



Video: Neurodiversity 2023

Neurodiversity: Facilitation Guide



Overview

This facilitation guide and accompanying video have been developed to assist equal opportunity (EO) and equal employment opportunity (EEO) professionals and practitioners in discussing *accessibility*.

Additional information on how to conduct a facilitation can be found in the *Leader's Conversation Guide* (available at deomi.mil).

This guided discussion is focused on the *Neurodiversity* video. The video portrays a conversation that can happen at any time in the workplace. The facilitator can use the video and guide to discuss the demonstrated problematic behaviors and how the unit members and leaders can prevent, mitigate, or address them. Adherence to this facilitation guide is encouraged to ensure consistency in training delivery.

However, this guide is not all-inclusive and may be expanded based on the facilitator's experience. Throughout this guide, questions are framed to stimulate the facilitator's thoughts on areas to explore and consider in this process and on the specific topic. Users should provide a controlled, safe, and nonattributorial environment where individuals will be willing to share their perspectives. EO and EEO professionals, practitioners, and leaders can use this event to review and educate their members on policy and acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.



Purpose

The objectives for this discussion:

- Define the concepts of neurodiversity and neurodivergence.
- Discuss the video and the behaviors seen within it.
- Understand the impacts of being unaware of neurodivergence and its impacts.
- Discuss ways to be inclusive of those who are neurodiverse.

Preparation

This guide has been developed assuming that users have some basic facilitation skills and understand the facilitation process. Users should also review *The Leader's Conversation* guide for additional parameters, techniques, and information on facilitation (available at deomi.mil). *The Leader's Conversation* guide provides areas to consider, including the following:

- Site selection
- Ground rules the facilitation may use
- Question development
- How to conduct the discussion

Definitions

- Accessibility, as defined by the DoD, encompasses the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services to enable all people, including those with disabilities, to fully and independently use them. This includes providing accommodations, reducing physical and attitudinal barriers, and adhering to best practices like universal design (Exec. Order No. 14035, 2021).
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that an individual with a disability is one who “has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.”
- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires Federal Agencies to make reasonable accommodations for qualified Federal employees with disabilities unless doing so would result in undue hardship.
 - Physical disability – impairment in a person’s body structure or function, or mental functioning (CDC, 2020).
 - Cognitive disability – a broad range of conditions that include intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorders (ASD), severe, persistent mental illness, brain injury, stroke, and Alzheimer’s disease, and other dementias (CDC, 2016).



What Is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a concept that recognizes and celebrates the diversity of human brains and minds and challenges the idea that there is only one right or normal way to be. Neurodivergence is an umbrella term that encompasses many neurologically based conditions that affect physical or cognitive functioning, where sensory difficulties or overload are common (Webber, 2022), such as atypical learning patterns and sociability. Conditions such as autism, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, and dyspraxia are some examples of conditions considered under the term neurodivergence (Chapman & Botha, 2022; Webber, 2022).

Neurodivergence differentiates between neurological impairment versus divergence in neurological perception and processing, conceiving that those whose brain perceives and processes sensory information from the world around them differently than individuals who are neurotypical are an inherent part of human variation (Bickenbach et al., 1999; Chapman & Botha, 2022; Dyck & Russell, 2020). A group of individuals including some that are neurotypical and some that are neurodivergent would be considered a neurodiverse group.

Inclusive Strategies:

- Be receptive and open to reasonable accommodations for sensory sensitivities such as sound or light
- Clearly communicate tasks and direction—avoid implied tasks
- Give advance notice to changing plans
- Be kind and patient
- Do not make assumptions
- Recognize individual differences

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Impacts of Being Unaware

Failing to recognize neurodiversity needs in the workplace can lead to exclusion, hindered collaboration, and a lack of diverse perspectives. This can impact team dynamics and innovation. Neurodivergent members may feel stressed and have a decreased sense of well-being if their work environment is unsupportive.

Notes:



Process

Before the participants' arrival, determine and prepare the setting for the guided discussion. Ensure the video is prepared to view (direct from the [Center of Excellence Portal](#) or may be predownloaded).

Video Description

Neurodiversity

FOR FACILITATOR USE ONLY: The video portrays a conversation between two individuals discussing neurodiversity. The video opens with a meeting that is ending, and a female member asks to speak to Lt. Col. Ferrer. He asks her why she did not bring her point up in the meeting, but she responds with "I'm not the best in social situations." The female member then informs him that she is finding it difficult to do her job because of office distractions such as the noise from the printer, coworkers, and the air conditioner. She asks if she can use headphones to drown out the sounds and then explains how she has a form of neurodivergence. Lt. Col Ferrer states, "I did not know you had this disability." She explains to him that, "it is not necessarily a disability, and it is not always something that you can see." He commends her for opening up to him and being transparent. The video concludes with discussing ways to be inclusive of those who are neurodivergent, such as adjusting lighting.

Video Participants

- Female DoD Civilian and Lt. Col. Ferrer



Directions

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Validate: explain the purpose or objective of the discussion/training.
3. Set expectations and establish ground rules.
4. Introduce the topic (using the notes you created based on the topic).
5. Explain what neurodivergence and neurodiversity are.
6. Provide the handout (if used) to the participants.
7. **Read instructions:** You are about to watch a video that is made for awareness purposes only.
8. **Read instructions:** Answer the questions in your handout individually after watching the video. Then later, we will share your answers with the group.
9. Show the video.
10. Have participants answer the handout questions (5–10 minutes). Please encourage them to use critical thinking as they view the questions.
11. Lead a discussion based on the questions used.

Facilitator Notes

Suggestions: Display the questions on a bulletin board, butcher paper, or PowerPoint, or prepare them in a handout. Explain to the participants that they will need a pen and paper (or handout) to answer the questions you will use during the guided discussion. **The anticipated responses (ARs) after each question can assist the EO professional in identifying potential discussion points.**

**Facilitator Note:* The facilitator should be prepared to discuss the questions (or similar questions) with the participants.

**Give students ample time to answer the questions.*

Reflection Questions

Think about questions you may wish to ask the participants.

Question and AR:

Question and AR:



Facilitator- Develop Questions

Below are potential questions and ARs for use in guiding the discussion. Before the session, the facilitator should review them and may develop their own. The provided handout matches the questions provided below. If you modify or add additional questions, modify the handout accordingly.

**Facilitator Note:* The facilitator should be prepared to discuss the questions (or similar questions) with the participants.

- Describe the difference between neurodivergent and neurodiverse.

AR: Neurodiverse and neurodivergent are two related but different terms that describe the natural variation in human brains and minds. Neurodivergent is an adjective that describes an individual who has a neurological difference from the majority of people, or the neurotypical population. Neurodiverse is an adjective that refers to a group of people who have different types of neurology. For example, a group that included neurotypical and neurodivergent people would be considered neurodiverse.

- Describe how neurodivergence can affect individuals in the workplace.

AR: Neurodivergent people may face discrimination, stigma, or misunderstanding in the workplace due to the lack of awareness, education, or inclusion of neurodiversity. They may also encounter barriers or difficulties in accessing the same opportunities, benefits, or accommodations as their neurotypical peers. Neurodivergent individuals may suffer in silence if their workplace does not recognize the importance of their needs or does not provide reasonable accommodations. The video discusses how basic office noise, such as the copier machine and coworkers talking, can be very distracting for someone who is neurodivergent.

- Why is it important to be aware of neurodiversity?

AR: Individuals that are neurodivergent do not always have an obvious physical or cognitive impairment. It is important for leaders to be aware of what neurodivergence is and how it can affect individuals differently so that they can be prepared to help those individuals be successful in the workplace. Creating a more accommodating and accessible work environment that supports the needs and preferences of neurodivergent people will allow them to thrive and contribute unique ideas and problem-solving approaches that can benefit the entire team or unit.

- What are some examples of ways leadership can be inclusive to those with a form of neurodivergence?

AR: Get to know your people and their individual needs. When communicating directions, it is important to avoid implied taskings. Ensure instructions are communicated directly, concretely, and consistently. Check for understanding and feedback, and clarify any misunderstandings or confusion. Listen actively and attentively, and respect their communication style and boundaries. Avoid using sarcasm, irony, or metaphors. If there are any scheduling changes, provide advance notice. Be respectful and empathetic: Treat neurodivergent people with dignity and kindness, and avoid making assumptions, judgments, or stereotypes about them. Neurodivergent people may have exceptional abilities or passions in certain areas, such as creativity, attention to detail, logic, or memory. Try to understand their needs, preferences, and challenges, and ask them how you can best support them.

Leadership can show its appreciation for and celebration of diversity by recognizing and valuing the unique contributions and perspectives that neurodivergent people bring to the workplace and acknowledging their



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achievements and strengths. They can encourage a culture of openness, acceptance, and collaboration, where everyone feels welcome and appreciated.

- What are some ways that the organization can accommodate specific needs?

AR: Organizations can empower their leaders to make reasonable and appropriate accommodations to promote an inclusive working environment for all. For example, for someone like a neurodivergent individual who experiences sound sensitivities, leaders could allow the use of noise-cancelling headphones. Other types of reasonable accommodation for neurodivergent individuals include the following:

- Flexible work schedules and settings
- Quiet workspaces
- Adjustable lighting
- Closed captioning
- Assistive technology
- Alternative work assignment – telework or remote work allowances

Lead the Discussion

Open the discussion by asking volunteers to share their responses with the group based on the questions used. As you do so, keep in mind:

General Considerations

- Ensure all participants have an opportunity to share their thoughts.
- Encourage open communication among participants.
- When applicable, ask clarifying questions.
- Use anticipated responses to help the group when needed.
- Avoid “why” and closed-ended questions.
- Remind participants of the ground rules when necessary.
- Remember to let participants know that you are listening.
- Take notes for your summary and conclusion.
- Paraphrase when participants are unclear with their answers/assist them in reaching the objectives.
- Let the discussion be fluent with little to no disruptions or corrections.

Examples of Other Questions That Can Be Asked

- In your own words, how would you describe neurodiversity?
- What are some ways your organization can accommodate these individuals?
- If someone who is neurodivergent is afraid to disclose, how can that affect mission readiness?
- As a leader, what behaviors can you show to create an environment where others feel open to discuss issues?

Close the Session

**Facilitator Note:* During the conclusion, paraphrase participant comments to show that they were heard. The provided conclusion is an example on how to close out the guided discussion.

End your discussion by restating the objectives covered at the beginning and provide closing comments.

Summary:

Restate the initial objectives:

- Define neurodiversity and neurodivergence.
- Discuss the video and the behaviors seen within it.



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- Understand the impacts of being unaware of neurodivergence.
- Discuss ways to be inclusive of those who are neurodivergent.

Potential Closing Comments

During this discussion we explored what neurodivergence is, the impacts of a lack of awareness, and the way organizations can be inclusive to neurodivergent individuals. As seen in this scenario, individuals who are neurodivergent may feel uneasy bringing this up to a supervisor. It is important for leaders to be empathetic and use active listening skills during such conversations.

Talking about accessibility and neurodivergence brings more awareness into the workplace. Everyone wants to feel like they are appreciated and valued in their organization. Being inclusive to those who are neurodivergent with reasonable accommodations such as noise-cancelling headphones or different work spaces can make these individuals more successful.



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Handout

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1. Describe the difference between neurodivergent and neurodiverse.
2. Describe how neurodivergence can affect individuals in the workplace.
3. Why is it important to be aware of neurodiversity?
4. What are some examples of ways leadership can be inclusive to those with a form of neurodivergence?
5. What are some ways that the organization can accommodate individual needs?