TALOGY

NEURODIVERSITY IN ASSESSMENT

Building a vision for assessment that supports neurodiversity



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Introduction

Neurodiversity is a concept that recognizes and embraces the natural variations in human neurology, including neurodivergent conditions like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia. It emphasizes that these differences are part of normal human variation, relating to how people think, learn, and process information.

In the workplace, neurodiversity has received increased attention as an essential aspect of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Notably, research findings indicate a significant disparity in employment rates for neurodivergent adults, with their unemployment rate as much as three times the rate for people with a disability and eight times the rate for non-disabled adults[10,22]. These statistics underscore the pressing need to prioritise and enhance employment opportunities for neurominorities.

The growing recognition of the lack of inclusivity around neurodiversity has prompted a number of major corporations - such as SAP, Virgin and Microsoft - to implement targeted inclusion initiatives, which have seen great success[3]. As a result, substantial evidence has emerged demonstrating the social and commercial advantages of having a neurodiverse workforce. By embracing neurodiversity, organizations can tap into a wide range of talents, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches that may not be present in a neurotypical workforce. This can lead to increased innovation, productivity, and improved decision-making. Additionally, creating an inclusive workplace that values neurodiversity has been found to enhance employee well-being and morale, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and retention[12,32].

Despite these advancements, there remains uncertainty in the recruitment field around best practices for promoting neurodiversity on a wider scale. In light of this, Talogy aims to contribute to the research in this field, focusing on understanding the recruitment experiences of neurodivergent individuals and identifying areas for improvement in recruitment processes. This whitepaper will examine existing literature on neurodiversity in assessment and present Talogy's research findings, highlighting key themes and insights to enhance practices in this domain.

Talogy's commitment

Talogy is committed to providing fair and objective assessment solutions. This means continually monitoring and applying research insights to optimize our product and service offerings. By doing so, we want to help our clients to break down potential barriers for neurominorities.

- We are committed to **reducing adverse impact**.
- We are **transparent** with our findings, reporting adverse impact when identified.
- We are committed to **improving solutions** by adapting to emerging data and evolving needs.

Using our position within the talent space and access to recruitment data, we will continue to contribute to the research in this field and work together with our clients and other practitioners to support this inclusion agenda.

> "Our vision is to create an inclusive environment where people can bring their uniqueness to the table."
>
> **Pisano & Austin**
> 2016a

What is neurodiversity?

> "Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will be best at any given moment?"
>
> **Harvey Blume**
> The Atlantic (1998)

The term "neurodiversity" was first coined by a sociologist, Judy Springer, in the 1990s. The term is an abbreviation for "neurological diversity" and describes the natural variation in human cognition and the way we function, learn and process information[37]. While it encompasses general cognitive diversity, it is commonly used in relation to specific neurological conditions such as:

- **Autism spectrum condition (ASC):** a condition that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn and behave.
- **Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD):** a condition marked by an ongoing pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity.
- **Dyslexia:** a condition characterized by difficulties with reading, writing and spelling.
- **Dyspraxia / developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD):** a condition that affects movement and physical co-ordination.
- **Dyscalculia:** a condition that affects the ability to learn and comprehend arithmetic.
- **Dysgraphia:** a condition that impairs writing ability and fine motor skills.



It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive, and other conditions, such as tick disorders, mental health conditions, and chronic neurological conditions, can also be included. Research estimates that approximately 15-20% of the world's population are neurodivergent[13,22]. Furthermore, these conditions often co-occur, with around 67% of neurodivergent individuals having a combination of these conditions[2,22,24].

Neurodiversity challenges the notion that there is a "right" or "normal" way of thinking and advocates for embracing neurological differences rather than viewing them as deficits. Within the employment context, neurodiversity represents a growing aspect of organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion that aims to promote acceptance, inclusion, and harness the unique talents of individuals who think differently[7].

One common characteristic of neurodivergent conditions is a "spiky profile"[13]. While all people have respective strength and challenge areas, in neurodivergent individuals, these differences tend to be more pronounced. Some have likened this to the notion of neurodivergent individuals being "specialists" and neurotypicals "generalists"[19]. Understanding this discourse can help provide useful insights to understanding how employers can best attract and retain neurodivergent talent. Likewise, it highlights the competitive advantage that neurodiversity can bring when neurodivergent individuals are in the right environment and able to fully harness these strengths.



It is estimated that **1 in 6 people** have some sort of neurominority status



Neurodivergence can bestow special skills in **pattern recognition**, **memory**, and **mathematics**



A common characteristic of neurodiversity is a "**spiky profile**"

Neurodivergent — Neurotypical



Co-occurrence across neurodivergent conditions is estimated to be around **67%**



Diagnosis and legal protections vary geographically

10% DYSLEXIA

5% DYSPRAXIA

5% ADHD

1% AUTISM

Prevalence by condition

Benefits of neurodiversity

Organizations that are actively embracing neurodiversity within their workforce have seen an array of benefits. Some of the direct advantages are highlighted below and include productivity gains, quality improvement, boosts in innovation, and increases in employee engagement[3]. These organizations often highlight a unique **synergy** that can arise when neurodivergent individuals are placed in certain roles[6].

There are also indirect gains that are equally valuable. One such benefit is the mindset awareness of neurodiversity endorses by promoting a **greater sensitivity to individual needs**. By being more attuned to individual needs, organizations are able to leverage the talents of all employees and enable them with the tools they need to achieve their full potential at work[1,18,25].

Another anecdotal advantage is that of **improved communication**, with organizations paying more care and attention to ensuring that any communications are clear, direct, and void of nuance and irony[3]. All of this helps foster an inclusive workplace and enhances employee well-being, morale, and leads to higher levels of job satisfaction and retention.

A report by JP Morgan found that employees on their Autism at Work program were up to 48% faster and up to 92% more productive than neurotypical colleagues[21].

Three specific strengths in neurodiverse individuals have been identified:

1

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

The nature of neurodiversity means that neurodivergent individuals are able to think differently and approach tasks from new angles. In this way, neurodivergent individuals can help bring a unique perspective[3,17]. Neurodivergent individuals can also be more open to change and willing to question existing practices and processes. This strengthens the overall workforce and results in greater innovation and creativity. For example, in product and service design and improved efficiencies[11].

2

DETAIL-ORIENTATION AND FOCUS

Neurodivergent individuals, including individuals with autism, have been linked to exceptional skills in attention to detail and sustained concentration[11,17,35]. For example, an internship program run by Curtin University at ExteND Testing found that **neurodiverse teams found 50% more defects in software systems than neurotypical teams**[8]. This means that neurodivergent individuals can be a great asset to roles that require a sustained focus and perseverance with tasks of a precise nature.

3

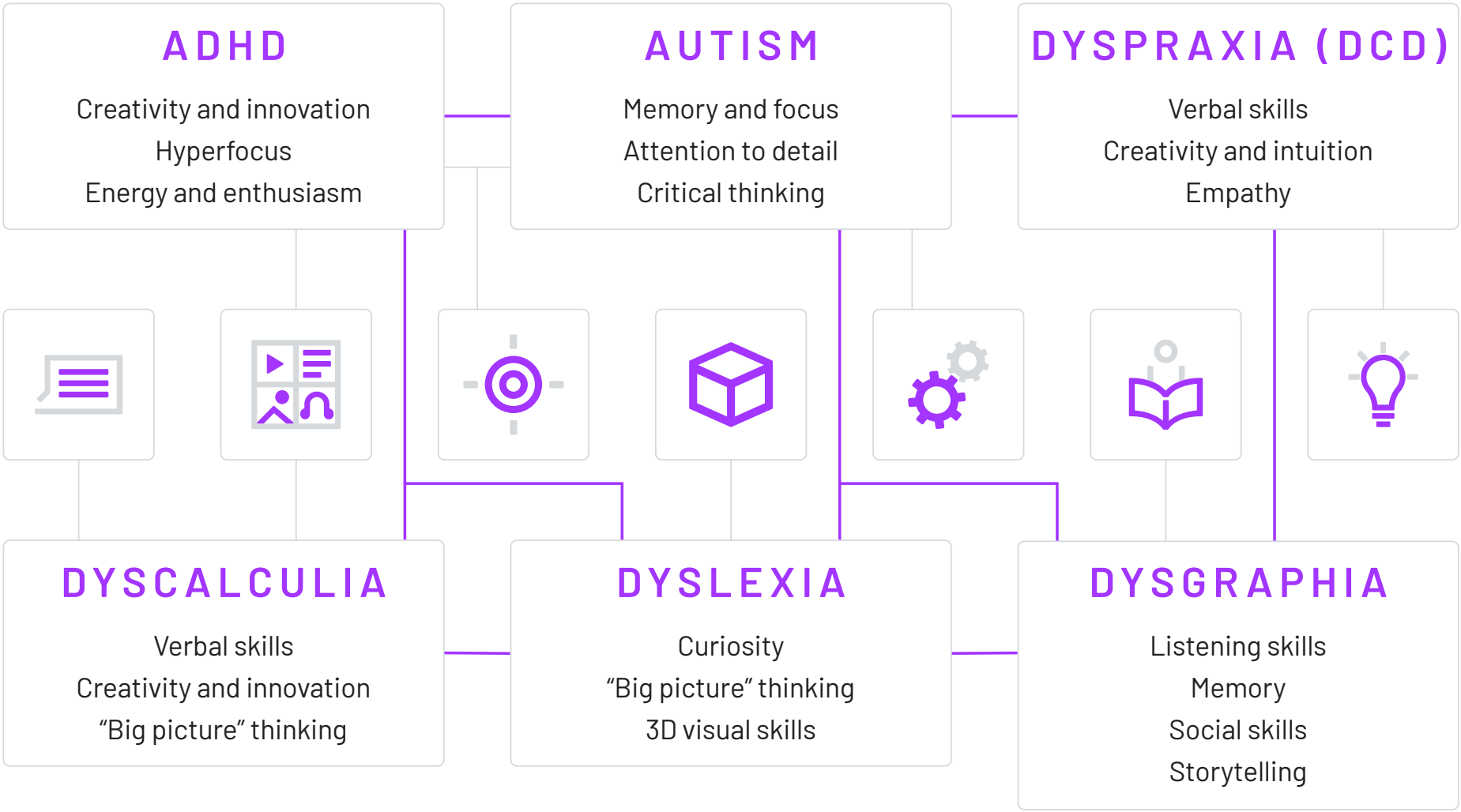
ANALYTICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

With the current skills shortage in the technology industry and rapidly expanding field of data analytics, this untapped pool of neurodivergent talent is becoming an area of increasing interest to many employers. In particular, autism is often associated with exceptional problem-solving abilities, analytical thinking and pattern recognition[38]. One application of this is demonstrated by the UK Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) who actively recruit individuals with neurodiverse conditions including autism and dyslexia, into cybersecurity roles to analyse complex datasets and identify patterns that help detect intrusions and attacks[4].

SAP reported that one such innovation by a neurodivergent employee helped them develop a technical fix worth an estimated $40 million in savings[3,29].



The below graphic highlights some of the strengths associated with different neurominorities[14,20,21,26,30,33]



Challenges of neurodiversity

Despite the wealth of research demonstrating the benefits of a neurodiverse workforce, the unemployment gap remains significant. So, why is this?

CHALLENGE ONE:

Societal barriers

The social model of disability suggests that people are disabled by barriers in society, rather than their condition or difference[28]. These barriers may be physical or psychological, and are caused by the way society is organized and people's attitudes to difference. For example, employers will often have preconceived expectations of what constitutes an "ideal" employee and will recruit for generalist skills such as communication, social skills and conformity, even though these factors may not be required, nor relevant, for successful performance in the given role. This can act as a barrier and inadvertently exclude neurodivergent individuals with specific talents and strengths[6,25].

> "The only disability is when people cannot see human potential."
>
> **Debra Ruh**



CHALLENGE TWO:

Scalability

The success of neurodiversity programs has prompted many organizations to reassess their standard hiring processes and consider how these may be unintentionally excluding high-quality talent. Traditional hiring processes are designed for wide application across an organization. However, when it comes to hiring neurodiverse talent, there is a conflict between scalability and the need to accommodate individual differences[1]. This can be seen in the challenges organizations face when handling reasonable adjustments during the hiring process. Managing modification requests can be particularly challenging in high-volume recruitment scenarios, leading to a potentially problematic one-size-fits-all approach, such as granting extra time, which may not address the underlying issue[15]. Addressing this requires a shift from an employer's inclination towards compliance through standardisation to adapting assessment contexts based on individual needs.

> "Innovation calls on firms to include people and ideas from 'the edges'."
>
> **Austin & Pisano**



CHALLENGE THREE:

Lack of understanding

The existing research on neurodiversity and assessment remains limited. As a result, guidance for promoting neurodiversity in recruitment is generally unclear, with uncertainty around what hiring processes may be discriminatory and in what circumstances[7,17]. At present, the scarcity of research has meant guidelines for employers are built on inferences from what is known about specific conditions, rather than empirical research. One potential challenge for research in this area is the availability of data, as it relies on access to candidate pools that have recorded biographic information and sufficient sample sizes. As minority conditions, this can be difficult, especially as these sample sizes are often further restricted by issues and hesitancy around disclosure[36]

> "Good practice in this field rests almost entirely on professional judgement and common sense, rather than evidence from evaluation studies."
>
> **Rice and Brooks**



Talogy's research

At Talogy, we are hoping to help address this gap in the literature by conducting research that will improve our understanding and better inform our field of practice. In this section, we will summarize the research that we have conducted so far on the selection experiences and outcomes for neurodivergent individuals. In this way, we hope to draw insights that will allow us to optimize our assessment solutions to be as fair and inclusive as possible. The studies summarized below are based on a mix of live applicant data and crowdsourced data. Our situational judgment test (SJT) research is based on a sample of live candidates applying for professional roles in the public sector. While, our cognitive ability test research is based on a sample of crowdsourced participants of working age who were asked to complete a series of ability tests with gameplay elements.

Study one: Overall SJT performance

Aim: To assess group differences in SJT performance between neurodivergent and neurotypical candidates.

Sample size: Sample sizes were as follows for individuals who disclosed a neurodivergent condition: dyslexia (N = 2,188), dyspraxia (N = 474), autism (N = 435), ADHD (N = 194).

Findings: No meaningful difference on test scores for any of the neurodivergent conditions identified, when compared with neurotypical candidates. D-values all fell below 0.20 and ranged between -0.12 and 0.12, indicating negligible group differences.

Specifically, there were almost no differences in performance between candidates with dyslexia and non-neurodivergent candidates (d = 0.03). Candidates with autism performed marginally worse on the SJT than non-neurodivergent candidates (d = 0.12). Meanwhile, candidates who reported ADHD and dyspraxia performed marginally better on the SJT than non-neurodivergent groups (d = -0.12 and -0.10, respectively).

	N	d-value
DYSLEXIA	2188	0.03
DYSPRAXIA	474	-0.10
AUTISM	435	0.12
ADHD	194	-0.12

Table 1: d-values for different neurodiverse groups, compared to neurotypical individuals.

Study two: SJT item features

Aim: A qualitative review of SJT scenarios and items to identify features associated with subgroup differences.

Sample size: Sample sizes were as follows for individuals who disclosed a neurodivergent condition: dyslexia (N = 50-567), autism (N = 50-109). Note, sample sizes varied due to an item-banked format.

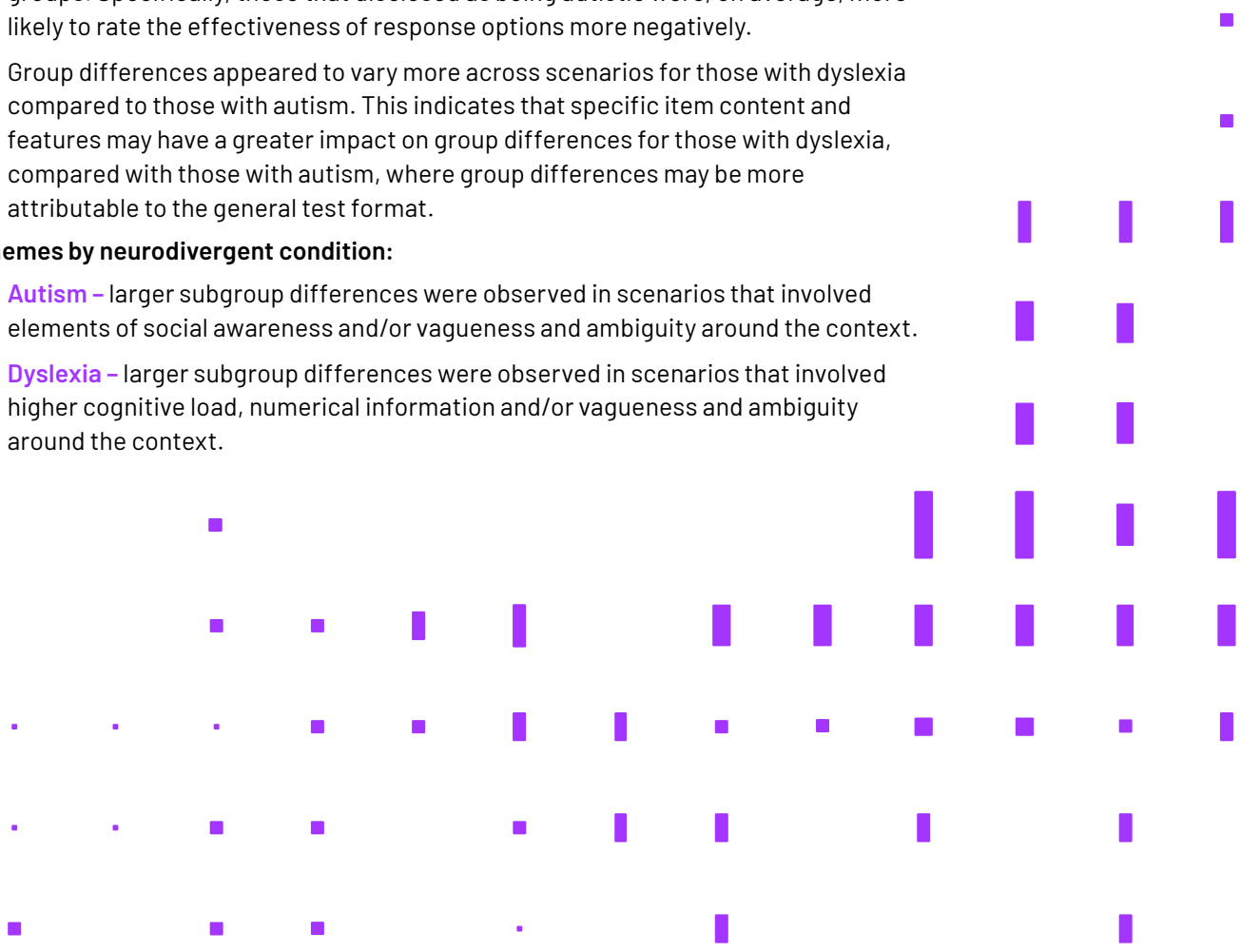
Findings:

Overarching themes:

- Scenarios with contextual complexity and cognitive load were associated with larger group differences among those that disclosed as being neurodivergent.
- Scenarios that had ambiguity around the dilemma presented were associated with larger group differences among those that disclosed as being neurodivergent.
- There was some overlap in the scenarios that were identified as the most problematic across the different neurodivergent conditions explored. This indicates that there are some general accessibility considerations that can be applied in item design and potentially reflects the high rates of co-occurrence between neurodivergent conditions.
- Multimedia scenarios were associated with smaller group differences than text-based scenarios among those that disclosed as being neurodivergent.
- There were slight differences in response style across certain neurodivergent groups. Specifically, those that disclosed as being autistic were, on average, more likely to rate the effectiveness of response options more negatively.
- Group differences appeared to vary more across scenarios for those with dyslexia compared to those with autism. This indicates that specific item content and features may have a greater impact on group differences for those with dyslexia, compared with those with autism, where group differences may be more attributable to the general test format.

Themes by neurodivergent condition:

- **Autism –** larger subgroup differences were observed in scenarios that involved elements of social awareness and/or vagueness and ambiguity around the context.
- **Dyslexia –** larger subgroup differences were observed in scenarios that involved higher cognitive load, numerical information and/or vagueness and ambiguity around the context.



Study three: Overall cognitive ability test performance

Aim: To assess group differences in Mindgage, Talogy's immersive cognitive ability assessment, module performance between various neurodivergent groups and neurotypical candidates.

Sample size: Sample sizes were as follows for individuals who disclosed a neurodivergent condition – Autism Spectrum Disorder 'ASD' (N = 151), ASD with minimum education of A level (N = 98), Dyslexia (N = 199), Language Disorders (N = 197), ADD/ADHD (N = 133), Literacy Difficulties (N =97) and Neurotypical (N = 150).

Findings: The three modules of Mindgage assess diverse elements of cognitive ability: Crunch – numerical ability, Flow – mental rotation, Seek – perceptual ability and working memory; using a non-traditional simulation format. Across the three modules, there were minimal to small observed subgroup differences in both directions.

The most pronounced score differences occurred on the Crunch module. Candidates recorded the largest gap in performance relative to neurotypical candidates in the Dyslexia (d = 0.45) and Language Disorder studies (d = 0.36), albeit with small effect sizes. Negligible to minimal differences were observed across the other neurodivergent groups (d = -0.04 – 0.25).

Every neurodivergent study group outperformed the neurotypical candidate group on both Flow and Seek. 4 groups: ASD with A level, Dyslexia, Language Disorders, Literacy Difficulties produced small effect size score improvements on both modules (d = -0.25 - -0.34). ADD/ADHD also demonstrated minimal/small differences on Flow (d = -0.28) and Seek (d = -0.23).

These results suggest that it may be possible to assess cognitive ability in ways that reduce the likelihood of group differences, compared with some other cognitive assessment methods. These results suggest that, using this assessment approach, many neurodivergent groups show comparable, and in some cases slightly higher, scores on certain cognitive elements than neurotypical candidates. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously and viewed as early indications rather than definitive conclusions. One caveat being that these assessments were purposefully designed to be inclusive and to reduce these group differences.

	N	Crunch	Flow	Seek
ASD	151	0.25	-0.19	-0.13
ASD WITH MINIMUM EDUCATION: A LEVELS	98	0.18	-0.29	-0.34
DYSLEXIA	199	0.45	-0.25	-0.31
LANGUAGE DISORDERS	197	0.36	-0.29	-0.34
ADD/ADHD	133	0.11	-0.28	-0.23
LITERACY DIFFICULTIES	97	0.12	-0.28	-0.34

Table 1: d values across Mindgage module scores for different neurodivergent study groups, compared to neurotypical individuals.

Key insights for a neuro-inclusive assessment process

Overcoming challenges and developing best practice

1 Hardly any differences in performance between neurodivergent and neurotypical candidates

Our research found that neurodivergent and neurotypical candidates performed similarly across our studies on a bespoke situational judgment test (SJT) and series of cognitive ability tests. Specifically, there were minimal subgroup differences observed between individuals with dyslexia, autism, ADHD, and dyspraxia, when compared with candidates who did not indicate a neurodivergent condition. However, it is important to exercise caution when making generalizations beyond this particular assessment context, as numerous proactive measures were taken to make these assessments as inclusive and accessible as possible. Nonetheless, the findings show that by considering fairness and accessibility as part of the design and development of recruitment tools, minimal subgroup differences can be observed. It is therefore recommended that employers and test publishers look to monitor for adverse impact among neurominorities where possible. Meanwhile, it also highlights the need for further research across different selection assessments and contexts. It is important to recognize that these types of assessments may not be suitable for every neurodivergent individual, considering the inherent diversity within subgroups. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the appropriateness of assessments on an individual basis.

2 Open communication is crucial

Clear and open communication during the recruitment process is crucial. Research highlights the negative impact that insufficient information and ambiguity can have on the recruitment experiences of neurodivergent individuals. For example, a study by Davies et al. (2023) found that neurodivergent individuals reported experiencing uncertainty and ambiguity throughout all stages of the recruitment process. To address this, employers should be clear and transparent around what the recruitment process will entail, and where possible, provide examples and practice materials. This allows candidates to determine ahead of time whether they are likely to experience any challenges during the recruitment process and request for any modifications to be made.

Likewise, effective communication from the employer can also help to mitigate potential barriers relating to heightened anxiety[32]. Research shows that neurodivergent individuals can often experience heightened anxiety during the assessment process, compared with neurotypical individuals[5,9]. This has the potential to negatively impact both their candidate experience and their ability to perform at their best. Consequently, it is important for employers to facilitate an open dialogue with candidates throughout, so that they can offer support to neurodivergent candidates and accommodate individual needs and requirements[23].

3 Take a person-centered approach

A one-size-fits-all approach does not work for assessing neurodiverse talent. Instead, research highlights the importance of taking a person-centered approach[32]. For example, strengths and challenges have been shown to vary by neurodivergent condition and between individuals, with further complexity coming from the co-occurrence of conditions[10]. Likewise, research shows that participants' individual preferences are also nuanced. For example, a study on neurodivergent candidate experiences found that some individuals felt more comfortable with online interviews than face-to-face interviews, while others found them more stressful[9]. This highlights the need for larger organizations to pursue scalable solutions that can be adapted and flexed, and the importance of not generalizing across condition or neurominority status[9]. Best practice guidance recommends taking a person-centered approach and working together with the individual to understand their needs and provide appropriate modifications[1,32]. This step is crucial for ensuring neurodivergent individuals are fairly treated and fully equipped to perform at their best.

4 Small change, big impact

Modifications do not have to be substantial or expensive. Small changes can have a big impact on the assessment experience and performance of neurodivergent individuals[25]. For instance, many modifications requested by neurodivergent individuals during live recruitment processes are relatively easy to implement, such as providing interview questions in advance, granting additional time, and allowing note-taking[6]. While these modifications often require minimal time or investment, they can significantly improve the assessment experience for an individual. This finding is further supported by the literature which highlights the negative impact that the physical environment can have on the recruitment experiences of neurodivergent individuals. Sensory factors such as bright lights, noise, artificial lighting, unregulated room temperatures and close proximity of others can have adverse effects[5,9,32]. As a result, online administration of recruitment assessments has been found to be more comfortable for some individuals, as it eliminates certain environmental stressors that can heighten anxiety and enables candidates to complete the recruitment process in a familiar setting[5,34].

5 Awareness and understanding is key

A common theme across the literature is the need for a better understanding of neurodiversity in assessment[6]. While the literature has begun to capture important insights into the recruitment experiences of neurodivergent individuals, much more research needs to be done. Similarly, many have referenced the need for those involved in recruitment to have a better knowledge and understanding of neurodivergent conditions so that they can better support these individuals. This knowledge gap is referenced within the research and has been noted as a key challenge by neurodivergent individuals. For example, there is still concern among many that disclosure will lead to discrimination or stigma[9]. One proposed solution for this is to provide neurodiversity awareness training to those involved in recruitment. A specific example of this would be to provide training so that interviewers are better equipped to recognize some of the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals at interview, so that they can offer support and adapt their style of questioning[6]. As our understanding of neurodiversity in assessment evolves, it is important that we consider how to share these learnings within organizations to improve awareness and ensure that recruitment practices are optimized to better promote neurodiversity in the workplace.



What's next?

Talogy is continually looking for ways to contribute to the literature and better our understanding of neurodiversity in assessment. Please do reach out if you are interested in opportunities for collaboration or research in this area. We are always keen to work with clients and practitioners in any way that we can to help support this inclusion agenda and promote neurodiversity in recruitment.

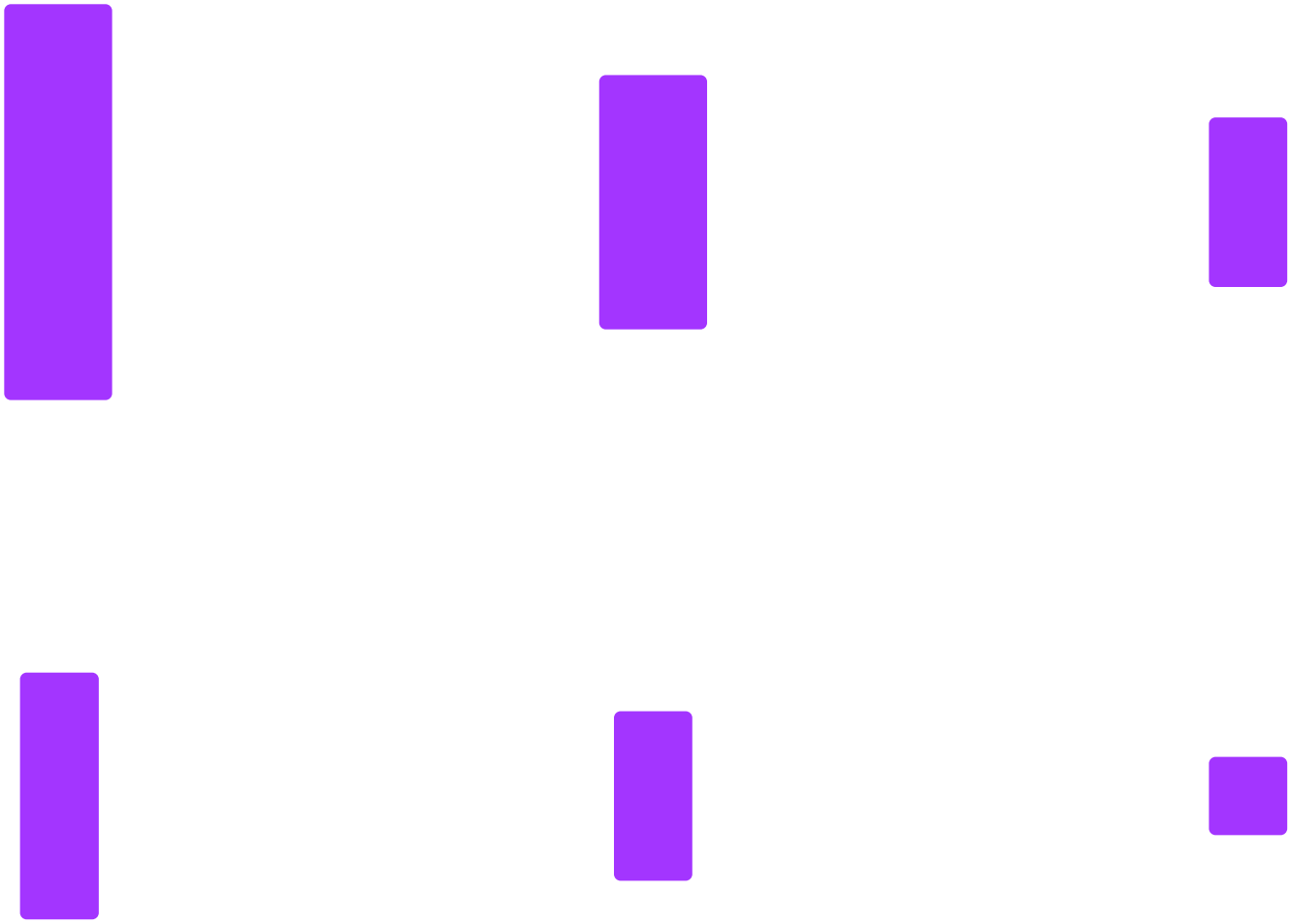
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