

Needs Analysis

Beyond the Checklist

Analysis Information	
Stated Problem	Neurodivergent employees are often misjudged during performance evaluations due to social and communication norms that favor extroversion, verbal engagement, and informal office bonding. These reviews prioritize “team fit” and subjective perceptions over measurable job performance, leading to unfair treatment, exclusion, and even disciplinary action. Also, there is often no safe or confidential way for these employees to report bullying, biased feedback, or inconsistent enforcement of policies.
Goals	- Clear, behavior-based performance metrics focused on job outputs, not personality traits. - A formalized, structured review system designed using Universal Design for Learning principles. - The option for neurodivergent employees to communicate through written formats (such as Teams or email) rather than being penalized for not engaging verbally. - An anonymous, confidential tool to report exclusionary behaviors, biased evaluations, or bullying. - Assurance that their workplace values diverse communication and work styles as part of an inclusive environment.

Current Performance & Observations	
Current Barriers	- Subjective performance reviews based on vague “team fit” criteria. - Social expectations that reward extroversion and penalize quiet or introverted behavior. - Inconsistent application of rules or feedback based on favoritism or social closeness. - Lack of formal channels for neurodivergent employees to report bias or seek accommodations without fear of retaliation.
Observations	Autistic adults face major barriers in the workplace, including high unemployment rates, short job tenure, and widespread misunderstanding of their communication styles. Only 16% of autistic adults in the UK are employed full-time (National Autistic Society, 2016), and in the U.S., up to 85% are unemployed (Golden Steps ABA). Autistic women are more

	likely to mask their traits to fit in, which can lead to misinterpretation as cold or unfriendly and unfair performance evaluations (Hull et al., 2019; Baldwin & Costley, 2016). Employers often lack awareness of how autism manifests, which leads to a lack of proper accommodations and increased social and communication challenges. Bullying and exclusion are also common, with one in three employees experiencing bullying in their careers and autistic adults being particularly vulnerable due to their unique interaction styles (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2007). These hostile work environments contribute to poor mental health, high turnover, and a lack of career advancement. Many autistic employees who disclose their diagnosis still report a lack of appropriate accommodations and ongoing bias in evaluations (Romualdez et al., 2021; Lindsay et al., 2019). These findings highlight the need for inclusive, behavior-based performance review systems and confidential reporting tools to address bias and protect neurodivergent employees from exclusion and mistreatment.
Conclusions	There is a critical need for an inclusive, accessible performance evaluation system that reflects the diversity of employee strengths and communication styles. By redesigning reviews to be clear, job-focused, and grounded in UDL, and pairing it with a confidential reporting tool, organizations can ensure fairer treatment and improved retention for neurodivergent employees.

Recommendations	
Non-Training	• Offer multiple evaluation formats (e.g., self-assessments, portfolios). This supports diverse communication preferences • Create quiet work zones to reduce sensory overload. • Use clear, concrete policy language. • Schedule regular written feedback sessions to reduce anxiety and promote thoughtful engagement.
Training	• Bias-Awareness Training for Managers and Staff. This training should focus on recognizing unconscious bias

	toward quiet, non-social, or masking employees. It would help prevent misinterpretations of autistic communication styles as negative traits. Thus, reducing the risk of unfair evaluations and workplace exclusion. • Supervisors and colleagues should be trained to understand how tone and delivery impact neurodivergent employees. This includes offering feedback in neutral, respectful ways and avoiding emotional or ambiguous cues. • Teach supervisors how to give step-by-step written instructions. Structured task breakdowns reduce confusion and support confidence. • Provide modules on inclusive language and neurodiversity. Training that explores identity-first language, masking, and the realities of neurodivergence in women can build empathy and normalize neurodivergent behaviors in professional settings. • Start a mentorship program with neurodivergent allies. Employees can be paired with trained peer mentors who understand neurodiversity. This allows new hires or struggling employees to ask questions and seek guidance without fear of judgment or misinterpretation.
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