

DEI ROUND TABLE.

PART 2

THE POWER OF NEURODIVERSITY AT WORK:

DEI Roundtable
Report

Talent x Forto

Berlin, October 2023



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ROUNDTABLE INTRODUCTION

About the Event

Hosted by Talent and Forto, the fifth DEI Roundtable series event is a continuation of The Power of Neurodiversity at Work discussion from July 2023. Based on valuable feedback from our community, we expanded the conversation to an increased focus on self-advocacy and the importance of policy creation to support neurodivergent professionals.

This roundtable occurred in Berlin on October 12th, 2023, with 50+ neurodivergent professionals, DEI practitioners, hiring managers, and advocates in attendance.

THE POWER OF NEURODIVERSITY AT WORK

Part 1 – Recap

A term coined by Australian sociologist Judy Singer, [Neurodiversity](#) describes the natural way that people think, learn, perceive the world, interact, and process information differently¹. We should not view these differences as deficits since there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving.

Guests at the last event discussed three different topics relating to Neurodiversity at work.

Understanding Neurodiversity: Exploring the Spectrum (Exploration):

Exploring the relevance of neurodiversity in the workplace, dispelling misconceptions, and embracing the unique strengths & perspectives of neurodivergent individuals to foster innovation and creativity in inclusive teams.

Inclusive Hiring and Recruitment Practices (Attraction):

Engaging in discussions about inclusive recruitment practices that identify and overcome barriers, including strategies for creating inclusive job descriptions, conducting interviews, and assessing the skills and potential of neurodivergent candidates.

Creating Supportive Work Environments (Support):

This discussion focused on discovering strategies for fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment for neurodivergent employees, including reasonable workplace accommodations, successful neurodiversity initiatives, the roles of managers and colleagues in promoting inclusion, and relevant legal obligations employers have towards their employees.

Guests of our Part 1 discussions believed this was the first time they could discuss, share, and learn about neurodiversity and ways to create more inclusive workplaces. They shared practical tips and insights and asked thought-provoking questions. Their interest in continuing to share and explore led to our second discussion on this topic.

Want more? Read the report from Part 1 of this [discussion](#).

THE POWER OF NEURODIVERSITY AT WORK

Part 2

Who was in attendance

We were lucky to have some of the same participants from Part One of this discussion join us for Part Two. New community members also joined, allowing us to benefit from the lived experience and professional expertise of neurodivergent professionals, Diversity & Inclusion practitioners, and advocates.

Event Setup

To guide our guests, facilitators led two discussions. Guests were grouped and had the opportunity to discuss each topic in 45-minute sessions.

Discussion 1.

Self-advocating practices for neurodivergent talent

Self-advocacy is essential when creating inclusive workplaces. Unfortunately, many factors hinder neurodivergent talent from successfully practicing self-advocacy at work, from the fear of stigma from colleagues to the lack of understanding from managers. Together, we look at ways the individual can self-advocate and how the workplace can become a welcome place for self-advocacy.

Discussion 2.

IMPLEMENTING NEURODIVERSITY POLICIES INTO CORPORATE STRUCTURES

Many organizations need help to implement neurodiversity policies into their structures successfully. With the backing of senior leadership, it is easier to put these into practice, and there are vital steps to be aware of when working out good policies. Together, we explore barriers to policy implementation and share tips and insights on how to remove these barriers and design and implement these policies.

What's in the report?

You'll read about what our roundtable discussions uncovered and gain insight into the key takeaways and suggested actions to support neurodivergent professionals and create more inclusive workplaces.

You can use the conclusions detailed here to help develop your internal DEI strategies, working to create a company culture where equity and inclusion are prioritized.

SELF-ADVOCATING PRACTICES FOR NEURODIVERGENT TALENT

Research states that as much as 20% of the population is neurodivergent, and many



individuals, especially women and girls, are underdiagnosed, leaving them without support and resources throughout their lifetime¹. Structural and systemic changes are critical to creating lasting inclusivity; however, as we discover through discussions, helping people to feel empowered to advocate for their needs is an essential aspect of helping to center neurodivergent professionals' experiences and create change. As more individuals learn more about themselves and their needs, self-advocacy becomes a vital skill set in ensuring each person has what they need to thrive at work.

Even with self-awareness and advocacy skills, it is often the case that work environments are not the safe places we need them to be. Disclosing neurodiversity is only sometimes possible. Each person should be able to decide whether they want to disclose based on their values, relationships, and preferences.

Supporting self-advocacy

The group clarified that psychologically safe workplaces are the best environments to ensure all neurodivergent professionals can share their needs and receive support. Leadership is responsible for creating the structure for safety and must hold themselves and their teams accountable for the behaviors that support safety at work. A positive team climate is the most important driver of psychological safety, and leaders can help cultivate psychological safety by role modeling and reinforcing the behaviors they expect from the rest of the team².

The groups agreed that expressing empathy, vulnerability, and active listening are the essential behaviors leaders and colleagues must model to create safer environments. Empathy helps leaders (and colleagues) understand their team members' thoughts, feelings, and emotions³. This can make people feel more understood and less alone as they encounter challenges since empathy is the ability to experience, feel, or imagine what another person is going through. Showing empathy makes it possible for all team members to feel safe sharing their experiences at work and their needs to do their best work.



The best leaders believed that what made them vulnerable is what made them beautiful

- Dr. Brené Brown

Vulnerability in leadership means being open and honest about one's strengths and weaknesses, admitting mistakes, and seeking feedback and support from others⁴. When colleagues and team members see that vulnerability displayed, their fears and doubts decrease, and they feel more confident in showing up to work as themselves, with their strengths and weaknesses, and feel more open to asking for support.

Being heard at work is one of the first ways anyone can be truly seen. Active listening is a skill set everyone needs, and when the behaviors aligned with active listening are displayed, deeper trust and care are created within teams⁵. Trust and care are crucial for a healthy team environment and create a safer workplace for neurodivergent professionals to self-advocate.

It is also important that colleagues and leaders transition from being an Ally to an Accomplice. An Ally is someone willing to act with and for others in pursuit of ending oppression and creating equality⁶.

Being an Accomplice goes beyond allyship. An Accomplice uses their privilege to challenge existing conditions at the risk of their comfort and well-being⁶. This can look like allowing flexible work policies within the team where a company policy is stricter, practicing new meeting behaviors to accommodate more working styles (e.g., sharing the agenda and the expected outcome of a meeting and expected contributions to a meeting before setting the appointment), using team budgets to making various accessibility tools available.

Self-advocacy & disclosure

Although safer workplaces are the ideal environment for self-advocacy, it is clear that even in safer workplaces, disclosure of a neurodivergent diagnosis or condition should not be necessary. The decision to disclose to managers or colleagues is personal and only possible where the workplace and team environments are safe. However, it is still important that neurodivergent professionals share their needs so they can thrive.

Although self-advocacy and disclosure are interrelated, the group was clear that if disclosure is not the path a neurodivergent professional wants to take, there are still ways to self-advocate without disclosure.



Self-Awareness

With more people learning about their cognitive needs and differences, many of us are on a journey of self-discovery and constantly learning what we need to thrive in different environments. As important as it is for companies to create strong policies to support neurodivergent professionals, it is equally vital for neurodivergent professionals to feel confident in knowing what works for them and what doesn't, and this can be a long journey. As we learn, we must be patient and have grace with ourselves, creating a flexible space within ourselves to try new things as we develop a deeper understanding of who we are, separate from the outside world's expectations.

Know your strengths

How we work, how we think, and how we express ourselves can all be strengths for our teams. Learning this truth will help develop deeper self-trust in what we offer to the workplace and our teams. When we are confident in what we bring to the team, asking for something someone else may not need can become more manageable. We all have different strengths that support business goals, and we all have different needs that should be respected and supported.

Make a Plan

Sharing what does not work is only one step in receiving what is needed. We can also be ready to share the solutions we have to address our needs. Connecting our needs to how this will enhance our strengths for work is one way to avoid

disclosing while being clear the requests are necessary.

Learn the policies

In some cases, companies have policies that can support neurodivergent professionals. Learning about existing policies that allow for better work conditions and requesting what you need can be worth the research and the effort.

Relationship building

Many managers are willing to offer assistance. Building a relationship with a manager helps us experience openness and empathy. If a broader policy does not exist, in some cases, we can share exactly what we need with our manager, and they can make sure we receive support.

Building relationships with colleagues (in and outside your team) can also be a path to sharing our needs and getting support. In some cases, we will learn about the support other colleagues receive, which can prompt us to feel comfortable asking for what we need to thrive.

Ideally, neurodivergent professionals could seamlessly request what they need without disclosing and with a positive response. In reality, companies only sometimes have inclusive systems to ensure neurodivergent professionals and needs are respected and valued. In the next section, we share our discussions about how companies can implement policies that create an environment where self-advocacy is appreciated and honored.

IMPLEMENTING NEURODIVERSITY POLICIES INTO CORPORATE STRUCTURES

Company policies are company rules that thoroughly and clearly outline behavioral and work standards, employee rights, and benefits⁷. Policies help make up the systems we use to create and develop a positive and fair company culture, ensuring everyone receives equal treatment and opportunities to excel⁷.

To respect and value the diverse talent in an organization, neurodiversity policies must be created, implemented, and improved to create a safe and supportive environment, attract and retain the best talent, and reach business goals.



We do not rise to the level of our goals. We fall to the level of our systems.

- James Clear

Our groups discussed three main topics for policy creation and implementation.

First, groups discussed the *tangible benefits* of implementing neurodiversity policies:

Authenticity at work

When policies that support neurodivergent professionals are implemented and used, expressing needs and working in ways that are best suited for our needs becomes easier to do, allowing for greater authenticity at work. Where authenticity is valued, workplaces have empathy and less judgment, and teams are healthier.

More collaborative teams

Collaboration is a key path to reaching business goals and developing strong teams. When policies support employees' strengths, teams can work better together, share workloads, ask for further support internally, and develop solutions and products that are more innovative and inclusive.

Learning and skills development increase

Policies that value the different strengths of employees also help to foster intellectual humility. Intellectual humility recognizes the limitations of one's knowledge, enables us to listen to those who don't have the same ways of knowing



as we do, and fosters human connection and cross-cultural collaboration⁸. Intellectual humility also helps develop skills such as adaptability and vulnerability, which allows employees to open themselves up to learning new ways of working.

Attracting & retaining top talent for innovation

Companies must create more inclusive environments to bring in the best talent and keep them there. We have learned that the ways companies have modelled 'top talent' in the past were narrow and non-inclusive. Where policies respect and value the skills and experiences of neurodivergent professionals, they can tap into a talent pool that can bring innovation to new levels.

Next, groups discussed barriers to successful policy implementation.

Low ownership and accountability

Practiced accountability is the main ingredient to successful changes to culture. Policies are a part of how culture is created, and everyone in the organization must be accountable for following policies (and processes) that support neurodivergent professionals.

In many cases, inclusion is considered an 'HR' topic and not a subject for all business areas, such as Finance, Sales, Operations, or Product Management. Inclusive learning and behaviors also seem to focus on middle management and

their teams, not executive leadership. Unfortunately, this leads to a lack of follow-through from executive decision-makers.

Without this broad and deep ownership and accountability, companies continue to experience low adoption of new policies and processes that support neurodivergent professionals.

Poor communication and continued support after the rollout

Creating new policies and processes requires the coordination of many complex elements. Of all the elements, communication is a crucial part of a change that will enhance adoption. When a change happens and something new is introduced, many companies think an email or a brief statement from a manager is enough. In reality, clear communication about the purpose and intention of the policies, before, during, and after the change, through various channels is necessary.

There is also a lack of dedicated support for employees and managers to use the new policies or processes. What could change the experience of neurodivergent professionals through reliable policies and processes becomes a frustrating set of rules that are not understood. This leads to low utilization, a lack of data for analysis, a low chance of review and improvement, and causes leaders to believe the policy was unnecessary. Ultimately, it leads to inadequate support for neurodivergent professionals.

Low self-education leads to no budget

When new policies and processes are suggested to support neurodivergent professionals, many decision-makers do not understand the need and choose to use their budgets for other priorities. It is also true that many managers may not have the budget immediately but do not request the funding in the future as the purpose and intention and 'return on investment' is unclear. It then becomes the responsibility of the neurodivergent professional to prove the expense is worth the cost. However, this creates a cycle of delaying the changes needed to support neurodivergent professionals, keeping decision-makers with a low level of education about a broad topic that needs attention.

Last, groups discussed the needed policy elements for genuine inclusion



Based on the barriers mentioned, the group discussed direct responses:

- Creating deep and broad ownership and accountability.
- Developing strong and effective communication and change tools for new policies and processes.
- Incentivizing decision-makers to self-educate on neurodiversity topics so they can support their teams with real investment.

The group also offered additional steps companies can take to create effective policies and develop genuine inclusion.

Diversity and Inclusion Embedded in the Business Strategy

Workforce planning is a crucial strategic process that requires a D&I perspective. This means the employee life cycle must include policies and processes for neurodivergent professionals that are continually reviewed, improved, and funded.

One example is ensuring each recruiter or hiring manager fills out a form when interviewing or making an offer to a candidate and capturing the candidates' preferred ways of working and any specific tools they need to work best. For new hires, hiring managers can then request these tools from the appropriate team. An onboarding survey can be provided to new hires after their first months to ensure they have received what they need, also giving them a chance to request further support.

The list from interviews/hiring can also be used to create a data set for the most requested tools and help the company invest in the tools that align with employee needs and company budgets. Continually reviewing the tools would ensure when needs change, the company can adjust.

A dedicated task force

When working to change culture through policies, it is important that a cross-functional team (e.g., affinity groups, business areas, functional expertise) is created and that the experience of neurodivergent professionals is centered and included.

Anonymous surveys to assess the current state helps the task force understand where to focus their efforts. External experts are also needed to guide this process. External experts can ensure policy creation is formed around the expectations of a diverse internal and external talent pool. It is also vital that each person has time to work in this task force without becoming overworked.

Clear ownership of policy management

Creating and implementing policies is only the beginning of supporting neurodivergent professionals. Once implemented, there must be clear ownership of the policy. This includes clarifying who trains stakeholders and users of the policy, ensuring specific contacts are trained well to answer all questions and resolve any concerns, and ensuring that policies have a stated timing for review and a documented approval process for any changes.

Continuous improvement

Employee engagement surveys are one way to create feedback for decision-makers about the actual experience of employees at work. This tool can help to break down where there are culture, management, and policy issues and can support decision-makers in prioritizing the right actions.

Ultimately, where neurodivergent professionals can anonymously share their experiences, they can help guide what needs to change.

Companies must ensure teams responsible for these surveys have the right tools, skills, external support, resources, and authority to take action on these surveys.

TO CONCLUDE

Part Two of The Power of Neurodiversity at Work helped our community continue an important discussion and brought to light many of the challenges neurodivergent professionals and companies face. The suggestions provided insight into the many ways we can all support the development of inclusive workplaces.

Being able to continue this discussion means our community benefits from the group's lived experience and expertise - which allows us all to be thoughtful and deliberate in the actions we take in our workplaces to support and learn from neurodivergent professionals.

Ultimately, we are all responsible for making our workplace better. We can all change our behavior to create a safer work environment, neurodivergent professionals can continue to self-advocate, bringing their needs to the forefront of the inclusive discussion, and decision-makers can invest in policies and processes that make inclusivity an action and not just a word.

Listen, Watch, and Learn

Below are some tailored audio and visual resources that can support your learning journey

The Power of Vulnerability

Brené Brown studies human connection -- our ability to empathize, belong, and love. In a poignant, funny talk at TEDxHouston, she shares a deep insight from her research, one that sent her on a personal quest to know herself and understand humanity—a talk to share.

Yes, Black women have ADHD, too, and need your attention!

ADHD affects everyone, though women often go undiagnosed, black women even more so. Abigail Agyei has lived with this disorder for her whole life, though she only got diagnosed recently. In her talk, she explains how and why early diagnosis in everyone, black women included, is essential for the entire society and discusses why it isn't a norm now. Abigail Agyei is an award-winning MBE-holding, dynamic senior policy advisor and change maker. She has over seven years of experience building and maintaining strong relationships with internal and external

stakeholders and community groups, leading community projects with vast experience supporting voluntary and marginalized groups.

Neurodiversity: The Untapped Competitive Advantage

Andrew Pfeiffer passionately advocates for the inclusion of neurodivergent staff in the workplace. He cultivates employee resource groups and regularly delivers presentations about neurodiversity to various audiences, including senior executives. He wants everyone to know that organizations will have a competitive advantage if they harness neurodivergent talent through inclusive recruitment practices and workplace culture.

OUR HOSTS



Inclusive and stress-free hiring for European scaleups and brands.

At [Talent](#), we are incredibly proud to help drive the DEI Roundtable events. As a technology and digital recruitment specialist, we are committed to taking a stand against social injustice.

We learn so much from every event and find real value in the opportunity to share our experiences as a leading recruitment agency. But while it's a big passion of ours, it's not our day job. Day-to-day, we are helping both corporate organizations and innovative scaleups to grow their digital teams through fast, efficient, and stress-free recruitment services. We are an experienced and diverse team of specialist recruitment consultants based in central Berlin. Part of what makes us unique is our commitment to promoting inclusive and ethical recruitment processes and ensuring that our candidates are introduced to working environments that can help them thrive as their authentic selves.

We aim to build long-standing relationships with our candidates and clients. Should you be in the process of hiring or seeking guidance on navigating the hiring or labor market, feel free to connect with me or a member of the team.



A white handwritten signature on a dark blue background, consisting of stylized initials and a long horizontal line.

Lisa Bartlett
European Director



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me on LinkedIn



“Own your Supply Chain.” - Forto was founded to deliver a highly transparent, frictionless, and sustainable digital supply chain. Forto platform technologies address the entire process stream, from offer, booking, document administration, tracking, and tracing to proactive exemption processing and analysis, supporting our customers with greater visibility, insight, and control. Leading manufacturers and e-commerce brands are among the 2,500 customers using Forto’s digitally-focused offerings as part of their supply chain delivery.

Headquartered in Berlin, Germany, the company currently has more than 900 employees with 21 locations across Europe and Asia, including offices in Berlin, Milan, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai

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OUR FACILITATORS



Héloïse Thon (she/her)

Freelancer, Neurodivergent Coach

As a neurodivergent coach, Héloïse is dedicated to helping others to unlock their inner superhero! With a coaching approach that is fun, supportive, and customized to unique needs, Héloïse will assist her clients in discovering their special abilities and utilizing them to conquer any obstacles. Acting as an accountability partner, cheerleader, and trusted confidant, she will guide you on your path to success.

Having personally experienced the challenges and stigma associated with being introverted and neurodivergent, Héloïse understands the barriers that come with having a mind wired uniquely. However, she firmly believes that with the right strategies and tools, everybody can get closer to their dreams and live a fulfilling life.



Mira Culic (she/her)

**Co-Founder, The Mind Takeaway +
Transformational Leadership Coach**

Mira is a Transformational Leadership Coach, director, and co-founder of the Mind Takeaway and Co-host of the Mind Takeaway Podcast. She works with executives, teams, and organizations, helping them develop their leadership skills and creating a conflict-free, high-performing environment. Through her work, Mira focuses on guiding people to mental clarity, enabling them to cast aside limiting beliefs, and building meaningful relationships with others, which are all crucial to the career of any leader and the sustainability of the organization they are part of.

Before she started her leadership development career, Mira worked as a physiotherapist, managed several medical startups, and established a Medical rehabilitation center in the Middle East.



Peter Griffiths (he/him)

Co-Founder, The Mind Takeaway - Leadership Development

Peter is a director and co-founder of The Mind Takeaway, a boutique consultancy specializing in leadership development through experiential learning, coaching, and mentoring. He is an executive coach working with leaders, business owners, and teams across different industries. Peter has developed hundreds of leaders and high-performing teams for international companies.

As a trusted Executive Mentor for the European Innovation Council, he supports female leaders in improving their leadership skills. Peter is an Adjunct Professor for the School of Business at Woxsen University, Hyderabad, India. He is also the co-host of The Mind Takeaway podcast, exploring various topics on creativity, leadership, and psychology.

Collaborators



Nichelle Appleby (she/her)

Independent Advisor, Work Imagined

Nichelle’s mission is to reimagine work by helping to create accessible, transparent, and value-driven programs while supporting the development of healthy, high-performing teams. Nichelle supports Talent International and developed this report based on research on Neurodiversity and notes taken during the discussions.

www.workimagined.com



Jeffrey Karl

User Experience Designer, ERGO

Jeff is a neurodivergent professional who was diagnosed in adulthood. Jeff pulled upon his personal experiences working in various business settings to provide feedback for this report before its release.

RESOURCES IN THIS REPORT

Discussions are a great way to exchange with experienced professionals on these topics, but time is always limited. If you want to dive deeper into the challenges and solutions shared, below are links to studies and articles referenced in this report.

1. [What is neurodiversity?](#) Harvard health publishing
2. [Neurodiversity is a strengthening point for your team and society.](#) Forbes.
3. [Neurodiversity is a competitive advantage.](#) Harvard Business Review.
4. [The Center for Neurodiversity and Employment Innovation.](#)
5. [What workforce Diversity means for Gen Z.](#) - Monster.com
6. [What is neurodivergent masking, and why do professionals do it?](#) - Inclusion Hub
7. [She Coined the Term 'Intersectionality' Over 30 Years Ago. Here's What It Means to Her Today](#) - Time Magazine.
8. [Are Diversity Surveys legal in Germany?](#) - Nicole Krüger
9. [Neurodiversity in the Workplace](#) - EARN
10. [Job Descriptions](#) - EARN
11. [The Golden Circle](#) - Simon Sinek
12. [How to hold your managers accountable.](#) - LeAnne Lagasse Coaching and Consulting, LLC
13. [The Dignity Standard](#) - Nichelle Appleby / Work Imagined
14. [Be a Better Ally](#) - Harvard Business Review.



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PART 2.
THE POWER OF
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Forto Logistics, Seeshöcker Str. 27 • 10485 Berlin
Thursday, 12th October 2023

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