 sec	Government	0–5
006 Interview Transcript	41 min 9 sec	Engineering Consultancy	20+
007 Interview Transcript	57 min 34 sec	Parliament	20+
008 Interview Transcript	33 min 22 sec	Transport & Infrastructure	6–10
009 Interview Transcript	28 min 42 sec	Integrated Security Fund	0–5
010 Interview Transcript	53 min 54 sec	Higher Education & Research	6–10
011 Interview Transcript	57 min 3 sec	Parliament & Public Services	11–15
012 Interview Transcript	30 min 29 sec	Construction	20+
013 Interview Transcript	45 min 15 sec	Engineering	0–5
014 Interview Transcript	49 min 37 sec	Government	0–5
015 Interview Transcript	41 min 51 sec	Government	0–5
016 Interview Transcript	54 min 6 sec	Government	11–15
017 Interview Transcript	24 min 2 sec	Transport & Infrastructure	6-10
018 Interview Transcript	33 min 36 sec	Engineering	11–15
019 Interview Transcript	32 min 5 sec	Engineering	0–5
020 Interview Transcript	50 min 55 sec	Consulting	0–5

4.3 Data collection and analysis

Interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams by four of the five researchers. The interviews followed a structured schedule, which included questions about the participants' neurodiversity, disclosure and reasonable adjustments, their role in the project management team, and how their neurodevelopmental conditions specifically impacted their role and the team more broadly. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and subsequently analysed thematically.

5. Results and discussion of findings

5.1 Findings from the thematic analysis

The initial findings from thematic analysis have provided some interesting insights in a range of areas which contribute to the development of themes.

5.1.1 Diagnosis and disclosure

The journey of receiving a neurodivergence diagnosis and navigating its impact in a professional environment is a deeply personal experience, often marked by moments of self-realisation, validation and the desire to create positive change. For project management professionals who are neurodivergent, this journey often intersects with the challenges and rewards of working in fast-paced, structured environments.

For many neurodivergent individuals, the process of diagnosis is not straightforward. One project manager shared how, for decades, they grappled with feelings of being different and wondering:

> "For decades I had wondered what was wrong with me, realized that I was different. It was not until I had a conversation with colleagues about ADHD traits that it clicked. It was not a light bulb moment; it was like the entire B&Q lighting section going on."

Another individual described their formal assessment in 2019. It was an intensive three-hour process involving a series of cognitive evaluations. Receiving the diagnosis later that year was a pivotal moment. It validated years of experiences that had previously felt confusing or isolating, giving them a framework to understand their differences and strengths.

The decision to share one's neurodivergence in a workplace context is often a delicate one. Many prefer to approach this process as 'advising' rather than 'disclosing'. One professional noted how the term 'disclose' carries negative connotations, as if revealing a hidden flaw or admitting guilt. 'Advising', by contrast, emphasises openness and empowerment, framing neurodivergence as a neutral or even positive aspect of one's identity. This subtle shift in language reflects the broader importance of fostering inclusive conversations about neurodiversity. A diagnosis can be transformative not only for the individual but also for the teams they work with. For one project manager, the newfound understanding of their neurodivergence allowed them to accept themselves and use their experiences to support others. Participating in the organisation's disability network became a way to demonstrate that neurodivergence is not a barrier to career progression. By sharing their story, they hoped to inspire colleagues to see that their conditions don't define their potential:

> "My diagnosis has helped me accept myself more and support others in their growth. Sharing my experiences in the disability network shows colleagues that neurodivergence isn't a barrier to career progression. It helps them see that their conditions don't define their potential."

5.1.2 Organisational culture and inclusivity

As individuals advance in their careers, there often emerges a growing sense of responsibility to disclose their neurodiversity, especially when in senior roles. This is frequently rooted in a desire to help others who may be concealing their own neurodivergence. The perception is that once you are in a position of authority and have established credentials, people are less likely to make assumptions, and the disclosure might even be seen as a strength. For those earlier in their careers or in more junior roles, the decision to disclose can be fraught with uncertainty and fear of discrimination. The concern is that revealing a neurodivergent diagnosis could be perceived as a weakness, especially when competing against many other candidates for a job or promotion. In this context, individuals may choose not to disclose their neurodiversity to avoid being filtered out during the recruitment process. Some interviewees shared experiences where they felt their disclosure during an interview led to them not getting the job:

> "I believe the recruitment process and training within the project delivery profession are heavily geared towards neurotypical individuals. For example, the processes are formal, linear and lack recognition of different learning styles. This creates barriers for neurodivergent individuals, particularly during interviews and leadership programmes."

However, there are cases where the opposite is true. Some large companies are actively seeking neurodivergent talent because of their unique qualities. This shift in perspective emphasises that neurodivergence is not just a challenge to accommodate but also a valuable asset that can drive innovation:

> "Neurodiversity is a spectrum, and organisations need to recognise its creative potential. Companies like Microsoft and Google actively seek neurodivergent talent because of the different ways they approach problems. Encouraging this creativity and reimagining processes allows neurodivergent individuals to shine and brings real benefits to teams and organisations."

5.1.3 Training and development

The findings suggest that the recruitment and training processes in project management are primarily designed for neurotypical individuals, creating challenges for neurodivergent candidates, especially during interviews and in leadership programmes. A notable gap exists in neurodiversity training in organisations. One interviewee highlighted that neurodiversity training is entirely missing from their current workplace, underscoring the need for such training to be as standard as onboarding training. Neurodivergent employees benefit from work environments that are more inclusive and adaptable. Feedback suggests that traditional ways of working may not always align with the strengths and challenges of neurodivergent individuals:

> "More training on neurodiversity would be beneficial, but it needs to reach beyond onboarding and head offices. Many site-level workers and managers dismiss these concepts, creating a hostile environment despite the company's inclusive policies."

5.1.4 Awareness, strengths and challenges

The respondents noted several strengths that they were aware of, many of which bring significant benefits to working in project management.

Their ability to map systems and recognise patterns enables them to identify connections that others might overlook, which is particularly advantageous in solving complex, systemic problems. This system thinking, combined with skills like hyperfocus and horizon scanning, allows neurodivergent individuals to excel in risk management and long-term planning. Hyperfocus enables them to complete tasks with exceptional speed and precision, often producing work that surpasses expectations in both quality and detail. Their capacity to sustain focus for extended periods results in significant output, which colleagues often recognise as a standout trait. However, from the neurodivergent individuals' perspective, such activity is extremely draining, and care should be taken to prevent any sense of exploitation. Adequate recovery time should be planned in.

Adaptability and agile thinking are also key strengths of neurodivergent individuals. Adaptability fosters creative problem solving, which proves invaluable in crisis situations or when unexpected challenges arise. Additionally, neurodivergent individuals often demonstrate strong interpersonal skills, including the ability to quickly build effective working relationships and communicate empathetically:

> "I am very good at building effective working relationships quickly. I think far ahead, always ensuring deadlines are met. I work at a fast pace, which suits project management. My brain is always going. I wake up thinking about emails or ideas. While it is hard to switch off, it helps me get through work."

Detail orientation is another strength, with neurodivergent individuals often excelling in planning, structuring tasks, and using tools to track and organise work. This precision not only enhances their own performance but also improves team efficiency. Their resilience in high-pressure situations, aided by their ability to stay calm under stress, makes them reliable and resourceful in meeting multiple deadlines and managing complex projects.

Challenges were also evident and must be considered. Neurodivergent individuals' preference for top-down thinking can sometimes clash with the bottom-up approaches of neurotypical colleagues, leading to difficulties in gaining buy-in or explaining ideas. Their minds are often active, even outside work hours, which can make it hard to disconnect and may lead to burnout or difficulties in achieving a healthy work-life balance:

> "I feel like I have hit an invisible ceiling. Neurotypical colleagues who are better at self-promotion and networking often get more challenging opportunities. Neurodivergent individuals tend to be self-deprecating and focused on the task rather than career advancement, which can limit growth in the profession."

Another challenge lies in workplace perceptions: while their productivity and output may be praised, there is a broader concern about defining their value solely through productivity. This raises important questions about inclusivity and how neurodivergence is valued in teams and organisations:

> "So hyperfocus, for example, is a great one where you can get one thing done a lot quicker than a neurotypical person. Or you can do extreme amounts of detail in the same amount of time, and if you're someone who values productivity. There is a bigger question, which is… should we be assessing a neurodivergent person's worth on their productivity? That to me is a much more important question."

5.1.5 Working environment and sensory challenges

The research found that neurodivergent individuals often face significant challenges in working environments, especially when they lose control over their surroundings. A lack of control can lead to heightened stress, diminished confidence and lower productivity, making it crucial for them to work in spaces where their sensory needs are respected. When individuals are able to manage their environment, such as by prioritising breaks or managing their diary, their mental health and overall performance improve dramatically. However, when this control is lost, it can have devastating effects on their emotional and professional well-being.

> "But actually, it's too distracting for me in the work environment. And what I enjoy about being at home is being surrounded by books and papers, and, you know, just art analogue things."

> "Going into the office now can be exhausting. Sometimes it's great because I have really good friends here and find it fun. But, you know, it's quite nice to be around people, but sometimes the lights are too bright and it's too noisy, etc. The sensory issues around that are just a bit much. And then the more ADHD traits, I get really easily distracted, which is very noticeable in the office because I'll be chatting to everyone. So just maintaining focus and also struggling to make use of small amounts of time."

Another challenge comes from the shame associated with neurodivergence, particularly when behaviours or difficulties related to it negatively impact their work. This feeling of shame can create additional emotional stress, complicating the individual's ability to perform tasks effectively, especially when cognitive or sensory factors shift unexpectedly from day to day. The unpredictability of mental and sensory states means that some days are simply not conducive to certain tasks, leaving individuals to navigate feelings of guilt or frustration over things beyond their control.

5.1.6 Coping strategies

The findings indicate that, for a neurodivergent individual working in the project management space, the combination of professional support and personal strengths can significantly enhance performance and well-being. Access to a chartered psychologist specialising in neurodiversity has proven essential for one individual, providing clarity on necessary adjustments and why certain tasks can be particularly challenging. This tailored support is far more effective than generic advice, ensuring a deeper understanding of the specific needs tied to conditions like dyslexia:

> "Access to a chartered psychologist specialising in neurodiversity has been incredibly helpful. They helped me understand what adjustments I needed and why certain tasks, like proofreading, were so challenging. Having that expert insight is far more useful than general support from someone who knows less about dyslexia than I do."

While creating long, detailed reports may present difficulties, tasks such as reporting and preparing board packs provide a natural outlet for expression. The individual's ability to thrive in high-pressure situations is another strength, with a preference for crisis management, where the urgency and focus required align well with their problem-solving capabilities.

To maintain balance and manage stress, strategies such as therapy, regular holidays and outdoor activities can be essential. These approaches help create a clear boundary between work and home life, allowing for improved processing of challenges and better overall resilience.

5.1.7 Meetings and communication

Several respondents emphasise the value of their neurodiversity in fostering strong, empathetic relationships with stakeholders. This includes being able to connect deeply with diverse groups, such as disabled staff networks and LGBTQ communities. Neurodivergent individuals are seen as approachable and empathetic – key qualities in complex environments where understanding and communication are critical.

A strong preference for structured communication is noted across the responses. Respondents highlight the importance of sharing meeting agendas in advance, allowing time to process the information before the discussion. However, there's a recognised gap when it comes to accommodating specific needs such as reasonable adjustments for meetings, which could enhance the inclusivity of these interactions:

> "For meetings and things, you don't keep them too long and be quite focused in like you know, share the agenda first. Give people time to think about the agenda before."

> "We send out the agenda and the structure for the conversations… and that will be done in advance."

The struggle with unstructured social interactions, particularly in larger group settings such as team away days, is a significant challenge for some neurodivergent individuals. Respondents expressed difficulty with random seating arrangements and the overwhelming nature of large crowds, highlighting the need for a more controlled, predictable environment for better engagement and comfort.

Dyslexia's impact on working memory and processing information is a recurring theme. Respondents reported needing extra support, such as note-taking or recording meetings, to retain information. Additionally, a meticulous approach to reviewing documentation and spreadsheets is necessary to compensate for memory challenges. Some individuals also noted that their communication style may be affected, with a tendency to over-explain to ensure clarity, though this could sometimes lead to lengthy and drawn-out presentations.

5.1.8 Support and adjustment

The questions on support and adjustment met with mixed responses regarding the need for practical support and reasonable adjustments. Many neurodivergent individuals have learned to adapt their workflow independently, utilising available technology (e.g. text-to-speech software) to enhance productivity. While these adaptations help, the lack of formal recognition or structured reasonable adjustments can lead to frustration and inefficiency. Technology tools like Grammarly and text-to-speech software are identified as highly beneficial for neurodivergent individuals, especially when they are dealing with large amounts of text. However, restrictive company policies (e.g. bans on AI or large language models) hinder the effective use of these tools. This highlights a need for more flexible policies that accommodate assistive technologies without compromising security.

Strong networks of colleagues, particularly those who understand neurodivergence, play a vital role. These connections offer emotional and practical support, creating safe spaces for venting, problem solving and regaining focus. This network is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and reducing stress in challenging work situations. There seems to be uncertainty about what formal reasonable adjustments should be implemented in the workplace. Many individuals are unsure whether their needs are being met by their current environment, relying instead on self-initiated solutions. This suggests that clearer communication and a proactive approach from managers regarding reasonable adjustments could improve overall support for neurodivergent employees:

> "My support systems include colleagues from the disability network and former teammates who understand neurodivergence. These relationships provide a safe space to vent, brainstorm and problem-solve. Having someone to talk things through with, even briefly, helps me regain focus and approach tasks more effectively."

5.2 Implications and discussion of key findings

- Diagnosis and disclosure or advising are deeply personal steps in a journey towards self-acceptance and advocacy. By sharing these experiences, neurodivergent project professionals not only empower themselves but also contribute to building more inclusive workplaces. This cultural shift benefits teams and projects alike, fostering environments where diversity of thought and experience is not just accepted but celebrated. In the context of project management, neurodivergent individuals often bring unique perspectives, creativity and problem-solving skills. However, systemic barriers and stigmas can hinder their ability to thrive. By normalising conversations about neurodiversity and fostering environments where advising about conditions is met with understanding and support, organisations can unlock the full potential of neurodivergent talent.
- Disclosure is a personal and context-dependent decision. For neurodivergent project professionals, disclosing their diagnosis can be empowering and helpful in senior positions, but it is often avoided in junior roles due to fears of discrimination. The insights gained suggest that neurodivergent individuals in project management face complex decisions around disclosure, but when it is embraced, their neurodiversity can be a key asset to both their personal growth and the broader success of the organisation.
- The insights gained from the study indicate a need for enhanced inclusivity in the workplace to be achieved through recruitment, training and everyday work practices, to ensure that neurodivergent individuals have equal opportunities to succeed. Suggestions were advanced on how to implement neurodiversity training to ensure that all employees, including managers and HR personnel, are aware of neurodiversity and its importance in fostering an inclusive workplace.

- Some neurodivergent individuals may feel different or out of sync with colleagues due to their unique ways of working. While this uniqueness drives their strengths, it can also create social or workplace challenges if not supported by an inclusive environment. By understanding and leveraging strengths while addressing challenges through awareness, inclusive practices and support systems, organisations can unlock the full potential of neurodivergent individuals in project management.
- To support neurodivergent individuals in the project environment, teams should focus on understanding strengths rather than job titles or hierarchical roles. Assigning tasks based on individual skills and abilities fosters intrinsic motivation and enables better results, especially for neurodivergent individuals. When employees feel their strengths are being utilised, they experience a stronger sense of contribution and pride in their work.
- The most critical environmental improvement needed is better education for senior managers. The experience of neurodivergent individuals in the workplace often hinges on the attitudes and awareness of their immediate line managers. There is a significant inconsistency, with some managers being open and supportive while others remain uninformed or even negative about neurodivergent needs. Addressing this inconsistency through education and awareness training is essential for creating a more inclusive and supportive work environment for all employees.
- A blend of expert guidance, self-awareness and stress management techniques can equip the neurodivergent project manager to excel in dynamic, high-stakes environments.
- An inclusive meeting design may be needed and can be achieved through explicitly asking for and implementing reasonable adjustments, such as different seating arrangements or sensory accommodations. More structured team building or networking events, offering structure and predictability (e.g. pre-arranged seating, quieter spaces), could support neurodivergent individuals who struggle in unstructured environments. Memory challenges have been identified, and these could provide tools to support memory and information retention, such as visual aids or clearer documentation, particularly in managing dyslexia-related challenges in project management tasks.
- While neurodivergent individuals are capable of finding workarounds and utilising support networks, they often face challenges due to unclear policies and a lack of structured accommodations. Enhancing communication about reasonable adjustments and making accessible tools available can greatly improve both efficiency and well-being in project management roles.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Concluding remarks

The findings provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals in project management, highlighting both their strengths and their challenges. These individuals often navigate complex environments, balancing personal self-realisation with the expectations and structures of the professional world. Figure 3 illustrates the key findings from our research, highlighting the various aspects of neurodiverse representation in project management and providing actionable recommendations to improve inclusivity and effectiveness in project management practices.

Figure 3: Key factors drawn from neurodivergent individuals in professional project management

Key conclusions drawn from the findings include:

- **Diagnosis and disclosure**: The process of diagnosis is a pivotal moment for neurodivergent individuals, bringing a sense of self-understanding and validation. However, disclosing one's neurodivergence in the workplace remains a personal decision fraught with potential risks, especially for those in junior roles.
- **Organisational culture**: There is a need for a cultural shift in organisations, where neurodivergence can be viewed as a valuable asset. This shift can help mitigate discrimination and encourage the use of neurodivergent talents in leadership and innovation.
- **Training and development**: Neurodivergent employees benefit from an inclusive and adaptive work environment. However, the lack of neurodiversity-specific training and support in recruitment and training processes creates significant barriers. It is essential for organisations to incorporate neurodiversity awareness and training into their regular procedures.
- **Strengths and challenges**: Neurodivergent individuals bring valuable skills to project management, such as systems thinking, hyperfocus, creativity and resilience. However, their challenges, including difficulties with unstructured interactions and sensory overload, can create barriers to effective performance if not addressed.
- **Workplace environment**: A flexible, controlled work environment that accommodates sensory and cognitive needs can greatly enhance the performance and well-being of neurodivergent individuals. This may involve personalised adjustments, clearer communication and flexible use of assistive technologies.
- **Support systems and coping strategies**: Self-initiated coping strategies, such as therapy, breaks and personal networks, help neurodivergent individuals manage stress and improve performance. However, these strategies can be more effective when organisations proactively offer formal support and adjust workplace policies.
- **Communication and meetings**: Structured communication and clear meeting agendas are highly beneficial for neurodivergent individuals, especially those with memory challenges. Creating environments where meetings and social interactions are predictable and accessible can increase engagement and reduce anxiety.

6.2 Recommendations

- **Promote neurodiversity awareness and training**: Project organisations should implement mandatory neurodiversity training for project teams, particularly managers and HR personnel. This training should cover the strengths and challenges of neurodivergent individuals, as well as strategies for creating an inclusive work environment.
- **Enhance disclosure processes**: Encourage a culture where disclosing neurodivergence is seen as a strength rather than a weakness in the project management space. For neurodivergent team members in senior project roles, disclosing their condition can empower others and create a more inclusive workplace. Those in senior project roles could also act as mentors, and organisations should develop clear policies to support disclosure and mentoring.
- **Implement reasonable adjustments and flexible policies**: Develop formal policies for reasonable adjustments and ensure they are consistently applied across all project teams. This includes providing the tools, technology and resources (e.g. text-to-speech software) that neurodivergent team members need to thrive.
- **Reassess recruitment and training practices**: Recruitment and training processes should be revisited to ensure they are neurodivergent-friendly. Adjustments, such as extended interview times or alternative communication methods, should be offered as standard practices.
- **Foster supportive networks**: Encourage the development of peer support networks, both formal (e.g. disability networks) and informal (e.g. employee resource groups). These networks help neurodivergent project team members feel a sense of belonging and provide a space for sharing strategies and experiences.
- **Redesign workspaces and meeting environments**: Adapt project workspaces to better support sensory needs and ensure that meetings and social events are structured and predictable. This can include pre-arranged seating, quieter spaces or offering virtual meeting options to accommodate sensory sensitivities.
- **Focus on strength-based task assignment**: In project management, focus on assigning tasks based on individual strengths, rather than job titles or hierarchical roles. This approach will allow neurodivergent individuals to excel in areas where they feel confident and motivated, leading to better outcomes for the team.

6.3 Areas for future research

Three main areas have been identified for future research in this area:

1. **Investigate the impact of neurodiversity training on workplace inclusion**: Future research could explore how neurodiversity-specific training programmes impact the overall inclusivity of project organisations, especially concerning leadership attitudes and team dynamics.
2. **Examine the long-term benefits of disclosure**: A longitudinal study could assess the long-term effects of disclosure on career progression, well-being and job satisfaction for neurodivergent professionals in project management.
3. **Evaluate assistive technologies and their effectiveness**: Future work could explore the use of emerging assistive technologies and their impact on neurodivergent professionals' productivity and well-being, particularly in fields like project management.

By addressing these areas, organisations can enhance the working experience for neurodivergent individuals, unlocking their full potential while fostering a more inclusive, diverse and productive workplace.

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