

# NEURODIVERSITY @ WORK PLAYBOOK

## Employee Engagement and Growth Series

ISSUE #3

## Neuroinclusive Transition to a New Manager

Managers play a critical role in an employee's experience and sense of belonging. Research suggests that this is especially true for minoritized employees, including neurodivergent employees.\* For neurodivergent employees, an inclusive manager is one of the key success enablers. Changes to a person's reporting manager can occur for various reasons such as an internal or external program, transfer of either the manager or the employee, or a reorganization of the unit.

For many neurodivergent employees who have struggled to find and maintain employment, the introduction of a new manager who might be unfamiliar with their strengths, work style, preferences, and needs will create high levels of insecurity. This insecurity may be worsened if they have experienced discrimination and a lower sense of self-esteem due to past managers who were not supportive of their needs.

As with all employees, it takes time to develop the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Supervisors must create clear expectations, develop the nature of social and task-related interactions, clarify the role the member plays on the team, and set the tone of relationships and interactions with the team. For neurodivergent employees, these aspects of the employee-supervisor and employee-team relationships may be complicated due to normative expectations relative to social interactions, communication styles, information processing behaviors and needs, and needs for accommodations at work.

### TRANSITION TO A NEW MANAGER CHECKLIST

- ✓ Be transparent about change.
- ✓ Respond to employee concerns empathetically.
- ✓ Maintain the privacy of the individual regarding their neurodivergence and accommodations.
- ✓ Follow the employee's lead about their needs and preferences in how they want to manage the transition.
- ✓ Check in with your employees regularly throughout the change process and beyond.
- ✓ Be intentional about team alignment and normalize such activities for all team changes.
- ✓ Educate new managers on neurodiversity and accommodation processes in the mainstream manager onboarding process, regardless of their team composition.

## How do we support a neurodivergent employee when there is a manager change?

A change in managers may be the most disruptive event to an employee's work life and will induce much uncertainty and anxiety. It may be helpful to consider the Trauma-Informed Care framework (illustrated on the next page) when preparing various organizational units and managers to support neurodivergent individuals, many of whom have experienced discrimination and trauma in their employment journey.

\* Roepe, L.R. (2022). *How to develop inclusive managers*. HR Magazine. <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/fall2022/pages/-how-to-develop-inclusive-managers.aspx>.

## Safety



Ensuring physical and emotional safety

## Choice



Individual has choice and control

## Collaboration



Making decisions with the individual and sharing power

## Trustworthiness



Task clarity, consistency, and Interpersonal Boundaries

## Empowerment



Prioritizing empowerment and skill building

### Definitions

### Principles in Practice

Common areas are welcoming and privacy is respected

Individuals are provided a clear and appropriate message about their rights and responsibilities

Individuals are provided a significant role in planning and evaluating services

Respectful and professional boundaries are maintained

Providing an atmosphere that allows individuals to feel validated and affirmed with each and every contact at the agency

Chart by the Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care (2015)\*

Consider the following actions within the Trauma-Informed Care framework. These can be used by managers or HR and Neurodiversity Program personnel responsible for supporting the employee transition.

## SAFETY

- Consider timing the news about change to be least disruptive to the individual.
- Build trust and safety by explaining the rationale for change.
- Identify the right context to announce the manager-related change based on what you know of the employee's preferences.
- Provide time for the individual to process the change before you ask or insist that they respond or react.
- Make the message, its potential impact, and available options as clear and explicit as possible and relevant to the individual to reduce stress and insecurity.
- Communicate the next steps, but be honest about what is uncertain or unknown.
- Send a follow-up email immediately about the details of the change, followed by regular updates and check-ins.

\* *What is trauma-informed care?* (2023). University of Buffalo. <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care/what-is-trauma-informed-care.html>

## CHOICE

- Give the individual agency in the next steps related to processing and discussing the change.
- Take the individual's lead, and protect their privacy related to whether, when, and how they chose to disclose.
- Provide the individual with resources related to their rights and support personnel that will help them navigate the change.
- Create templates for how to navigate support processes and ask for information.

## COLLABORATION

- Identify key members from HR, Neurodiversity Program, accommodation, or a mentor to be a point of contact to proactively reach out to the affected employee to provide support.
- Develop an action plan that is co-created with the employee and related to their needs for disclosure and modifications to work practices.
- Maintain open lines of communication by proactively checking in with the employee about the transition and evaluating whether the plan of action and resources provided are sufficient throughout the change period and well into the future.
- Involve the team in developing the approach to managing the change by developing an intentional, collaborative team alignment activity/process to use for all team changes.

## TRUSTWORTHINESS

- Insist on compassion during transitions, grounding interactions in empathetic listening and affirmation.
- Create clear expectations of the changes taking place and their impact on the team.
- Explicitly articulate the role the individual and team members will play to facilitate successful change. This could be co-designed but must be made explicit quickly.
- Be consistent in managing the change process and the various team members.
- Maintain explicitly stated, clear, respectful, and healthy boundaries in how you support each employee and expect that of all team members during the process.

## EMPOWERMENT

- Build the capacity of the entire team, especially the manager, to be neuroinclusive. This is the cornerstone of successful transitions and long-term success.
- Onboard managers to neurodiverse teams through explicit training regardless of disclosure by making neuroinclusion training mandatory for all managers.
- Create mentoring and feedback opportunities centered on neuroinclusion for managers.
- Provide mentoring and training opportunities for neurodivergent employees related to advocacy and navigating supports within the organization.
- Provide development workshops for all employees to navigate advancement effectively, making them explicit and neurocentric.

## Neuroinclusive transition to a new manager

- Be deliberate and transparent about change.
- Timeliness is critical when communicating change.
- Set explicit boundaries and expectations of respect and compassion.
- Provide clear, discoverable resources to support transitions.
- Respect individual rights to privacy during transitions.
- Empower neurodivergent employees by providing accessible resources and best practices related to their rights around disclosure and requests for accommodations.
- Identify point of contact from HR, accommodations, and Neurodiversity Teams to support transitions.

## Resources

This brief only touches the surface related to best practices to support neurodivergent employees through organizational and team-level change. Below are some additional resources that will help you dive deeper into the topic.

- This blog by Emma Fox provides very helpful insights from a neurodivergent advocate's perspective: <https://theautisphere.com/why-autistic-people-find-change-difficult/>
- This guest blog by Auticon also provides actionable insights for supporting neurodivergent employees during change: <https://www.texthelp.com/resources/blog/supporting-autistic-employees-during-change/>
- Much of the writing on change management has been done from the perspective of autistic employees. This video from Jessica McCabe provides insights related to change management from an ADHDER's perspective: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xLv1aQnjXI>

## About this series

The Neurodiversity @ Work Playbook: Employee Engagement and Growth Series is the product of a series of focus groups led by Dr. Hala Annabi, an associate professor at the University of Washington Information School. Dr. Annabi facilitated discussion in five focus groups, including participants from the Neurodiversity at Work Employer Roundtable, addressing best practices related to five key areas of opportunity represented in these briefs. The facilitators distilled best practices and developed these guides for other organizations to use to continue to advance neurodiversity employment with input from focus group participants.

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