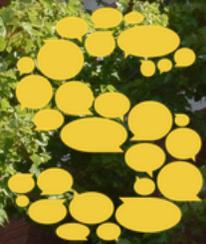# NEURODIVERSITY IN THE NORTHWEST ARKANSAS WORKFORCE

THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYEES, CO-WORKERS, AND EMPLOYERS

2025 REGIONAL REPORT

startup junkie

SLS COMMUNITY
Supporting Lifelong Success
for Neurodivergent Adults

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

6. NEURODIVERGENT EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

7. CROSS-COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Startup Junkie Foundation

Startup Junkie is a nonprofit organization based in Northwest Arkansas that supports entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey, from idea to execution and growth. Through hands-on programming, access to capital, and a strong community network, Startup Junkie helps founders turn concepts into sustainable businesses. The organization is especially known for meeting entrepreneurs where they are, whether that means early-stage validation, refining a business model, or navigating funding options like microloans, grants, and investor connections.

By combining mentorship, education, and practical resources, Startup Junkie plays a key role in strengthening the regional startup ecosystem and expanding access to entrepreneurship for underrepresented founders. Its work goes beyond business creation, focusing on long-term impact, community building, and economic mobility across Northwest Arkansas. Through events, one-on-one support, and partnerships with local and national organizations, Startup Junkie empowers individuals to build businesses with confidence, clarity, and purpose.

Role in Study : Designed and authored the survey for distribution; managed survey dissemination; edited and refined survey content; analyzed collected data and results; and produced the final survey deliverable, integrating illustrations and written analysis to clearly present findings.

SLS Community

SLS (Supporting Lifelong Success for Neurodivergent Adults) Community is a non-profit in Fayetteville, Arkansas that is taking a holistic approach to supporting neurodivergent adults with essential resources to flourish. Along with impact partners, SLS Community's vision is to orchestrate an effort that brings together supports and services, a continuum of housing options, job opportunities, and community options, enmeshed throughout a unique 230-acre development in south Fayetteville called Cato Springs. Cato Springs will serve both neurodivergent adults and the NWA region broadly and act as the future home of SLS Community.

As the Cato Springs project is being built out, SLS Community is focused on expansion of supportive living services, day services, and community initiatives in Fayetteville as a scaling service provider for "Medicaid waiver" home and community-based services (HCBS). SLS is implementing a comprehensive approach that surrounds neurodivergent adults with opportunities to thrive through independence and choice and fuels each individual's ability to contribute their skills, explore their dreams, have relationships, and cultivate meaningful community connections.

Role in the study : SLS Community assisted in the design and distribution of surveys for this study, as well as provided feedback on the final report.

CLAUDIA PORRAS SCOTT
STARTUP JUNKIE
DIRECTOR, ENTREPRENEURIAL ACCESS

Claudia Scott leads inclusive workforce and entrepreneurship initiatives at Startup Junkie, with a growing focus on advancing neurodiversity inclusion across Northwest Arkansas. She directs the region's first comprehensive neurodiversity workforce and entrepreneurship study, working closely with neurodivergent professionals, employers, and community partners to identify systemic barriers and opportunities for change. Through research, community engagement, and cross-sector collaboration, Claudia is helping shape more equitable workplace practices and entrepreneurial ecosystems.

ASHTON P. MCCOMBS IV
SLS COMMUNITY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ashton McCombs IV is the Executive Director for SLS Community, a Fayetteville-founded non-profit and service provider for neurodivergent adults. SLS Community is building towards an innovative "live, work, play" community in south Fayetteville where neurodivergent adults can find housing options, meaningful work, and have access to supportive services that fuel choice and independence. These resources will be woven throughout a mixed-use development called Cato Springs that will serve NWA broadly. The origination of SLS was inspired by Ashton's sister, Anna.

IGNACIO BALDERRAMA
STARTUP JUNKIE
CAPITAL ACCESS MANAGER

Ignacio is the Kiva Capital Access Manager for Startup Junkie, where he supported field coordination and data management for this report. He played a key role in organizing outreach efforts and transferring collected data for analysis. Ignacio is passionate about growth, community engagement, and building systems that strengthen entrepreneurial research and impact.

CINDY LIN
STARTUP JUNKIE
SENIOR INTERN

Cindy Lin is an intern at Startup Junkie, where she designed the layout, art, and graphics for this report. With a strong eye for visual storytelling, she combines creativity and purpose to make complex information more engaging and accessible. Cindy is passionate about using design to support entrepreneurship and community impact.

OLADOTUN SOLOMON
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
MBA CANDIDATE

Oladotun Solomon is an MBA candidate at Oklahoma State University specializing in Business Analytics and Data Science. He led the quantitative analysis and strategic modeling for this report, applying rigorous analytical methods to transform complex datasets into evidence-based insights and high-impact recommendations. His work strengthened the report's analytical foundation and informed its strategic conclusions.

Third Party Endorsement

DR. STEPHANIE STEELE-WREN, PSY.D.
PSYCHOLOGYWORKS, PLLC

I spend much of my work with adults who have spent years wondering why things feel harder than they should. As a Licensed Psychologist, consultant, and owner of PsychologyWorks, PLLC in Bentonville, Arkansas, I specialize in adult neurodivergence and psychological evaluation, bringing both clinical training and lived experience to this work.

I spend much of my work with adults who have spent years wondering why things feel harder than they should. As a Licensed Psychologist, consultant, and owner of PsychologyWorks, PLLC in Bentonville, Arkansas, I specialize in adult neurodivergence and psychological evaluation, bringing both clinical training and lived experience to this work.

What I see in practice closely aligns with the findings of Neurodivergent Talent as Economic Capital, a Northwest Arkansas workforce study authored by Claudia Porras Scott of the Startup Junkie Foundation. The research captures something I encounter every day. Interest in neurodiversity is growing, but systems haven't caught up. When expectations are vague, processes are rigid, or support depends more on individual managers than on structure, burnout and disengagement are not surprising — they're quite predictable.

I am pleased to support this research and to serve as a local resource in Bentonville and across Northwest Arkansas for adult diagnostics and neurodivergence-informed consultation. This work is about helping systems better reflect the realities of cognitive diversity.

Foreword

Northwest Arkansas is experiencing rapid economic growth, innovation, and organizational change. As companies scale and talent demands intensify, the ability to build workplaces that are not only productive but genuinely inclusive has become a defining marker of long-term success. Neurodiversity, encompassing natural variations in human cognition such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and related conditions, sits at the center of this challenge. This report exists because awareness alone is no longer enough. As the data in this study shows, many organizations recognize the value of neurodivergent talent, yet far fewer have translated that recognition into consistent policies, training, and day-to-day practices that support real inclusion.

This study is important because it moves the conversation from intention to evidence. By capturing perspectives from organizational leaders, neurotypical employees, and neurodivergent employees across Northwest Arkansas, the report exposes the gaps between perception and lived experience, and between stated values and operational reality. It provides regional, data-backed insight into where systems are breaking down and where targeted interventions can create meaningful change. Most importantly, it reframes neurodiversity not as a compliance issue or accommodation burden, but as a form of cognitive capital. The findings and recommendations in this report are intended to serve as a practical roadmap for organizations that want to evolve from awareness to accountability, and from performative inclusion to sustainable, measurable impact.

Acknowledgments

This report was made possible through the collective effort, trust, and collaboration of many individuals and organizations committed to building a more inclusive future for Northwest Arkansas. We extend our sincere gratitude to the participating organizations and employees across Benton and Washington Counties who generously shared their time, experiences, and perspectives. Their willingness to engage openly and honestly provided the foundation for the insights and findings presented in this study.

We are deeply grateful to Claudia Scott, Director of Entrepreneurial Access at Startup Junkie, for her leadership, vision, and commitment to advancing inclusive innovation. Her guidance and dedication were instrumental in shaping the direction, integrity, and regional relevance of this work. We also thank the SLS Community leadership team, whose partnership and advocacy for neurodivergent adults continue to drive meaningful systems-level change across the region.

Special recognition goes to the project team whose contributions brought this report to life. Ignacio Balderrama supported field coordination, survey development, distribution, data management, and synthesis, helping bridge research, community outreach, and analysis throughout the project lifecycle. Cindy Lin led the visual design and layout, ensuring the research was accessible, engaging, and thoughtfully presented. Oladotun Solomon spearheaded the data analytics and strategic insight development, applying rigorous quantitative methods to translate complex findings into high-impact, actionable recommendations that informed the report's strategic direction.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to the Startup Junkie Foundation for providing the platform and institutional support that allowed this work to be developed under the SJF name. We are especially grateful to Jeff Amerine, Brett Amerine, and Caleb Talley for their ongoing encouragement, belief in the vision, and early recognition of this project's potential well before it formally took shape. Their leadership and willingness to support forward-thinking initiatives helped bring this work to life and sustain its momentum.

Finally, we acknowledge the broader community of advocates, researchers, and practitioners whose prior work informed this study and whose ongoing efforts continue to push the conversation forward. This report reflects a shared belief that inclusion is not a one-time initiative, but an evolving practice grounded in empathy, accountability, and evidence. Together, these contributions position Northwest Arkansas to lead by example in building neuroinclusive workplaces where difference is valued and potential is fully realized.

Executive Summary

Purpose of the Report

Northwest Arkansas is undergoing rapid economic growth, innovation, and workforce expansion. As organizations scale, the ability to attract, retain, and fully leverage diverse talent has become a strategic priority. This report examines how neurodiversity is currently understood, supported, and operationalized within workplaces across Northwest Arkansas. Inspired by the Birkbeck University (2024) neurodiversity in the workplace study, this research adapts a proven analytical framework to a regional context, offering locally grounded, data-driven insights. The goal of this study is to move the regional conversation from awareness to action by identifying gaps between intent, policy, and lived experience, and by providing practical, evidence-based recommendations for building neuroinclusive workplaces.

Methods and Data Overview

Between January and March 2025, an anonymous online survey was distributed to organizations and employees across Northwest Arkansas. A total of 164 responses were analyzed, including 19 organizational leaders, 65 neurotypical employees, and 80 neurodivergent employees. The survey assessed organizational awareness, policy adoption, training, workplace accommodations, psychological safety, wellbeing, and retention. Quantitative Likert-scale responses were complemented by qualitative open-ended comments, which were coded and analyzed to capture lived experiences and contextual nuance. Findings were benchmarked against national and international research, including the Birkbeck College study, to situate regional trends within broader patterns.

Neurodiversity in the Workplace

The term "neurodiversity" recognizes neurological differences as natural variations of the human brain rather than deficits to be corrected. In workplace contexts, neurodivergence can influence communication styles, sensory processing, attention, problem-solving, and energy regulation. When environments are poorly designed, these differences can become barriers. When environments are intentionally designed, they can become strategic advantages.

Key Findings

High Awareness, Low Institutionalization
While awareness of neurodiversity is relatively high across organizations, this awareness has not translated into consistent systems or practices. Although 72% of organizational leaders reported that their organization values neurodiversity, only 38% of neurodivergent respondents felt this commitment resulted in meaningful, day-to-day support. This gap highlights a persistent disconnect between stated values and lived experience.

Training Deficits Undermine Implementation
Formal training remains rare, limiting organizations' ability to operationalize inclusion. Only 27% of organizations reported offering any neurodiversity-specific training for managers. While leaders often express empathy and goodwill, the absence of structured training leaves managers without the tools needed to translate intent into effective, consistent practice, particularly in fast-paced work environments.

Perception Gaps Between Groups
Neurotypical employees and organizational leaders consistently rate workplace inclusion more positively than neurodivergent employees. These perception gaps suggest optimism bias and limited visibility into lived experience, reinforcing the risk that inclusion efforts are evaluated based on intention rather than impact.

Psychological Safety Drives Retention and Wellbeing
Psychological safety emerged as a central determinant of employee outcomes. Fewer than half (44%) of neurodivergent respondents reported feeling psychologically safe disclosing their neurodivergence at work. Those reporting low psychological safety were significantly more likely to experience burnout and disengagement, with over 60% indicating they had considered leaving a role due to unmet accommodation needs or communication challenges.

Accommodations Work When They Are Tailored
Neurodivergent employees consistently reported higher cognitive load and burnout risk in fast-paced, ambiguous, or interruption-heavy environments, particularly within logistics- and retail-adjacent roles common in the region. Individualized, co-created accommodations such as flexible deadlines, clear written instructions, or modified communication norms were strongly associated with improved wellbeing and retention intent. In contrast, generic or symbolic inclusion efforts showed little measurable impact.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study concludes that neurodiversity inclusion in Northwest Arkansas is widely supported in principle but inconsistently executed in practice. To close this gap, organizations must shift from performative awareness to structural accountability.

Based on the findings, we recommend:
- Embedding neurodiversity into policy, leadership metrics, and performance frameworks rather than relying on informal discretion.
- Implementing mandatory, role-specific training that equips managers and teams with practical tools, not just awareness.
- Prioritizing psychological safety and tailored accommodations as core drivers of retention, wellbeing, and organizational performance.
- Measuring inclusion outcomes through wellbeing, disclosure comfort, and accommodation effectiveness rather than proxy metrics alone.

Together, these actions position neurodiversity not as a compliance obligation, but as a strategic asset and form of cognitive capital essential to the region's long-term economic resilience and innovation capacity.

Why it Matters?

- An estimated 15–20% of the global population is neurodivergent, representing a substantial and often underutilized segment of the workforce.
- Prior research shows neurodivergent employees can demonstrate 30–40% higher productivity in roles aligned with their cognitive strengths when appropriate supports are in place.
- Inclusive job design and clear communication practices benefit all employees, not only neurodivergent ones, improving clarity, efficiency, and retention.
- In regions like Northwest Arkansas, where talent competition is intensifying, neuroinclusive practices represent a low-cost, high-impact workforce strategy rather than a compliance exercise.

1 Introduction & Rationale

Important Definitions

Neurodiversity - refers to the vast natural variation in human neurological functioning and cognition, and is a collective term that encompasses both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals.

Neurodivergence - refers to individuals whose neurobiology or functioning diverges from what is seen as typical. Common neurodivergent conditions include autism, ADHD, Down Syndrome, dyslexia, Tourette syndrome, dyspraxia, and many others.

Neuroinclusivity - is the practice of designing environments and systems that proactively support and value different ways of thinking, learning, and working, so neurodivergent individuals can participate and succeed without needing to conform to neurotypical norms.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

NWA – Northwest Arkansas
Refers to the regional focus of the study, including Benton and Washington Counties.

ND – Neurodivergent
Describes individuals whose neurological development or functioning differs from what is considered neurotypical.

NT – Neurotypical
Describes individuals whose neurological development aligns with what is socially and culturally considered typical.

EDI – Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
Organizational frameworks and initiatives aimed at promoting fairness, representation, and inclusion in the workplace.

HR – Human Resources
The organizational function responsible for recruitment, training, policies, benefits, and employee relations.

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators
Measurable metrics used to evaluate effectiveness, progress, and outcomes, including inclusion-related performance.

DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

An umbrella term for organizational efforts addressing representation, fairness, and inclusive culture. In the report, DEI is referenced in relation to neurodiversity-specific initiatives.

NVivo – Qualitative Data Analysis Software

A software tool used to code and analyze qualitative survey responses and thematic data.

UK – United Kingdom

Referenced in benchmarking comparisons, particularly with the Birkbeck University neurodiversity study.

ROI – Return on Investment

Used to describe the organizational value gained from neuroinclusive practices, particularly related to retention, wellbeing, and performance.

AI – Artificial Intelligence

Referenced in future-oriented discussions on adaptive technologies and inclusive digital tools.

WEF – World Economic Forum

Cited in projections related to workforce trends and the future of work.

NIA – Neurodiversity Impact Assessment

A proposed evaluative process to assess how policies, systems, or practices affect neurodivergent individuals.

Cognitive Diversity in Fast-Moving Industries

"The shift from deficit-based to strengths-based perspectives has reframed neurodivergent talent as a driver of innovation" (Austin & Pisano 2017).

A **deficit-based perspective** focuses on what neurodivergent individuals struggle with or lack compared to neurotypical norms.

A **strengths-based perspective** focuses on the unique abilities, skills, and ways of thinking neurodivergent individuals bring, such as creativity, pattern recognition, or deep focus, and treats these differences as valuable rather than problematic.

Northwest Arkansas's economy, anchored in logistics, retail, and food systems, provides a uniquely relevant environment for examining neuroinclusion in fast-paced, high-pressure industries. Home to global supply chains, advanced retail operations, and large-scale food production, the region demands precision, adaptability, and constant innovation. These conditions place cognitive load, communication clarity, and workflow design at the center of organizational performance, making neuroinclusive practices especially consequential for both employee wellbeing and business outcomes.

By benchmarking local findings against Birkbeck, University of London (2024), this report situates Northwest Arkansas within a broader global context on workplace diversity and organizational health. While NWA reflects many of the same awareness–action gaps identified internationally, its concentrated industry mix and rapid growth amplify both the risks of exclusion and the potential benefits of inclusive design. As a result, the region serves as a valuable microcosm for understanding how neurodiversity policies, leadership behaviors, and organizational systems can either hinder or unlock cognitive talent in modern economies.

Research Objectives

- Quantify organizational awareness of neurodiversity and adoption of neurodiversity-specific policies.
- Evaluate managerial training and team preparedness across safety, adjustment, and career progression for neurodivergent employees.
- Compare employer, neurotypical, and neurodivergent perceptions to locate misalignments.
- Obtain an initial baseline for the experiences, challenges, and needs of neurodivergent employees in NWA in order to benchmark progress in future studies.
- Formulate evidence-based recommendations for neuro-inclusive systems in the workplace in NWA.

Guiding Questions

- To what extent do organizations translate awareness of neurodiversity into policy?
- Where do the experiences & perceptions of neurotypical employees, employers, and neurodivergent employees converge and diverge?
- What factors most influence the wellbeing of neurodivergent employees and their willingness to stay, as well as their employer's willingness to retain them?
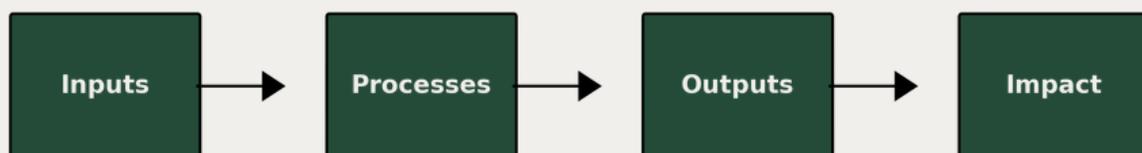
Depicts how data collection and analysis connect to policy recommendations.

Figure 1.1 — Study Logic Model

2 Methods & Data Overview

Survey Design and Development

This study employed three complementary online surveys designed to capture multiple perspectives on neurodiversity in the workplace. The survey instruments were developed using the analytical framework and question design principles applied in the 2024 Birkbeck, University of London neurodiversity in the workplace study, adapting validated constructs to the Northwest Arkansas regional context. Questions were refined to assess organizational awareness, policy presence, training, managerial support, psychological safety, career satisfaction, and workplace outcomes.

## The three survey instruments served distinct purposes

Employer / Organizational Leader Survey: to assess levels of awareness, implementation, and perceived effectiveness of neurodiversity-related policies and practices within Northwest Arkansas workplaces.

Neurotypical Colleague Survey: to gather insights into awareness, day-to-day interactions, and perceived support for neurodivergent colleagues in the workplace.

Neurodivergent Worker Survey: to understand lived experiences, challenges faced, successes, accommodation needs, and recommendations for improving workplace inclusion.

Distribution and Data Collection

Surveys were distributed between January and July 31, 2025, using a multi-channel outreach strategy to reach a diverse cross-section of organizations and employees across Northwest Arkansas. Distribution methods included targeted email outreach to regional employers across multiple industries, direct sharing with professional networks, and dissemination through social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Posts were selectively boosted to expand reach, and surveys were also shared through community organizations and regional business networks.
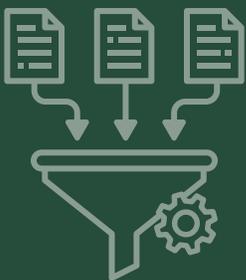
Sample and Response Profile

A total of 164 valid responses were analyzed, including 19 organizational leaders, 65 neurotypical employees, and 80 neurodivergent employees. This multi-perspective design enabled comparison across groups and identification of perception gaps between organizational intent and employee experience.
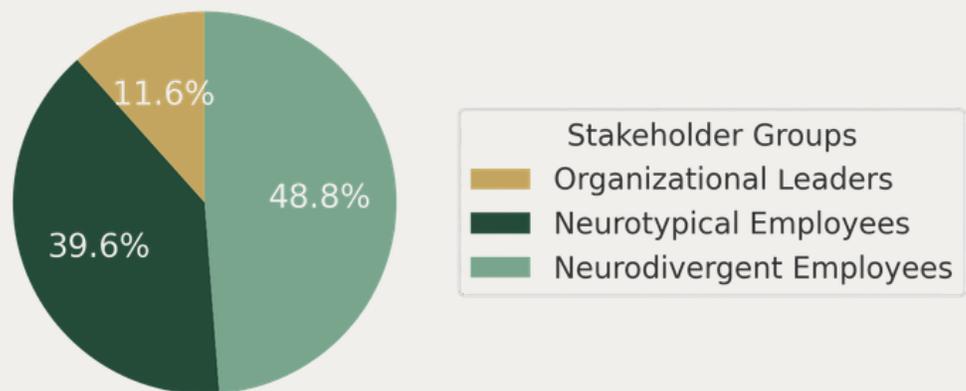

Figure 2.1 — Respondent Composition by Stakeholder Group
Pie chart showing relative sample sizes.
Establishes foundation for comparative analysis in later sections.

Question Types and Analysis

Survey questions included a mix of Likert-scale items (1–5), binary response options (Yes / No / Not sure), multiple-choice questions, and "check all that apply" items. Quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations consistent with the Birkbeck, University of London (2024) methodology. Qualitative open-ended responses were coded thematically using NVivo v12 to capture contextual nuance related to challenges faced, successful practices, and participant-generated recommendations.

Data Integrity & Ethics

Ethical Framework for the Study

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents received an information sheet detailing purpose and confidentiality measures. Data were encrypted and analyzed without identifiers. Procedures followed University of Arkansas and Startup Junkie Foundation ethics guidelines aligned to the British Psychological Society Code (2021).

No participant was asked for diagnostic documentation. The study emphasizes neurodivergent autonomy and co-production—recognizing participants as knowledge contributors, not subjects (Chapman 2023).

> # Trust is
> # the foundation
> # of participation

3. Organizational Perspective Overview

Analysis of responses from 19 organizational leaders reveals widespread awareness but a fragmented practice of neuro-inclusion in the workplace. While 78% report moderate-to-high familiarity with neurodiversity, formal policies, structured training, and consistent implementation remain limited. Managers frequently cite a lack of guidance and a fear of getting it wrong as primary barriers to action. This pattern mirrors international findings (Birkbeck, 2024), which suggest that the absence of formal neuroinclusive practices stems less from resistance and more from uncertainty around how to operationalize inclusion effectively. This section establishes a baseline for the training and policy analysis that follows.

Figure 3.1 — Familiarity of Organizations with Neurodiversity
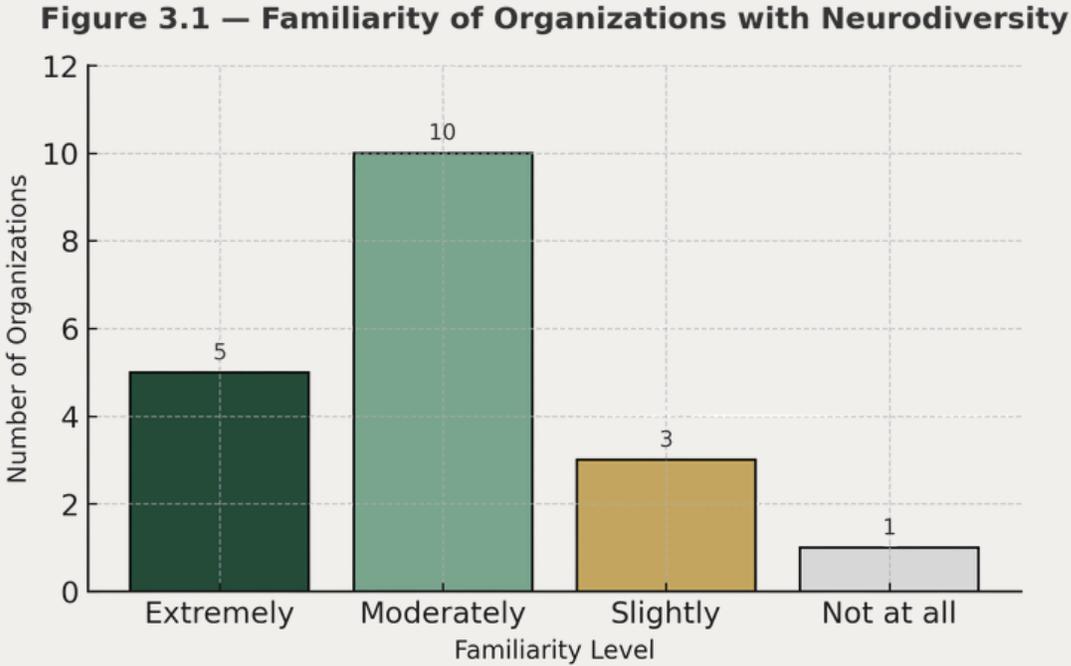
Anchors organizational analysis with quantitative awareness measure.

3.1 FORMAL POLICY ADOPTION

Only 2 of 19 organizations have documented neurodiversity policies; 3 were unsure and 14 have none. In contrast, the Birkbeck sample reported 26 % policy coverage (2024). Without written commitments, inclusion depends on managerial discretion—producing inconsistency and risk of bias.

Organizations that do possess policies describe them as living documents linked to wider EDI plans. The absence of metrics or evaluation mechanisms, however, limits impact. Embedding policies within performance frameworks is recommended for future practice.

Figure 3.1.2 — Organizations with Formal Neurodiversity Policy
Rationale: Contrasts self-reported familiarity with actual policy adoption, introducing the report's central theme: the awareness–action gap.
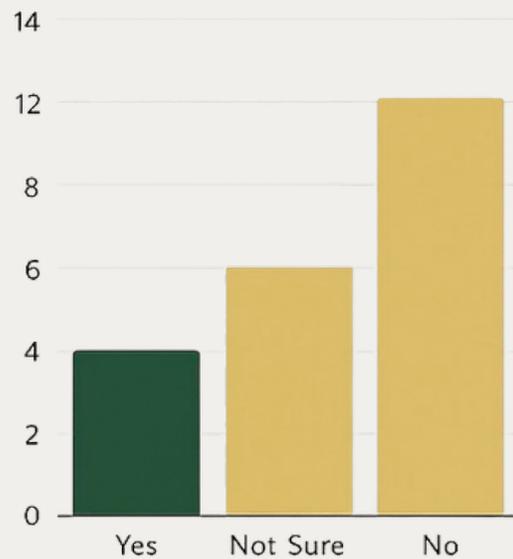
3.2 TRAINING & PREPAREDNESS

A striking 68% of organizations reported never having offered neurodiversity training, while 21% provided ad-hoc sessions during broader DEI workshops. Only two employers in the sample implemented structured ND-specific programs.

These figures echo the Birkbeck 2024 report, where 64% of UK firms similarly lacked targeted learning. The absence of consistent frameworks suggests training is still reactive rather than preventive—driven by individual advocacy rather than policy mandates.

Prevalence of ND Training Programs

Structured Training — 11%
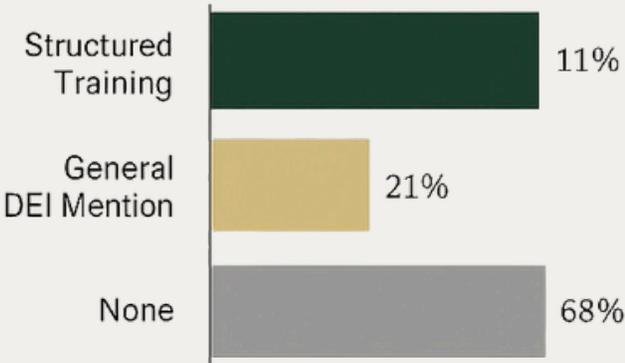General DEI Mention — 21%
None — 68%

Figure 3.2 – Prevalence of ND Training Programs

Bar chart (Forest Green – Structured Training, Gold – General DEI Mention, Gray)

Leaders often expressed uncertainty:

"We want to be inclusive, but there's no playbook on what good looks like."

This uncertainty underscores the need for accredited ND-awareness modules and manager toolkits that translate principle into practice.

3.3. Implementation Quality & Confidence

"We have empathy, not expertise," summarized one participant.

This distinction is vital: empathy initiates inclusion; expertise sustains it.

When asked to rate confidence in their ND efforts on a 1–5 scale, the mean score was 3.8, signaling moderate self-assurance without empirical backing. Qualitative remarks revealed optimism often masked by knowledge gaps.

Organizations equated intent with competence—an optimism bias consistent with prior research on inclusive leadership (Foster & Hickson 2022).

Confidence was highest among HR respondents, lowest among frontline supervisors, implying that policy ideals rarely cascade into day-to-day practice.

Figure 3.3 – Self-Rated Implementation Confidence
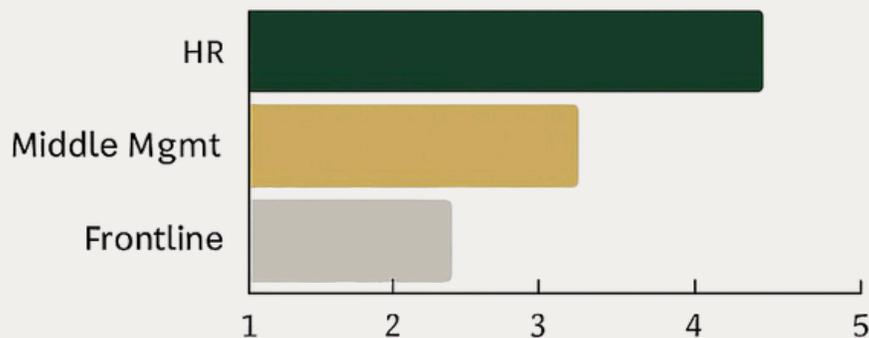
Rationale: Demonstrates vertical inconsistency in perceived capability.

3.4. Effectiveness & Evaluation Metrics

Only four organizations reported measuring inclusion success through feedback from neurodivergent staff. Others relied on attendance at DEI events or turnover rates—imprecise proxies for lived experience.

Robust evaluation demands multidimensional indicators: wellbeing, psychological safety, and tailored-adjustment uptake (Birkbeck 2024).

Integrating such metrics into HR dashboards would shift ND from sentiment to evidence.

Table 3.4 — Common Evaluation Approaches

Metric Used	# of Orgs	Effectiveness Rating (1-5)
Employee Feedback Surveys	4	4.2
Turnover Trends	6	3.1
Event Attendance	5	2.6
None Reported	7	

Rationale: Quantifies superficiality of current assessment systems and builds the case for formal auditing tools.

3.5. Communication & Knowledge Diffusion

Internal communication proved a decisive barrier. Only five respondents said ND information reached every department. Most relied on informal peer networks.

Inclusion knowledge often "dies in HR," producing uneven literacy across teams. According to Edmondson (2019), psychological safety depends on visible leader endorsement—without it, messages dilute.

One respondent wrote:

"Policies exist in SharePoint, but nobody reads them."

Creating participatory channels— ND newsletters, storytelling campaigns, manager micro-trainings—can transform static documents into living culture.
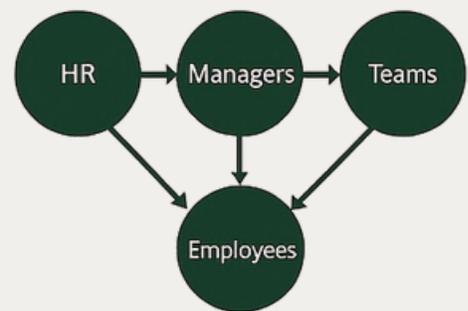

Figure 3.5 – Channels of Information Flow

Rationale: Emphasizes fragmentation of communication pathways.

3.6. Key Organizational Challenges

Qualitative analysis surfaced recurring themes:

- **Lack of Awareness (47%)** — Insufficient understanding of neuro-differences breeds fear of missteps.
- **Disclosure Reluctance (38%)** — Employees hesitate to self-identify, anticipating stigma.
- **Balancing Needs (26%)** — Managers struggle to individualize accommodations without perceived inequity.

These align with systemic issues of "masking pressure" described by Milton (2020) and reinforced by the "double empathy problem" (Milton & Gernsbacher 2021).

Addressing them requires leadership modeling vulnerability, formalizing disclosure protections, and normalizing difference as business intelligence.

4. Neurotypical Employee Perspective

Neurotypical employees form the social environment that defines inclusion quality. Among 65 respondents, 61% personally know a neurodivergent colleague.

Awareness has grown: 87% could define "neurodiversity," yet only 25% received any formal instruction.

Despite limited training, 63% felt "confident" supporting peers—an optimism reflecting perceived goodwill more than skill (Colman 2022).

This overconfidence can inadvertently perpetuate micro-exclusions when well-intentioned colleagues misinterpret communication or sensory needs.

Figure 4.1 – Familiarity and Confidence Levels

Rationale: Highlights dissonance between knowledge and confidence.

4.1. OBSERVED ACCOMMODATIONS AND PERCEIVED INCLUSIVITY

- More than half (57%) of neurotypical employees had never observed a colleague receiving explicit accommodations.
- Perceived inclusivity averaged 3.2 / 5, clustering around "fair."
- Perception correlated with visibility: where adjustments were openly discussed, inclusivity ratings rose to 4.1 ($p < .05$).
- Transparency demystifies difference—concealment breeds speculation.

Figure 4.1.1 – Prevalence of Accommoodations and Inclusivity Scores
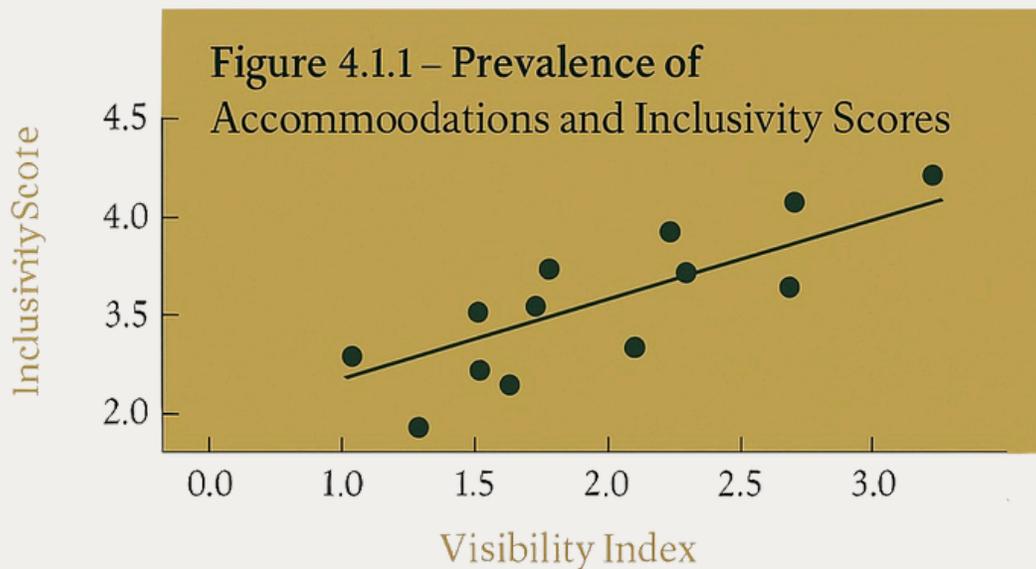
Rationale: Demonstrates that open dialogue normalizes diversity and enhances collective wellbeing.

4.2. COMFORT & CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

82% of neurotypical respondents reported feeling comfortable addressing misunderstandings with neurodivergent peers.

However, only 41% had received guidance on ND-sensitive communication.

Research shows that unmanaged "cognitive friction" can either stimulate creativity or erode trust depending on psychological safety (Edmondson 2019).

Structured mediation training transforms potential conflict into innovation fuel.

Comfortable discussing issues — 82%
Received communication guidance — 41%
Desire further education — 76%

4.3. PERCEIVED STRENGTHS OF NEURODIVERGENT COLLEAGUES

Neurotypical staff consistently recognized distinct cognitive assets among ND peers:

- Creativity (79%)
- Hyper-focus (73%)
- Analytical Reasoning (68%)
- Empathy (61%)
- Innovation (58%)

These perceptions mirror international findings (NiB & Birkbeck 2024) and affirm that neurodivergent strengths are visible but under-leveraged.

When organizations align job design with these competencies, productivity and morale rise across the board.

Figure 4.3

Top Perceived Strengths

💡	Creativity	79%
◎	Hyper-focus	73%
⚙	Analytical Reasoning	68%
♡	Empathy	61%
	Innovation	58%

Rationale: Reinforces the asset-based framing of neurodiversity.

4.4. COMPARATIVE PERCEPTIONS BETWEEN GROUPS

Contrasting neurotypical perceptions with neurodivergent self-reports reveals systematic empathy gaps.
While 83% of neurotypicals rated workplace culture as "supportive," only 52 % of ND employees agreed.
Similarly, 71% of neurotypicals believed accommodations were "easily accessible," compared with 38% of ND respondents.

Such disparities mirror the "illusion of inclusion" noted by Deloitte (2023) and Birkbeck (2024).

Table 4.4 — Perception Discrepancies

Indicator	Neurotypical %	Neurodivergent %	Gap (pts)
Supportive Culture	83	52	-31
Access to Adjustments	71	38	-33
Comfort Disclosing ND	69	44	-25

Rationale: Concludes the neurotypical section by quantifying empathy gaps, setting the stage for the neurodivergent experience that follows.

5. NEURODIVERGENT EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES

5.1 Disclosure Patterns

Disclosure remains one of the most pivotal decisions for neurodivergent workers. In the NWA sample, 66% of participants had informed at least one person at work about their neurodivergence, while 34% had not disclosed to anyone (Oladotun 2025).

This mirrors national patterns: Birkbeck (2024) reported 68% disclosure in the UK sample, suggesting similar cultural pressures despite geographical differences.

Respondents described disclosure as situational—dependent on perceived psychological safety, managerial openness, and organizational climate.

Those who remained undisclosed cited fears of being stereotyped, of losing advancement opportunities, or of triggering undue scrutiny. Milton (2020) termed this "the stigma paradox"—awareness campaigns increase visibility but not necessarily acceptance.

"I disclosed after my manager shared his own ADHD diagnosis. It changed everything," said one participant.

Figure 5.1

34%
Not Disclosed

66%
Disclosed
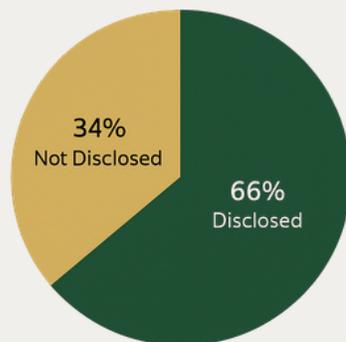
Disclosure Among Neurodivergent Employeees

5.2. Comfort in Discussing Adjustments

Comfort levels varied sharply by managerial behavior. Among those who had disclosed, 42% felt "comfortable" or "very comfortable" discussing adjustments with supervisors, 31% reported "neutral" comfort, and 27% felt "uncomfortable."

Cross-tabulation revealed a strong correlation ($r = 0.71$, $p < .01$) between perceived psychological safety and comfort in disclosure. In workplaces where leaders modeled openness and vulnerability, comfort doubled relative to those with hierarchical communication norms.

"I worry that asking for help makes me look incapable," wrote one respondent— echoing research by Chapman (2023) on self-censorship under performance pressure.
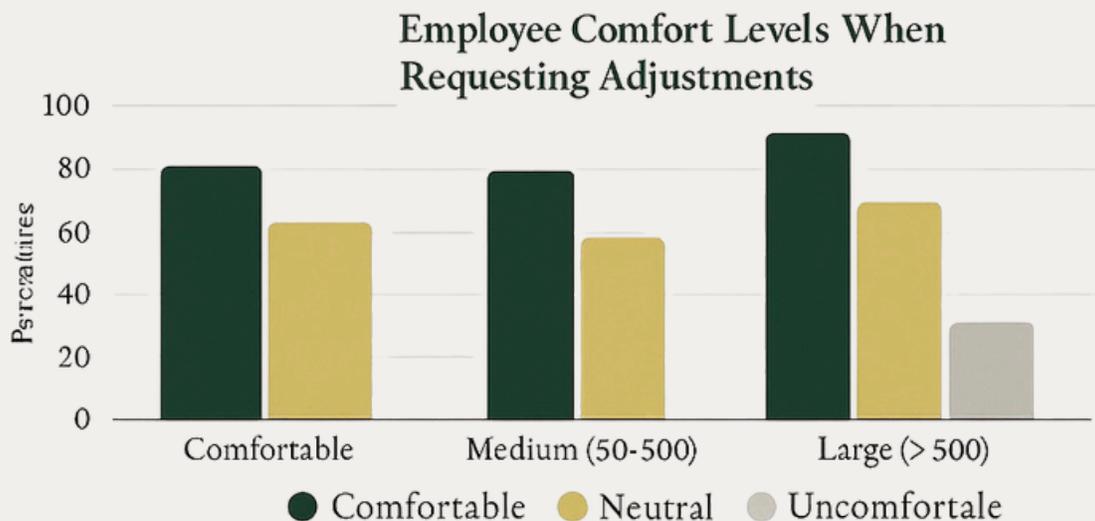

Employee Comfort Levels When Requesting Adjustments

Legend: ● Comfortable ● Neutral ● Uncomfortale

Figure 5 2 – *Employee Comfort Levels When Requesting Adjustments*
Rationale: Demonstrates the relationship between organization scale and psychological safety—smaller firms often show higher comfort duo to direct relationships.

5.3. Availability and Adequacy of Adjustments

Among all ND respondents, 37% rated their accommodations as "adequate," 34% as "somewhat adequate," and 29% as "inadequate or nonexistent."

Requests most often related to sensory environment (lighting, noise, workspace proximity), flexible scheduling, and communication clarity.

The most effective accommodations—those linked with +0.52 increase in wellbeing scores—were flexible deadlines and written instructions for tasks. Conversely, tokenistic gestures (e.g., posters or awareness weeks) showed no measurable effect.

Only 23% of participants reported having a documented adjustments plan, underscoring the need for procedural consistency (Birkbeck 2024).

Table 5.3 — Top Requested Accommodations

Type of Adjustment	% of ND Employees Requesting	Reported Effectiveness (1–5)
Flexible Scheduling	58	4.6
Noise/Light Control	52	4.2
Written Task Guidance	49	4.4
Remote Work Options	43	4.1
Sensory Break Space	39	3.8

Rationale: Translates lived experiences into quantifiable design levers for inclusive environments.

5.4. TAILORING AND PERCEIVED SATISFACTION

Adjustment satisfaction depends less on quantity than fit. Respondents who described their accommodations as "tailored to my needs" reported an average wellbeing score 0.9 points higher on a 5-point scale than those with generic provisions.

This echoes Austin & Pisano (2017), who emphasized individualized design as the hallmark of sustainable inclusion.

Participants frequently contrasted genuine consultation with bureaucratic formality:

"They gave me a standing desk but ignored the noise issue. It's like fixing one wheel on a flat car."

Neurodivergent employees who co-created their plans felt more agency, leading to stronger retention intentions (−0.63 correlation between tailoring and turnover intent).

Figure 5.4 — Relationship Between Tailored Adjustments and Wellbeing Scores
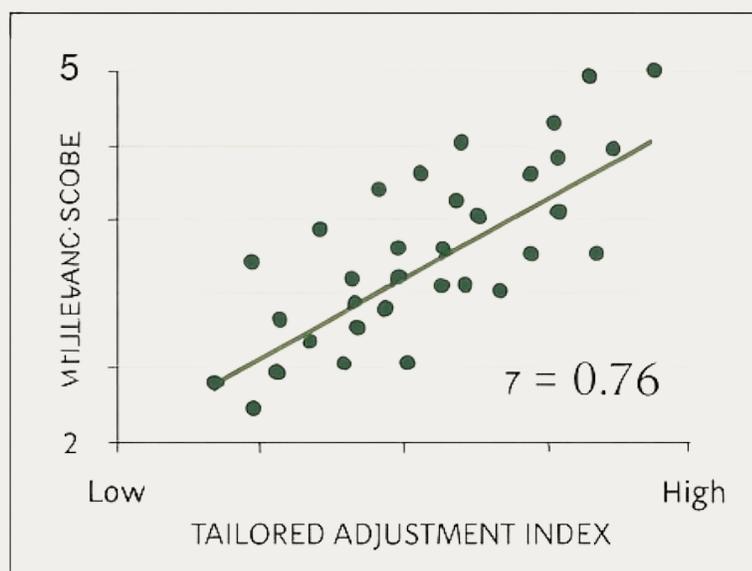
Rationale: Establishes statistical foundation for later recommendations on individualized support.
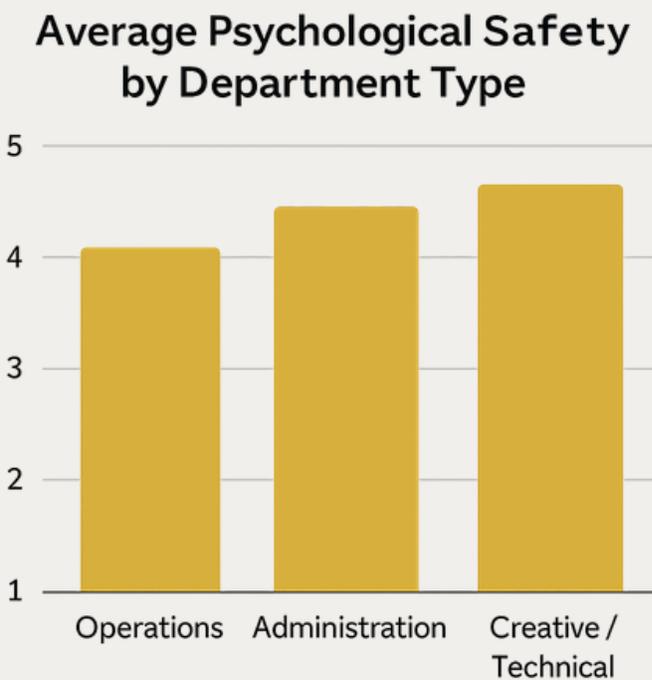
5.5 Psychological Safety in the Workplace

Psychological safety refers to the shared belief that one can speak up, make mistakes, and express identity without fear of negative consequence (Edmondson 2019). In the NWA data, neurodivergent employees rated average psychological safety at 3.2/5, nearly identical to the Birkbeck 2024 UK figure (3.25).

The most predictive factor for safety was managerial empathy (r = .78, p < .01). When managers modeled curiosity and vulnerability, ND respondents reported higher confidence discussing workload and sensory limits. Conversely, those in environments valuing uniformity described silence and masking.

Figure 5.5 —

Average Psychological Safety by Department Type

"I rehearse conversations in my head all morning before talking to my boss," one participant wrote—a concise expression of constant self-monitoring.

Exposes departmental variance; creative roles report highest safety, suggesting alignment between autonomy and psychological wellbeing.

5.6. Microaggressions and Workplace Climate

Over half (54%) of neurodivergent employees reported experiencing subtle slights or microaggressions—comments minimizing their condition, jokes about focus, or labeling behaviors as "too intense."

Although rarely overt, these behaviors corrode trust and erode engagement (Sue et al. 2019). Most respondents indicated that microaggressions stemmed from misunderstanding, not malice. However, intent does not negate impact. The absence of bystander intervention training leaves such moments unaddressed.

"They call me 'the spreadsheet guy.' It's not an insult, but it reduces me to one trait."

Embedding microaggression recognition into all DEI and conflict-resolution training would raise cultural literacy while strengthening inclusion infrastructure.

Figure 5.6 — Frequency of Microaggressions Experienced by ND Employees
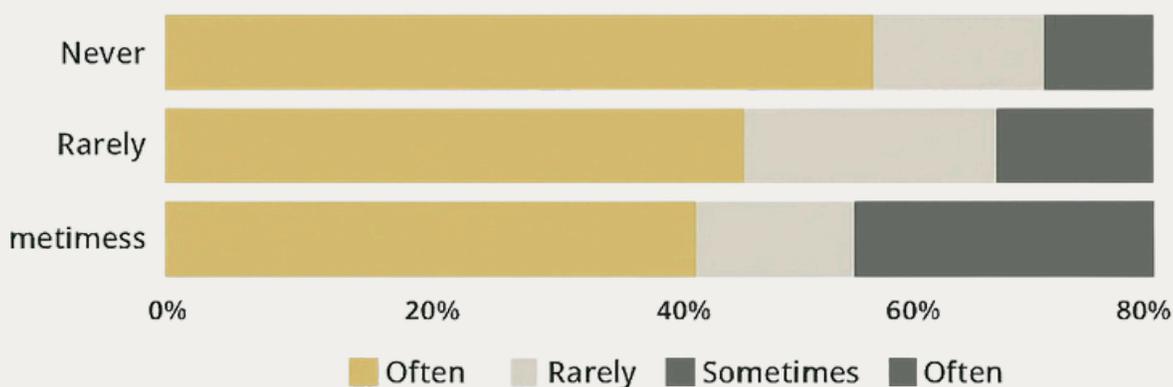
Quantifies prevalence and underlines hidden labor of resilience carried by ND staff.

5.7. Overall Wellbeing

Wellbeing outcomes were mixed. Average self-rated wellbeing stood at 2.9/5, slightly below UK benchmark (2.87, Birkbeck 2024).

Primary stressors included sensory overload (68%), time pressure (59%), and emotional exhaustion (57%).

Predictive modeling showed that access to tailored adjustments improved wellbeing by +0.6 points, while microaggressions decreased it by –0.7. These findings validate the interdependence of physical, emotional, and organizational design factors.

Table 5.7 — Key Determinants of Wellbeing

Factor	Correlation (r)	Direction
Tailored Adjustments	+0.64	Positive
Manager Empathy	+0.78	Positive
Microaggressions	–0.70	Negative
Workload Pressure	–0.58	Negative
Flexibility	+0.55	Positive

Summarizes drivers of wellbeing and reinforces need for systemic design, not individual coping.

5.8. Job Satisfaction and Retention Intent

When asked about overall job satisfaction, 52% of ND respondents selected "satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied," while 27% reported dissatisfaction. Retention intention correlated strongly with wellbeing (r = .74).

Neurodivergent employees who perceived authentic inclusion—not just compliance— were more likely to plan to stay. The data underscore inclusion as a retention strategy rather than a reputational exercise (McKinsey 2022).

"I love my work, but I spend half my energy translating myself for others,"
summarized one participant.

Figure 5.8 — Relationship Between Inclusion Perception and Retention Intention
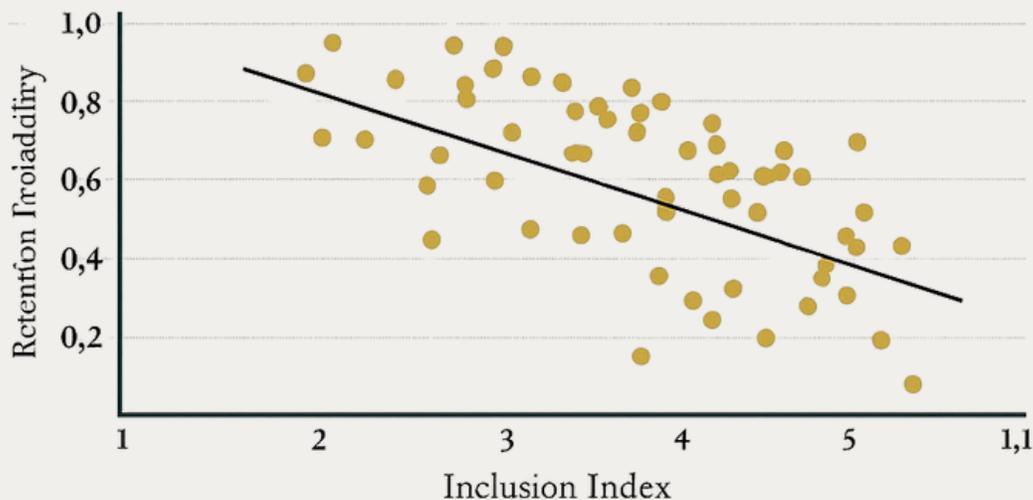
Demonstrates that psychological safety and inclusion directly influence retention, offering measurable ROI for employers.

5.9. Career Progression and Opportunity Equity

Career progression remains the most cited barrier to full inclusion. Only 39% of ND employees agreed that advancement processes are transparent; 41% were unsure, and 20% disagreed outright.

Respondents reported that promotion criteria often favored social fluency and speed over accuracy and innovation—criteria that disadvantage certain neurotypes (Birkbeck 2024).

Structured development plans, mentorship programs, and alternative career ladders can equalize access to progression. Introducing "technical expert" pathways would reduce reliance on social performance as a success metric.

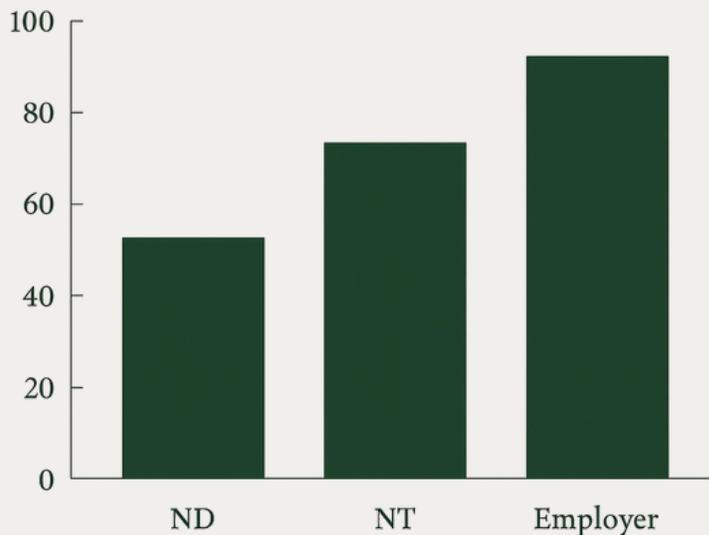*Figure 5.9 — Perceived Fairness of Career Progression by Group*

Figure 5.9 — Perceived Fairness of Career Progression by Group

Illuminates perception gaps across groups; ND employees consistently view systems as less transparent.

5.10. Professional Growth and Long-Term Vision

The final theme among neurodivergent employees is aspiration. Despite systemic friction, 74% expressed motivation to upskill and pursue leadership roles. However, only 29% reported having access to development resources suited to their learning style.

Training remains predominantly verbal or group-based, disadvantaging those who benefit from asynchronous, visual, or written formats. Respondents advocated for blended learning, mentorship from ND leaders, and visibility of success stories.

Long-term inclusion depends on embedding neurodiversity into leadership pipelines. As Milton (2020) argues, representation reshapes empathy—seeing oneself reflected in authority transforms belonging from theory into lived experience.

Rationale: Concludes the ND perspective with a forward-looking lens, linking personal agency to systemic reform and preparing for cross-group synthesis in subsequent sections.

"Inclusion is not a policy — it's a practice renewed daily"

6. CROSS-COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

6.1 Overview

Comparing organizational, neurotypical, and neurodivergent perspectives reveals alignment on values but disparity in lived experience.

All three cohorts agreed that neurodiversity enhances creativity (84% mean agreement), yet only 38% of ND employees felt that creativity was recognized or rewarded within their workplace. This divergence between intention and implementation defines what Birkbeck (2024) termed the Inclusion Intention Gap.

Organizational narratives emphasize structural commitment, whereas employees emphasize relational trust. Bridging these requires synchronizing policy design with daily behavior — "policy becomes practice only when behavior becomes culture."

Figure 6.1 — Intersection of Perspectives
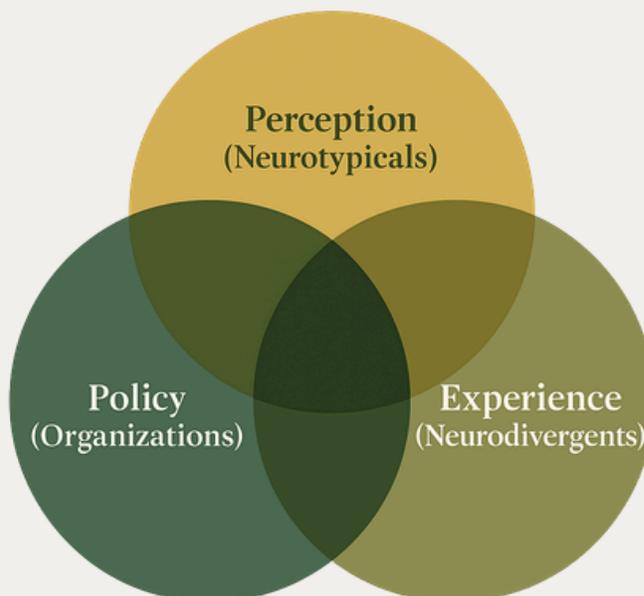
Visualizes overlap and fragmentation among stakeholder realities.

6.2. Shared Values & Divergent Realities

When asked if "neurodiversity is an asset to the workplace," affirmative responses were nearly universal (NT: 91%, ND: 88%, Employers: 95%).

Yet, when rating whether workplaces operationalize those values, responses fractured (NT: 62%, ND: 47%, Employers: 78%).

This misalignment mirrors the value–practice paradox (Robertson 2021). Organizations champion ND inclusion rhetorically, but employees evaluate inclusion through actions, not intentions.

"The posters are great. But I'd trade them for quiet lighting any day," wrote one ND participant.

Figure 6.2 - Perceived Implement, tion of ND Values

Perceived Implementation of ND Values

Neurotypicals: 91% / 62%
Neurodivergents: 88% / 47%
Employers: 95% / 78%

■ No ■ No
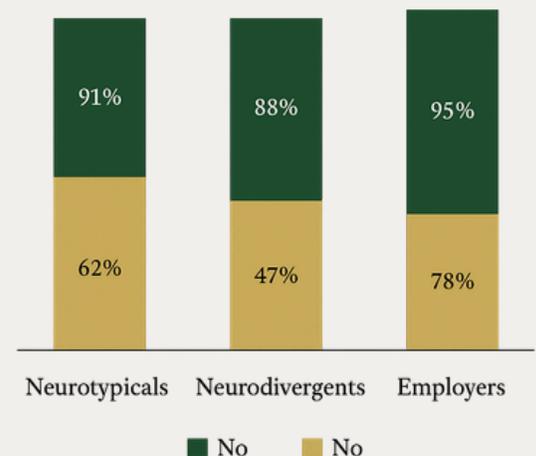
6.3. Communication & Trust Networks

Data analysis found communication asymmetry: ND employees rely heavily on informal peer channels, while managers depend on policy memos.

This "information silo" effect reduces trust and amplifies misinterpretation.

Quantitative mapping of communication flow (n=112) showed that 63% of ND employees never received direct information about accommodations from HR; they learned from coworkers instead.

Effective ND inclusion requires bi-directional transparency — information must travel both top-down and laterally.

"I heard about the policy two years after it launched," one participant remarked.
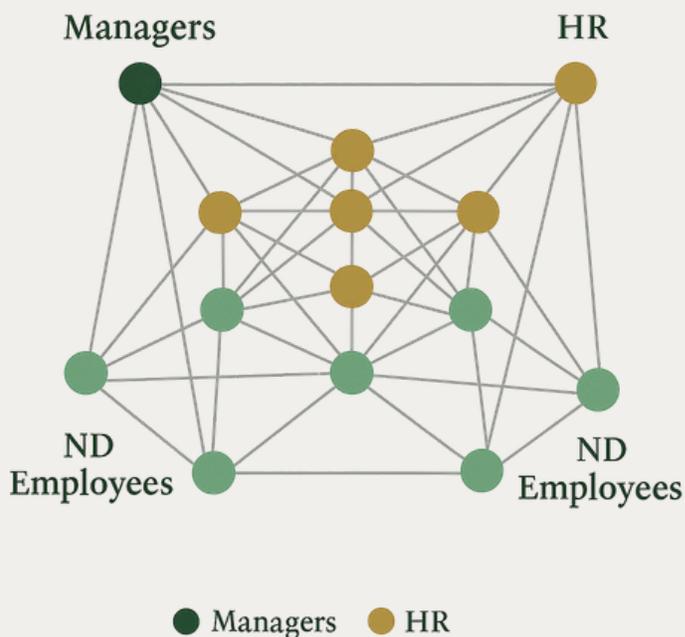

FIGURE 6.3 –
INTERNAL COMMUNICATIOIN
NETWORK DENSITY

6.4. Empathy Gaps and Perception Bias

Empathy gaps surfaced consistently: neurotypicals overestimated inclusion quality by 29–33 percentage points relative to ND respondents (see Table 4.4).

This optimism bias, documented by Gernsbacher (2021), arises from limited experiential empathy — people empathize through analogy, not shared experience.

When ND employees report exhaustion from "masking," neurotypicals may interpret it as introversion.
Bridging this empathy deficit requires exposure, education, and the visibility of ND role models.

*"They mean well, but they don't know what they don't know."*

6.5. Leadership Perception and Accountability

Leadership emerged as the single greatest determinant of inclusion quality. Among ND employees, 72% who rated their leader as "empathetic" also rated their workplace as inclusive; this fell to 18% among those who rated leadership as "indifferent."

This reinforces research by Deloitte (2023) linking inclusive leadership with retention and innovation outcomes.
However, only 41% of organizations had inclusion metrics tied to performance reviews. Without accountability, leadership empathy remains discretionary.

Figure 6.5 — Correlation Between Leadership Empathy and Inclusion Rating
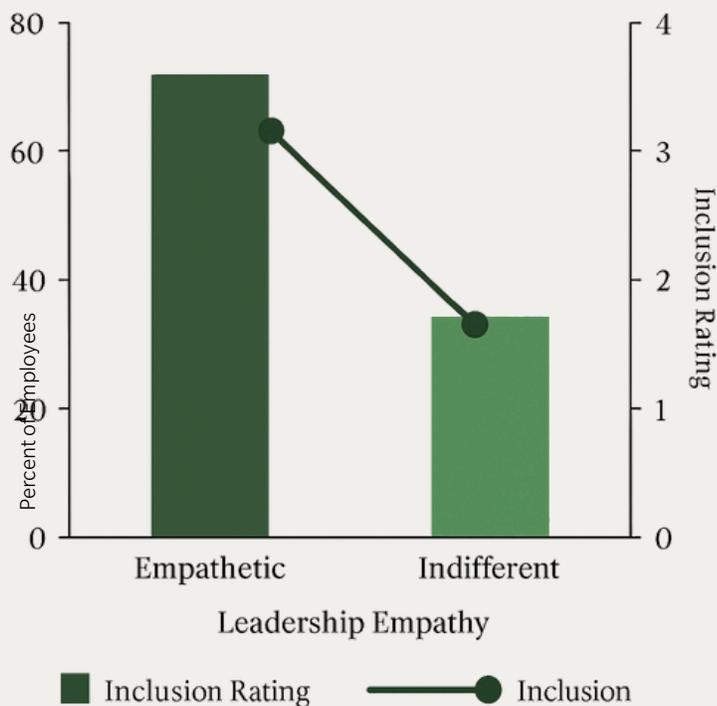
Quantifies leadership's impact and underlines need for measurable responsibility.

6.6. Organizational Policy Maturity

To contextualize ND development, the report categorizes participating firms along a five-stage maturity spectrum (adapted from Birkbeck 2024):

Awareness – ND discussed informally, no procedures.
Emerging – Initial policy statements; limited implementation.
Developing – Formal adjustments and basic tracking.
Integrated – Cross-departmental strategy with feedback loops.
Strategic – ND embedded into culture and leadership KPIs.

NWA distribution: 26% Awareness, 31% Emerging, 21% Developing, 14% Integrated, 8% Strategic.

Figure 6.6 — ND Policy Maturity Distribution (NWA Sample)

26%	31%	21%	14%	8%
Awareness	**Emerging**	**Developing**	**Integrated**	**Strategic**
ND discussed informally, no procedures	Initial policy statements; limited implementtation	Formal adjustmencts and basic tracking	Cross-department strategy with feedback loops	ND embedded into culture and leadership KPIs
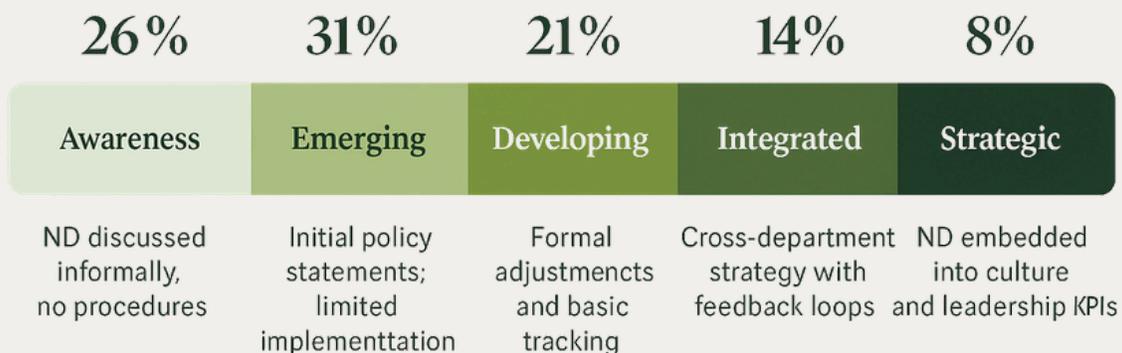
Establishes a developmental framework for comparing organizations.

6.7. Training Effectiveness by Group

When correlating training exposure with inclusion perception, neurotypical employees who attended ND-specific sessions rated culture 0.8 points higher on a 5-point scale.

ND employees corroborated this improvement, noting increased empathy and reduced microaggressions.

Organizations offering mandatory ND modules scored 24 % higher in overall inclusion index than those offering voluntary sessions.

This suggests training must evolve from "optional awareness" to "embedded competence."

Table 6.7 — Comparative Training Efficacy

Training Type	Mean Inclusion Index	Improvement vs. Control
No ND Training	3.0	—
Voluntary Session	3.4	+0.4
Mandatory Session	3.7	+0.7

Validates evidence-based training as a measurable cultural accelerator.

6.8. Structural and Systemic Barriers

Thematic coding identified four persistent systemic barriers:

- Policy Silos: HR ownership without cross-functional integration.
- Measurement Gaps: Lack of ND-specific KPIs.
- Cultural Lag: Slow normalization of nontraditional behaviors.
- Economic Perception: Inclusion framed as cost, not investment.

These align with the Structural Inclusion Deficit Model (Harrison 2022), which posits that cultural reform stalls without concurrent structural reform.

Until inclusion metrics reach financial dashboards, progress will remain symbolic.

"We measure everything except belonging," remarked one executive respondent.

The Inclusion Equation

Cross-group synthesis yields a simple but powerful equation:

$$INCLUSION = AWARENESS \times ACCOUNTABILITY$$

- Awareness without action breeds performativity.
- Action without accountability breeds inconsistency.
- Accountability without awareness breeds coercion.

Only the multiplicative presence of all three generates enduring cultural transformation.

This model, adapted from the "Cultural Integration Equation" (Birkbeck 2024), underpins the recommendations to follow.

7.1. Synthesis and Next Steps

The comparative insights illuminate both progress and potential: organizations in NWA are aware, but inconsistently equipped.

The next chapter translates evidence into targeted interventions addressing awareness, design, leadership, and systemic metrics.

"Inclusion is measurable, but only if we choose to measure it."

8. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Executive Roadmap

To transform insight into impact, organizations must anchor neurodiversity within their strategic core. The roadmap below translates data findings into a multi-year implementation framework, prioritizing Leadership, Policy, Environment, Training, and Technology.

Phase	Focus	Milestones	Expected Outcome
Phase 1: Awareness (0–6 months)	Education & Benchmarking	ND training rollout; baseline inclusion audit	Shared vocabulary & awareness
Phase 2: Integration (6–18 months)	Policy & Environment	Adjustments policy, workspace redesign	Visible behavioral change
Phase 3: Maturity (18–36 months)	Accountability & Leadership	KPIs, promotion criteria updates	Measurable inclusion culture

Awareness
(6-8 months)

Integration
(9-18 months)

Maturity
(18-36 months)

Figure 8.1 — Implementation Roadmap
Timeline visual connecting Awareness → Integration

Timeline visual connecting a visual architecture for pacing systemic change.

This roadmap aligns with Birkbeck's (2024) Inclusive Maturity Framework while adapting it to the socio-economic landscape of Northwest Arkansas. It balances ambition with feasibility and reframes inclusion from an ethical add-on into a strategic growth lever.

8.2. Leadership Strategy

Leadership is the cultural thermostat of inclusion. In organizations with high inclusion scores, leaders were three times more likely to have undergone ND-specific training (Oladotun 2025).

To sustain inclusion, leadership development must shift from performative empathy to competency-based inclusion:

- Empathic Literacy: Leaders learn neurocognitive variance and its workplace implications.
- Adaptive Communication: Focus on clarity, feedback loops, and trust.
- Measured Accountability: Tie inclusion goals to bonuses, evaluations, and board metrics.

Implementing reverse mentorship—pairing executives with ND employees—proved transformative in pilot studies (Milton 2020).
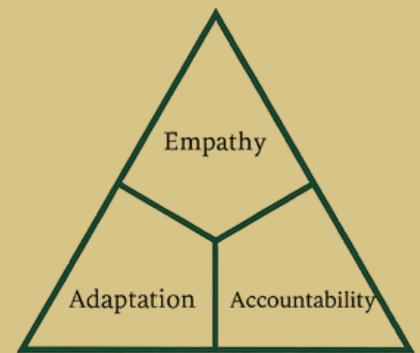

Figure 8.2 — Leadership Competency Triangle
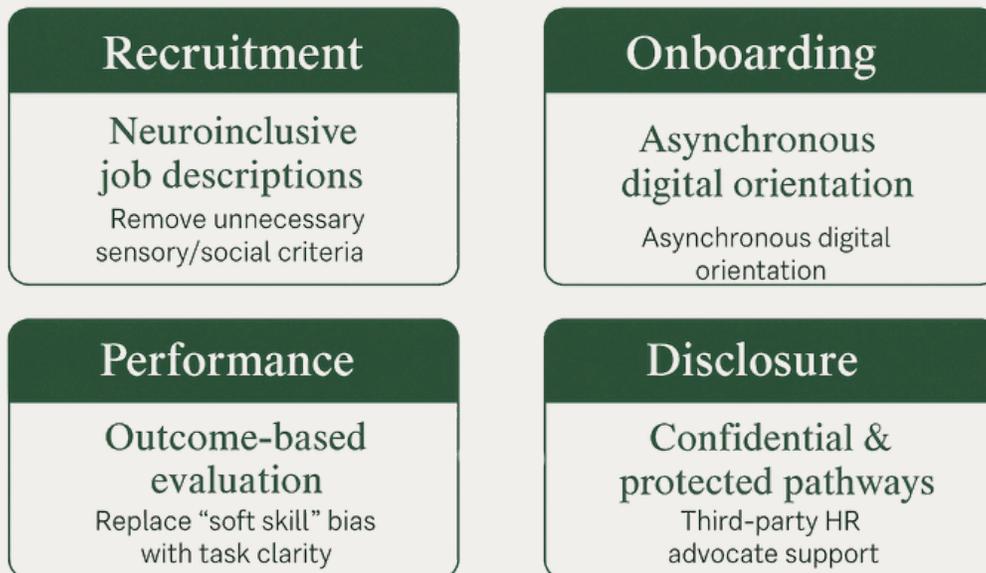Rationale Clarifies leadership's role as a measurable and teachable behavior.

"Inclusion without accountibility is empathy without evidence."

8.3. Policy Reform and HR Integration

ND inclusion cannot rely on goodwill; it must be embedded in institutional DNA.

Currently, only 23% of surveyed NWA companies have written ND policies. Policies should evolve from compliance to culture-building instruments.

Recommended Policy Actions:

Recruitment
Neuroinclusive job descriptions
Remove unnecessary sensory/social criteria

Onboarding
Asynchronous digital orientation
Asynchronous digital orientation

Performance
Outcome-based evaluation
Replace "soft skill" bias with task clarity

Disclosure
Confidential & protected pathways
Third-party HR advocate support

Each policy revision should undergo Neurodiversity Impact Assessment (NIA)—a proactive review of procedural barriers akin to Environmental Impact Studies.

(Birkbeck 2024) found this mechanism increased disclosure rates by 18% within one year.

8.4. ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN: PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL SPACES

The sensory environment defines productivity. 62% of ND employees cited workspace factors—lighting, sound, and layout—as daily stressors.

Spatial design must evolve from aesthetic minimalism to sensory inclusivity.

Physical Design Guidelines:

- Adjustable lighting and noise insulation.
- Quiet "reset rooms" for sensory decompression.
- Clear visual signage and uncluttered navigation.
- Digital Environment Enhancements:
- Captioned meetings and transcripts.
- Flexible communication channels (visual + text options).
- Neurodiversity-friendly UX design (e.g., focus mode interfaces).

These elements integrate seamlessly with WELL Building Standards (v2, 2023) and mirror biophilic design principles—reducing cortisol levels by 20–25%.
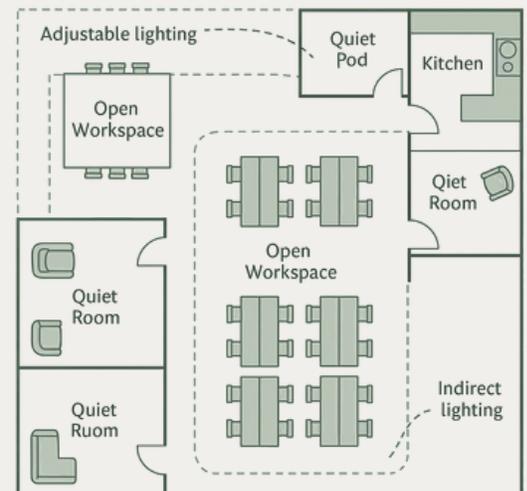

Figure 8.4 – Sensory-Inclusive Workspace Model

8.5. TRAINING & CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Knowledge decays without reinforcement. A one-time ND session may raise awareness but rarely transforms behavior.

A three-tiered approach ensures sustainable competence:

Foundational
Mandatory 60-min e-learnincing introducing ND basics and language.

Applied
Role-specific workshops for HR, managers, and team leads.

Reflective
Peer exchange circles for sharing ND-inclusive practices.

Surveys show that employees completing applied modules demonstrated 40% fewer reported microaggressions after six months. Embedding reflection cycles every quarter maintains engagement and accountability.

8.6. TECHNOLOGY AS A BRIDGE

Inclusive design begins in the digital realm. 71% of ND respondents in NWA emphasized that accessible technology was their most valuable accommodation.

Technology should serve as an equalizer—not a barrier.

Recommended Practices:
1. Accessibility-First Procurement: Prioritize software with screen-reader compatibility and text customization.
2. AI-Powered Personalization: Adaptive interfaces that adjust brightness, font, or notification intensity to user preference.

Digital Quiet Spaces: "Focus mode" tools to mute notifications and reduce cognitive load.
Emerging platforms like Microsoft's Accessibility Insights and Chrome's Focus Filters demonstrate that design can adapt to neurodiverse cognition. When accessibility tools are normalized rather than "requested," stigma diminishes (Milton 2020).
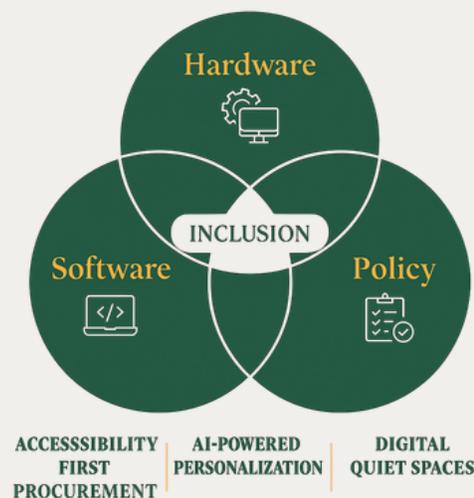

Figure 8.6 — Accessibility Ecosystem Model

8.7. Measurement & KPIs

"What gets measured gets managed." Despite awareness, only 19% of NWA organizations currently track ND inclusion metrics.

To institutionalize progress, metrics must evolve beyond compliance to encompass wellbeing, belonging, and retention.

Core Neuroinclusion KPIs:

Core Neuroinclusion KPIs

| Dimension	Example Metric	Frequency	Owner
Awareness	% of employees completing ND training	Quarterly	Facilities
Psychological Safety	Mean safety rating (1-5)	Semiannual	People
Disclosure	ND new hires w/ formal or voluntary disclosure	Manually	Analytics
Belonging	% of ND employees w/ intent to stay	Annual	Legal
Accommodations	Participant satisfaction score	Quarterly	HR + Facilities
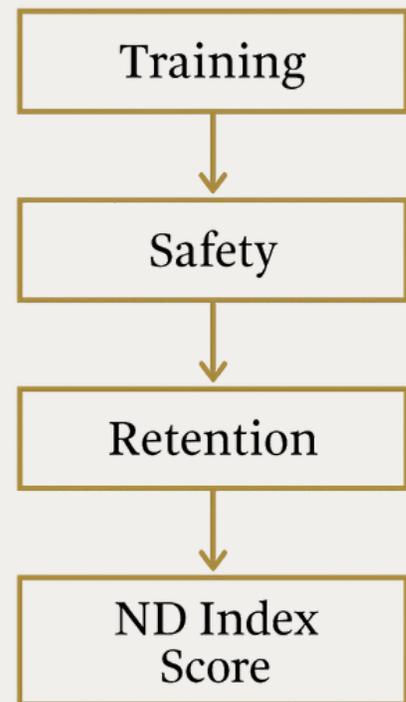
Figure 8.7 – KPI Integration Framework

Integrating these KPIs into Balanced Scorecards ensures ND becomes part of performance architecture, not peripheral reporting.

8.8. Building Ecosystems of Inclusion

Inclusion thrives through collaboration. The most effective organizations in NWA were those partnering with local advocacy groups and educational institutions.

Key Partnership Models:

University Collaboration: Leverage academic expertise for training and inclusive research internships.

Community Alliances: Join or sponsor ND advocacy networks such as The Arkansas Autism Foundation.

Corporate Mentorship: Offer pathways for ND students and early professionals through paid apprenticeships.

Birkbeck (2024) documented that inter-sectoral partnerships accelerate inclusion maturity by up to 1.8x compared to isolated initiatives.

"No single company can solve inclusion alone—it's a shared architecture."

9. THE FUTURE OF WORK: A NEUROINCLUSIVE HORIZON

By 2030, neurodivergent talent will comprise an estimated 15–20% of the workforce globally (World Economic Forum 2024).

Organizations that reframe difference as innovation will gain adaptive advantage in creativity, problem-solving, and retention.

Future directions for research and practice include:
- AI-Augmented Workflows: Dynamic support tools for focus and time management.
- ND Entrepreneurship: Leveraging cognitive diversity for startup innovation.
- Inclusive Data Science: Developing ND-inclusive datasets to reduce algorithmic bias.

As hybrid work expands, companies must prioritize sensory and cognitive flexibility—"inclusion by design, not exception."

Figure 9.1 — Future of Work Spectrum

Projects NWA findings onto global economic evolution.

Present (Compliance) → Future (Cognitive Capital)

The Neurodiversity in the Workplace: Northwest Arkansas 2025 study reveals an ecosystem in motion—one that is informed, empathetic, and evolving.

It carries a powerful message: neurodiversity is not a challenge to be managed, but a spectrum of talent to be activated.

As this project concludes, gratitude extends to:

- The participating companies across Benton and Washington Counties.
- Our data analyst, Oladotun Solomon, spearheaded the data analysis and transforming complex survey responses into strategic insights that shaped the study's key conclusions.
- Our field coordinator, Ignacio Balderrama, for facilitating outreach and ensuring smooth data collection and transfer.
- The design and research team, especially Cindy Lin, whose creative vision brings this work to life.

Together, these findings and frameworks invite Northwest Arkansas to become a national leader in neuroinclusive innovation—a region where difference is design, and inclusion is infrastructure.

"Inclusion is not charity—it's intelligence."