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Sharing an example of neurodiversity affirmative hiring

Abstract

Hiring processes often unintentionally disadvantage neurodivergent candidates by expecting neuro-normative performances without due scrutiny of their merits. We offer reflections as a neurodiverse research group on our experiences of hiring a researcher colleague, while aligning with compassionate and neurodiversity affirmative frameworks. We make recommendations informed by our learning through this process. Ultimately, we are motivated to enable every candidate to demonstrate their abilities to perform the essential tasks of the job, whilst minimising nonessential, and often unspoken, social, sensory, and thinking performances. Our hiring decisions differed from default practices by sharing responsibility for the interview process, making explicit the value of personal and professional experiences of neurodivergence, providing choice of interview format, allowing the uncertainty of an encounter, providing honest feedback, and minimising an expectation of neurodivergent disclosure or aesthetic diversity. We readdressed these details to enable each candidate to best represent themselves and minimise learnt and ableist conventions. This Perspective offers a novel, critical reflection on recruitment, occupying both the hiring employer and candidate perspectives. We invite further scrutiny from researchers and hiring organisations on decisions that can unintentionally marginalise and stigmatise neurodivergent candidates, and on actions that can enable genuine equal opportunity for employment to all.

Community brief

Why is this topic important?

Neurodivergent people should be part of workplaces. The ways in which we hire researchers can exclude neurodivergent applicants, sometimes unintentionally. Neurodivergent people then have too little say over research, including who participates and which research methods are used. We describe practical steps that employers may want to follow to make hiring processes fairer for neurodivergent candidates.

What is the purpose of this article?

This article encourages researchers and employers to demonstrate ‘compassionate’ and ‘neurodiversity affirmative’ hiring practices. This means giving all candidates equal opportunity for employment, including neurodivergent candidates.

What personal or professional perspectives do the authors bring to this topic?

We wrote this article as a research group of mixed neurotypes. We offer reflections from both job applicants and employers in a university setting to share honest and personal experiences of hiring.

What is already known about this topic?

Neurodivergent people do not have fair opportunities for employment. Employment statistics show that many capable and motivated neurodivergent people are not in suitable jobs. Limited workplace opportunities can have negative impacts on physical and mental wellbeing. A growing body of research has explored barriers that affect neurodivergent people in workplaces and shows that they rarely provide supportive adjustments, and often have unsuitable sensory environments and unsupportive cultures. Relatively little literature has focused on all stages of the recruitment process, from the kinds of employment opportunities offered, through advertising, shortlisting, and interviewing of candidates.

There is a gap in understanding how organisations can be more inclusive in how they recruit neurodivergent employees.

What do the authors recommend?

Employers should: reflect honestly on the reasons for hiring and design a role based on essential tasks; write in job advertisements that difference and varied expertise is welcomed, but that applicants do not need to share any diagnoses if they do not want to; offer choice over the interview process, including the location, format, sensory environment, and presentation style; share interview questions in advance; invite conversation about the interview process so that everybody can learn about what is working well; show compassion and support of vulnerabilities and discomforts; make clear that differences in communication style are accepted and do not need to be adjusted; provide feedback after the interview.

We recommend these changes so that every candidate can show their abilities to do the job, without having to perform in the limited ways that employers often expect.

How will these recommendations help autistic adults now or in the future?

These recommendations share out responsibility for making sure that neurodivergent people have fair access to recruitment processes. We ask researchers and employers to look at the unnecessary expectations placed on job applicants and remove these barriers so that neurodivergent candidates can demonstrate their strengths. We hope these changes will help employers to make informed hiring decisions that improve recruitment and, critically, retention of a neurodiverse workforce.

Introduction and aims: Equal opportunity of employment to all

As a new research group, we intend to conduct research in ways that align with a compassionate and neurodiversity affirmative approach.[1, 2] This means that we want to scrutinise the unintentional acts of discrimination that can be part of research conducted with and about autistic and other neurodivergent people. We intend to notice aspects of practice that privilege and disadvantage different performances, if sometimes not obviously. Compassion here means proactively considering the experiences of another without judgment, whilst acting where possible to alleviate marginalisation and suffering. Differences are noticed, welcomed, and accepted.[1] These aspirations motivated us to reflect critically on how we enacted neurodiversity affirmative practices when hiring a researcher colleague. We are a neurodiverse research group. We share our team's reflections on how we navigated neurotypical defaults and demonstrated change in practice. We make four recommendations for fellow researchers and hiring organisations. We wrote these recommendations collaboratively with contribution from different members involved in the process of hiring a member of a research group, hearing candidate experiences that are often missing from prior research. Our aim, when approaching each incremental hiring decision, was to enable genuine equal opportunity of employment to all candidates. The advertised job was for a researcher in a university setting, who would be working into a project that foregrounds the experiences of neurodivergent students and staff in higher education.

Background: Opportunities for neurodiversity affirmative practices

It is usually the burden of the neurodivergent individual to advocate for inclusion in higher education and other life contexts, including workplaces.[1, 3] This process can marginalise and stigmatise the person at the point when they show their difference from what is expected. Unspoken expectations (such as maintaining eye contact with the

interviewer) can advantage some people more than others. These expectations often show a candidate's ability to fit into the interactional context of the interview, rather than their ability to do the job.[4, 5] In recruitment processes, expectations for how to prepare and perform within an interview are rarely discussed explicitly. Candidates are expected to inhabit the spaces chosen by the interview panel, follow conventions of social exchanges, demonstrate visible enjoyment or enthusiasm, and respond spontaneously to interview questions.[6] These expected performances can disadvantage some neurodivergent candidates who find the unspoken conventions tiring, unachievable, or discriminatory.[6] It is important to recognise the efforts made on both sides of any interaction where impressions are being managed, but we should appreciate the accumulated and disproportionate efforts that neurodivergent people often make.[7, 8] We intended to align with neurodiversity affirming practice by minimising disabling conventions and making some of the hidden expectations of the hiring process explicit.

We therefore approached recruitment with an expectation of sharing responsibility between the candidates and the hiring institution. We worked collectively to achieve a shared aim, which was: to enable every candidate to demonstrate their abilities to perform the essential tasks of the job, whilst minimising nonessential social, sensory, and thinking performances.

Hiring context

We were recruiting for the position of a Postdoctoral Research Assistant; the position required co-ordination of a research project, delivery of a programme of research, project management, communication with stakeholders, and dissemination of project outcomes. As an alternative to a doctoral qualification in a relevant discipline, the job advert stated that we would consider relevant experience, but it was left open as to what experience

could be shared. Additionally, the advert said, ‘Candidates with lived experience of neurodivergence are encouraged to apply’, and ‘Experience of working with neurodivergent people would be valuable in this role’. Applicants submitted a curriculum vitae and responded to questions aligned to the job description. Questions asked applicants to demonstrate relevant research experience, their understanding of the key barriers faced by neurodivergent students at university, commitment to equality, and understanding of what this means in practice. Two members of the hiring panel shortlisted the applications independently, using a standardised screening process used by the hiring organisation. Answers to the above questions were each rated as being ‘unmet’ through to ‘exceeding the expectations’. Twenty-one people applied and we interviewed five candidates. We conducted four of the five interviews online, at candidates’ request. The appointed candidate interviewed online. Candidates had choice over their preparation and presentation style, as discussed in Recommendation 2. Interviews were approximately 45 minutes. There were eight questions, all shared in advance with the following wording: ‘Below we have listed the main questions that you will be asked during your job interview. We may ask follow-up questions based on your responses’. We intended the first question to invite a presentation: Question 1. ‘This project will involve sharing information and facilitating communication with neurodivergent learners and educators. Drawing on relevant theoretical literature, work, and/or personal experience, please outline how you could meet the communication needs of a diverse group of research participants effectively and inclusively. (If preferable, you may use slides, documents, or visuals to answer this question.)’

We made changes to regular institutional recruitment practice based on our own professional and personal experiences of hiring and of being hired ourselves, and of supporting neurodivergent people through education, higher education, and clinical institutions. We made changes based on an underpinning compassionate pedagogy[1] and

existing research about hiring practices.[6] We provide some illustration of our process but encourage employers to tailor the examples to the needs of their own candidates and organisation.

Author positionality

We are a research group of mixed neurotypes, with personal and professional experiences of neurodivergence. The author team includes both autistic and non-autistic people. SP is a Chartered Clinical Psychologist and Associate Professor in Psychology. She provides assessment and therapeutic support for neurodivergent clients and researches personal accounts of neurodivergence, mental health, and wellbeing. CHH is a Lecturer in Applied Professional Studies (Social Work) and is the person we hired as a Postdoctoral Research Assistant, the process of which we present in this article. CHH's shares his own reflections throughout. In his research, CHH has translated educational practices with a focus on gestures of hospitality, creating and opening a 'civic shelter' and 'public sanctuary' for narrative research. JAW is a Co-Director of a leading employer of neurodivergent professionals. He also co-facilitates an international science communication education program drawing on a Critical Psychology and Humanities background. LGH is a Professor of Developmental Psychology and Inclusive Education. Her research focuses on contextual factors that influence educational outcomes for children and young people, including barriers to access for neurodivergent learners at all stages of education. The authorship team therefore includes varied personal and professional experience of autism and other neurodivergence, which collectively influenced both the hiring process and the recommendations that follow. Our organisation is a Disability Confident employer, which is a UK government scheme supporting employers to employ and keep a diverse workforce.

Recommendations

We anticipated and welcomed difference from the outset. The following four recommendations are the concluding summaries of our learning and we present them with reference to what is already known about the issues. We open each recommendation with a personal reflection written by CHH, the appointed candidate. We do so with the explicit intention of sharing an ongoing dialogue with the people affected by the decisions made, because no one person or group has a monopoly on best practices, including in recruitment processes.

Recommendation 1: Welcome difference but do not require disclosure

> *Interview candidate reflection: "I feel privileged to look back at an interview process from the position of a new member of staff. However, I have no advice to give for performing at an interview when you are neurodivergent. I can just recall this job interview as a rare invitation to be myself. When thinking of new formats for processing applications in a way where neurodiversity guides the process, I first have to think of the silences, of the stories muted and untold. There have been online job interviews where I was speechless, unable to find my voice. Intrinsically, I was in my hide-out, masking my divergent strengths in the fear that they would be perceived as weaknesses. This time it was so different. It was as if this requirement for performative silencing of my own ways of expression, the extroverted ideal that had become internalised ableism, had been waived, so that I could just be receptive to an interview flow to unfold reciprocally."*

Our recruitment practices were subtly but meaningfully different from default practices in the following ways. The job advert made explicit our value of personal and professional

experience of neurodivergence, including ‘lived experience’, ‘a personal commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion’, and ‘social justice-focused research’. We wanted to demonstrate socially just action by representing these values in public-facing communication:[9] we were mirroring our philosophy of participatory action-based research that underpins the work carried out by this research group, which is our commitment to seek change through the ways in which we conduct research. We wrote this invitation of varied expertise to enable candidates to foreground attributes that could contribute to their delivery of this role. We were, therefore, open to how the role could be partially co-designed or shaped by the employee. We did not ask for disclosure of neurodivergence and did not expect this; instead, we intended to demonstrate a culture of inclusion. When neurodivergence was apparent from disclosure in a written application, we did not presume that a disability disclosure extended to the interview. The candidate should be able to choose the environments and people with whom they share their information.

We were concerned about the risk of performative inclusivity, where diversity can be mentioned solely in order to represent an organisation positively through their branding or marketing.[10] It was important for us to reflect critically on the temptations of ‘aesthetic labour’,[11] or what we might call aesthetic diversity, whereby a certain group (such as neurodivergent people) is named, or used as a simple check-box of inclusive practice. This is especially important as we challenge our own positionality as a research group: we acknowledge that we do not have access to everybody’s individual experiences. As an antidote, we committed authentically to sharing power, expertise, and ownership of the hiring process.[12]

Recommendation 2: Enable every candidate to demonstrate their abilities

> *Interview candidate reflection: "Space is an element that is usually not up for negotiation in job interviews. The panel selects a convenient room in advance and is already installed on time before the candidates arrive. What if we changed that in neurodiversity affirmative interview practice? What if it became the job of the interview panel to handle uncertainty? The hiring process outlined here inspires me to imagine a scenario which enables applicants to inhabit a space where they can gather the strengths of their voice: each candidate can decide between different interview spaces. The choice is between the online interview, the interview room picked by the panel, an interview with the possibility to come in advance to pick a suitable room (one which welcomes this person's specific sensory needs for spatial hospitality), or a walk-along campus tour where everyone will be in movement. This requires the selection panel's willingness to deal with a certain discomfort of not knowing where the candidates will choose to locate an environment which can host their own strengths. Opening up to this idea can be a way to disrupt the sensory obstacle courses usually performed from one side only, by neurodivergent candidates, long before the actual interview begins, and therefore to unsettle even more the spatial discrimination embedded in neuro-normative interviewing."*

'Neuro-normative' practices refer to those that are designed for the majority of people, who are not neurodivergent, and these practices often, therefore, go unquestioned. It was important that our practices throughout and after hiring were consistent with the initial advertised invitation of varied expertise that we described in Recommendation 1. We therefore scaffolded shared responsibility for the interview process by inviting open

conversation about how each candidate could show their best selves. We let the candidate lead in letting us know what was relevant about their attributes and experiences for this specific role. In research conducted with employers who have experience of hiring autistic employees across Poland, Canada, Australia, and Spain, a recommendation for good hiring practices is to write job descriptions that clearly detail the tasks of the job.[13] They should minimise the jargon about commonplace workplace skills that often define recruitment materials. From this qualitative research, Tomczak at al.[13] introduced a model of inclusive communication. They emphasised practical ways in which employers can select candidates based on their skills to complete the tasks of the job. Similarly, researchers are making valuable adjustments. A preliminary evaluation conducted by Ashworth and colleagues[14] proposed a research tool that allows autistic participants to choose their disclosure of neurodivergence and requested adjustments. Examples of practical steps that others may want to follow when implementing neurodiversity affirmative practices are shared by Le Cunff et al.[15] and Szulc.[16] In addition to recommendations that are discussed in this article, these can include sharing a short biographical sketch of the people conducting the interviews and offering the use of assistive software when participating online.

We implemented the following changes in order to create the conditions for authentic interaction. We encouraged all candidates to let us know of any adjustments that they might find helpful both ahead of the interview and at the beginning of the interview. We ensured that we were able to meet all adjustment requests. Critically, employers should ask questions about employee differences with careful consideration of how they are able to deliver the corresponding inclusive practices.[14] Otherwise, organisations collect information about diversity but fail to invest in systemic practices that enable a diverse workforce to thrive. We minimised environmental disruptions and noise within all interactions, we were flexible in how we made adjustments for each candidate, and we welcomed candidates

letting us know their personal choices.[16] We, therefore, offered a choice of interview format (in person or remote interview) and choice of days and times. On reflection, this flexibility widened the lens to other intersectional concerns that interviewers should not neglect when working with awareness of neurodivergence, such as geography, socioeconomic or language statuses.[17] Candidates could attend without additional travel burden. We only comment on characteristics that individuals foregrounded as being relevant to this hiring process, and whilst we were aware of different genders and ages being represented by the candidates and employers, we continue to reflect on who we did not hear from, and what we did not hear, by paying too little attention to different intersectional identities.[18]

We chose a venue that offered the most natural light and quiet, although we were limited in our choices by the rooms available in our university. Natural light was prioritised, and blinds provided some amount of control over brightness, but variable overhead or lamp lighting was not available. We could turn the digital screens in the room on or off. We gave choice over the sensory environment where this was possible, with recognition that interviewees might experience a "*sensory obstacle course*". We found that mentioning what we could or could not change, with an explicit and shared wish to improve what was possible for the benefit of all present, was the most valued action according to candidate feedback.

We followed the best practices outlined by the model of inclusive communication[13] by allowing for a more varied structure to the interview. Candidates had choice over their preparation and presentation style, using 'slides, documents, or visuals' if preferred. This invitation resulted in candidates sharing a prepared handout of text and infographics, a slide presentation with photos, pre-scripted verbal answers, and spontaneous discussion. These decisions align with universal design practices.[19] Universal design embeds flexibility and choice in the design of different processes in order to make learning, or working, accessible

to the widest possible range of people.[1] The spontaneous use of photo elicitation by one candidate was surprising and welcomed, because sharing chosen images can foster increased collaboration, representation of identity, and a means of crossing cultural boundaries.[20] This candidate showed highlights of their previous work through a selection of photographs. This is an example of an unanticipated gain of enabling each candidate to demonstrate their abilities.

Recommendation 3: Make explicit hidden expectations of hiring performances

> *Interview candidate reflection: "One can never know if the chosen interview design will work for everyone. I want to illustrate the importance of flexibility instead. Is it really possible to claim to get it right for all candidates of a job interview? More desirable may be to open an imperfect space to start an honest conversation about needs within this imperfect process of hiring. I tend to experience some spaces as enabling, while others at first block my creativity. Inhabiting the chosen space can take time, and my energy is then scattered for coping with and processing this initially indigestible spatial set-up. So in this hiring process that I experienced as empowering and neurodiversity affirmative, there had been choices that would not have worked for my own needs. The 'job interview room' was not where I would have gained inspiration to connect to the three panel members in the short amount of time. What matters in complex scenarios of not knowing how candidates will react to a room is a relational atmosphere in which needs can be voiced and by doing so, a new conversation can arise. Giving choice resets definitions of a fixed standard and can rescript the*

evaluation from comparison and ranking towards spaces for relational singularity."

Previous research has revised some specific aspects of neurodiversity affirmative hiring. The design of interview questions, in particular, benefits from this growing knowledge base. Maras et al.[6] evaluated and adapted an interview protocol when hiring autistic candidates. Based on this protocol, we shared interview questions in advance, gave care to the number of parts in questions, asked part questions in turn, and used explicit prompts of what expertise we were asking to hear about. Within interviews, we outlined what candidates could expect with regards to additional follow-up questions, gave prompts if the candidate did not fully answer a question, and gave invitation to pause or prepare further answers. An example interview question was, 'Please reflect on a current issue that is affecting students on university campuses, which could inform this project'. This was a deliberately open question. Candidates were able to check whether what they wanted to talk about was relevant. On reflection, the question yielded rich and insightful answers. We invited candidates to seek clarification over the meaning of questions and were transparent in what we were seeking discussion of. These decisions align with existing guidance for providing additional structure and signposting within the interview flow, from across both employment[6] and research settings[15, 16] when working with autistic people. We also considered the hidden curriculum of interview performance, by which we mean performances that meet a neuro-normative ideal for performing within a job interview, but which often assess behaviours that candidates have learned for this specific environment only. We stated that we expected differences in communication style and that we wanted to talk with each candidate as best we could. These decisions contributed to the '*relational atmosphere*' described, or an '*imperfect space*'. We made clear to all candidates that the purpose of this design was to enable them to best represent themselves.

Recommendation 4: Share discomfort when implementing a flexible and compassionate approach

> *Interview candidate reflection: "If we wait for the ideal scenario to start neurodiversity affirmative practice, we have a certainty to not get it all wrong. The neurotypical standard protects from 'mistakes' outside the box. But in not getting started to challenge this standard, there is a missed opportunity for an experimental frame where it is ok not to always get it right. There was a flow of imperfection that brought me closer to a team, to a field, to a way of thinking collaboratively about a research topic that I had so far mainly nurtured in my own introspective bubble. From my experience of the interview process, the challenge here was not primarily about finding the 'right' candidate or a 'right' new interview protocol to standardise. This is more about sharing the vulnerability of improvisation by doing things differently. When you place neurodiversity at the centre of the interview process, there is no standard, no technique, no action plan or universal advice because every person is different, every setting is different, every situation is different. This is about allowing the uncertainty of an encounter for which there is no fixed script."*

Our reflections on the impact of readdressing these details of the hiring process and sharing discomfort were as follows. We inhabited a better environment at interview. Candidates consistently said they appreciated that they felt welcomed, they were given choice, and were able to best represent themselves, which they said had not been possible for them in previous hiring experiences. They told us that the hiring process enabled them to perform well, which for us as a panel strengthened the interviews and our opportunity to hire a colleague. We observed a highly competitive process. We learnt about many topics

including psychological safety, trauma, and embodiment through the relevance of these topics for the interviewee experience. Honest reflections from candidates meant that we heard of personal experiences in reciprocation with the demands of the unfolding recruitment process, and we tried to respond flexibly as we went.

It is crucial to provide feedback to candidates, but this is often an especially confronting part of recruitment for neurodivergent applicants.[21, 22] Often interviewers give minimal or no feedback when somebody is unsuccessful after interviewing for a post. Unappointed candidates experience an(other) unexplained exclusion. A lack of feedback prevents constructive reflection and development of relevant interview skills. Further, for individuals with negative experiences of assessment in education and previous interviews, a lack of feedback may foster negative self-talk. This can particularly affect those with experiences of rejection sensitivity[23] (which we believe reflects a person's accumulated experiences of misunderstandings, negative judgements, or discouragement, rather than only a sensitivity within the person[1]). Neurodivergent people may recall experiences of stigmatisation or ableism in education and previous employment.[6, 24, 25] Without this opportunity to reflect together, organisations keep to an unchanged hiring process, and candidates maintain a restricted interview performance in response.

Our experience of informing unsuccessful candidates of the outcome was different from when we have hired previously. One candidate who we did not appoint queried the fairness of the appointment, because they believed they could fulfil the role described. This felt particularly pressured because of the explicit value that we placed on variable (non-academic) expertise and the ways in which the role could be personally tailored. The role could be a good fit for a number of candidates. This candidate neither passively accepted nor dismissed the feedback. Receiving this critique felt challenging to the panel, but we welcomed the feedback, and we thought it illustrated the process of changing practice for

the better. We reflected that the collaboration and investment in co-design might increase disappointment for candidates who we did not appoint. This is a difficult balance to strike. Accordingly, we made the decision to provide honest, detailed, and constructive feedback. We worded the feedback plainly but compassionately, focusing on what we thought candidates did well, alongside practical suggestions for what we thought candidates could improve. We acknowledged that written feedback may not be accessible for everybody, and candidates were offered alternative methods for accessing feedback, including a phone call. Similarly, when working with neurominority people within research, Szulc[16] recommends implementing a debrief to demonstrate inclusive practices across all stages of research design. This giving of feedback was in reciprocation with us receiving feedback. As noted, when we shared the reasons for our recruitment decisions, this included an invitation to talk further, to keep learning together. An imbalance of power was inevitable, and we did not intend to dismiss this. We committed to being honest and transparent. Candidates could submit feedback to the HR department with an option to keep it anonymous to the hiring team, or they could share feedback directly with any member of the hiring team. There was no prescribed format for providing feedback. Collectively, candidates gave feedback within their written job applications, email correspondence with HR and members of the hiring team, and in conversation with the hiring team prior to, during, and following interview.

Lessons learned from implementing neurodiversity affirmative hiring practices

We offer this reflection on neurodiversity affirmative hiring to help settle the incongruence that can exist within neurodiversity research, where practices can unintentionally exclude and disadvantage the minority group being represented.[26] We were aware of the potential for this hiring process to shape a candidate's story of how neurodivergence is valued by the society within which they engage.[27] When hiring, we were

in a position to contribute to a smaller plot, or theme, that might chime with or challenge more dominant ‘master narratives’ about neurodivergence in our culture.[28, 29] Specifically, there is evidence of the benefits for all involved when research is co-designed with neurodivergent peers.[15, 26] We add our reflections on the benefits of co-designing hiring processes.

We implemented these adjustments with a relatively small outlay of time and effort, though they required active consideration. The quality of the interviews far outweighed the investment we put into the process. Without the constraint of default barriers often associated with interview situations, we supported candidates to demonstrate attributes that they themselves might have hidden, or that we would not have given opportunity to see. We believe that this helps to close the gap between how somebody appears in an interview and how they then are at work day-to-day.[30] This should improve employment longevity.

These recommendations do not belong to any one sector, though they emerge from a higher education setting. Rather, they speak to workplace culture. A common theme in the feedback that we received was that candidates felt enabled to camouflage less and demonstrate their strengths more, in ways that had not been possible in previous interviews. This was both pleasing to hear and frustrating because the adjustments made had not been difficult to implement and did not impact the rigour of the process. Unlike in previous experiences of recruiting, as a hiring team we experienced a process of developing a network of colleagues rather than interviewing as an act of gatekeeping. The design we employed enabled some candidates to disclose neurodivergence in the professional sphere for the first time. Making these kinds of accommodations most probably benefits all neurotypes, but certainly ensures that interviewers do not unintentionally disadvantage neurodivergent candidates whether they disclose or not. Making these changes requires scrutiny of outdated hiring practices, which can exacerbate staff turnover and contribute to

unhelpful standards of evaluation at a single point in time, notably within the interview performance.[31, 32]

After hiring neurodivergent colleagues, employers can consider many possible workplace adjustments;[33-35] however the evidence base for their effectiveness is in its infancy. A neurodiversity affirming approach may therefore benefit organisations, which encourages reflection on the hiring process and what good performance looks like.[36]

Conclusions and recommendations summary

In this article, we share a worked example of neurodiversity affirmative hiring. We encourage employers to scrutinise the unintentional acts of discrimination embedded within neuro-normative hiring processes, and onward workplace supports. Importantly, we ask aloud which unspoken conventions and performances in recruitment processes get in the way of equal opportunity for employment for all. The following list provides a summary of our recommendations.

- Reflect honestly on the reasons for recruitment, and whether the chosen hiring processes support them. Do the processes enable every candidate to demonstrate their abilities to perform the essential tasks of the job whilst minimising non-essential performances?
- Demonstrate welcome of difference in job advertisements, without making disability disclosure a requirement. Write job descriptions that clearly detail the tasks of the job.
- Make choice possible and welcomed. Let candidates make choices about their disclosure of neurodivergent identity or experiences, their preferred

accommodations, preparation and presentation style for their interview, the interview space, interview format, and sensory environment.

- Make explicit the unspoken expectations of how a desirable candidate would perform, including sharing interview questions in advance and providing feedback following interview. Make clear that you accept differences in communication style and candidates can be themselves without making communication adjustments.

- Offer adaptations to the interview itself, to create "*a relational atmosphere in which needs can be voiced*" and "*a new conversation can arise*".
- Nurture a wider organisational culture built around compassion, that warmly encourages a flexible format of interaction and a flexible environment, and allows candidates to voice vulnerabilities and discomforts with confidence. This can mean hiring panels sharing vulnerabilities and discomfort with prospective employees.

In these ways, we explicitly communicated our expectation to share responsibility for the hiring process to empower every candidate to show their best selves. We believe we achieved this to some extent because of: (a) the level of detail and the openness in the contributions that candidates made, (b) their communication of adjustment preferences, (c) candidates taking advantage of flexibility in how they participated at interview, and (d) the feedback given to the hiring panel by candidates throughout. We consider these to be markers of a co-designed hiring process.

Author contribution and confirmation statement

SP conceptualised the article. All authors contributed to writing and revising the manuscript. CHH provided the personal reflections shown as quotes.

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