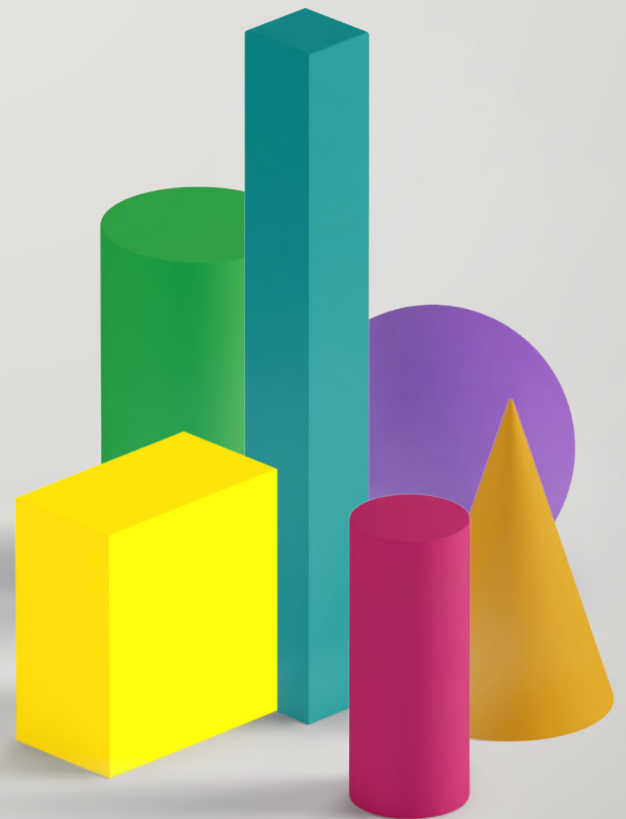


# Neuroinclusivity in the Workplace

## Part Three | Design Considerations

For neurodivergent individuals, typical work environments can pose challenges most people do not experience to the same degree – or at all. With increasing diagnoses, recognition, and acceptance, neurodiversity is impacting workplace planning now and will for years to come. In this blog series, we will explore essential strategies and considerations for companies to use in workplace planning, design, and change management – creating more inclusive work settings for all employees. This is the third post of a series. You can read post two [here](#).





# Workplace Design Considerations for Neurodivergent Employees

After a company has decided to update its workplace design to support neuroinclusivity, what are the crucial considerations? In this week's discussion of neurodiversity in the workplace, we will look at methods companies can use for testing design strategies before they invest, as well as aspects of office design that present opportunities for fostering neuroinclusivity.

## Mock-ups and Pilot Space to Get to the Right Design Strategy

After a period of [strategic planning](#), companies may find it useful to test out a design strategy before committing to any changes, especially where specific changes regarding neuroinclusivity are concerned. There are two valuable methods that can help companies gather data and employee feedback that will shape the outcomes of the design.

**Mock-ups** provide the earliest opportunity in the design process to solicit user feedback. A mock-up space is an informal, quickly built test space that gives employees a sampling of the functionality or intent of a design. It is used to elicit initial reactions from employees prior to building out a full pilot space. Employers can use mock-ups to evaluate several different design options, from furniture strategies to layout, before proceeding through the design phase.

An optional but beneficial next step is establishing a **pilot** program. Pilots serve many potential purposes when planning neuroinclusive workplaces: they can help test new technologies, policies, or workplace design.

### Neurodiversity

[noor-oh-di-vur-si-tee]

Differences in human cognition that affect functions such as sociability, learning, or attention. Examples include the autism spectrum, dyslexia, dyspraxia (difficulty with movement and coordination), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and Tourette syndrome.

### Neurotypical

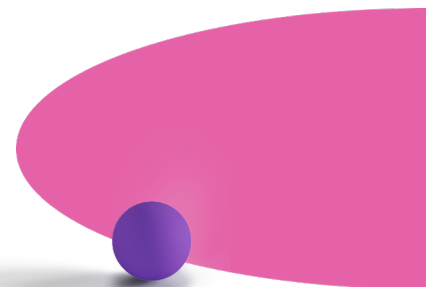
[noor-oh-tip-i-kuhl]

Showing typical or average neurological behavior and development.

### Neuroinclusive

[noor-oh-in-kloo-siv]

Anything that is designed to include both neurodiverse and neurotypical people.





Running a pilot successfully involves administering a continuous feedback cycle. The following cycle describes how to initiate and process the data that a pilot yields:

### Generate Buy-in

Engage leadership, as well as HR and IT, and set realistic expectations for outcomes for the initiative.

### Collect Feedback

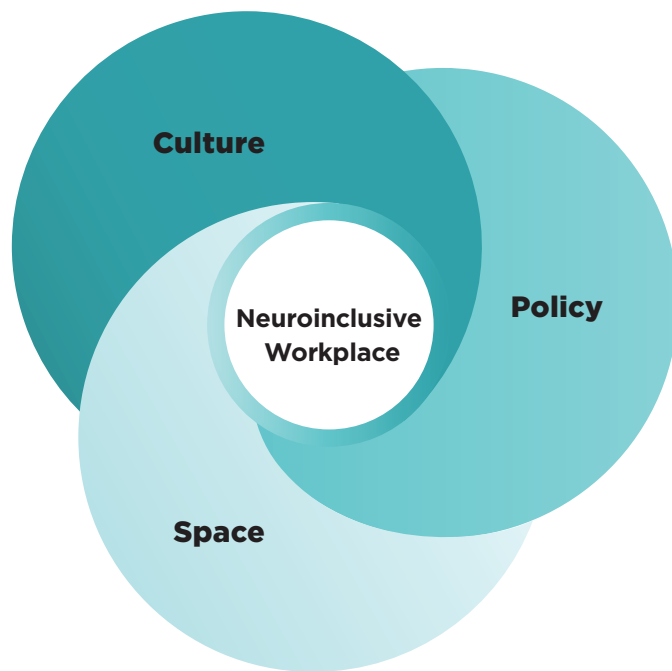
Solicit live feedback as well as reactions from users via survey after they have spent time in the pilot space. In addition to employee feedback, use occupancy sensors to collect and produce useful quantitative data on space usage. Analyze the data against the desired future state for the office to identify gaps.

### Adapt

Analyze data and user feedback to inform further tweaks or changes within the pilot space to arrive at the most user-friendly scenario.

Because neuroinclusive workplace design can impact so many aspects of the physical work environment, we recommend this strategy for any company who can commit the time and resources. Many organizations - [as many as 93% surveyed post-pandemic](#) - turned to piloting before adopting permanent workplace changes.

Piloting involves setting aside space, whether small or large, on- or off-site, and engaging with users to trial a particular design strategy within it. The pilot space is essentially a living lab: employees will use the space from day to day just as they would a permanent office for an extended period of time. Knowing how to pilot test a space is especially important when working to achieve a neuroinclusive workplace. It's a process that enables the company to continually test or re-test products or environments as staff grows or changes, ensuring that neurodiverse talent has access to the optimal working environment.



## Design Considerations

What does a neuroinclusive office look like? Just as no two neurodivergent individuals have an identical experience, it would be impossible to identify one perfect neuroinclusive design model for the office. [But one thing is certain - culture, policy, and space are closely intertwined, and a workplace that functions best for neurodiversity starts with a culture that supports it.](#) In that spirit, the following three principles should guide implementation of any design or work policy changes aimed at fostering neuroinclusivity:



### Offer options and choices wherever possible

Keeping a diversity of options available in furniture, equipment, and space types meets a wider range of needs at work – not just for neurodiverse talent, but for all employees.



### Educate, train, and de-stigmatize

Empowering neurodivergent employees to ask for what they need in their space starts with creating an open, understanding environment at work. By educating employees on neurodiversity, including training managers who handle teams, companies can broaden awareness and de-stigmatize disclosing a condition or making a specific request for furniture or equipment at work.



### Keep information accessible and transparent

Ensuring all employees have access to the same options and information will help neurodivergent people obtain the tools they need for a better work experience. Companies can, for example, make it clear that employees may request assistive technology or specific furniture products by posting the information on a company intranet or issuing regular reminders that choices are available.

By keeping these three principles in mind, companies can develop a more neuroinclusive approach to designing workspace. Let's take a look at how these principles intersect with a range of design features in the office:



### Furniture

Employees with autism, ADHD, or sensory processing disorders may benefit from specific furniture products and accessories to help them focus on work or control anxiety – for example, soft seating or an under-desk elliptical. Just as many companies now offer ergonomic furniture options, they can also offer a selection of task chairs and other desk accessories to meet the needs of neurodivergent employees. As suggested above, making sure all employees know these options are available, and removing the stigma of asking – perhaps by not requiring a doctor's note – will foster neuroinclusivity.



### Technology

A range of technologies exist to help neurodivergent people alleviate sensitivities or support different ways of processing information. Software and apps that read text out loud, reduce blue light, or offer intentional controls over web surfing to reduce distractions are just a few of these. Here again, education removes stigma. Making these products available to order and broadly advertising this at work can help neurodivergent employees feel confident in requesting what they need.





### Visual Distractions

Autistic people may experience sensitivity to color, especially bright colors or patterns. Offering options in work settings that incorporate neutral, soothing tones can ease this difficulty. Employers may designate stationary environments, such as desks, with more muted colors. Transitional spaces, such as hallways, should not be forgotten.



### Light and Temperature

Both of these ambient features can impact people with neurodivergent conditions. As many as half of all autistic people may have a [severe sensitivity to fluorescent lighting](#). Giving employees access to non-fluorescent lighting, dimmable task lighting, and small zoned controls for lighting and temperature can help mitigate these sensitivities.



### Scent

People with autism or sensory processing disorders may feel impacted by certain smells in their work environment. Educating employees to be thoughtful about their own choices (for example, being mindful about wearing strong fragrances at work or a policy on heating potent smelling foods) can help create awareness of this issue. Zoning areas of the office to create a meaningful separation - such as between workstations and eating areas - can mitigate the impact for neurodivergent employees.





# A Neuroinclusive Approach to Workplace Design

At the end of the day, designing a neuroinclusive workplace is not about making drastic or dramatic changes. It's about making smart choices that build enough flexibility into a space to make it open, usable, and productive for everyone, whether neurotypical or neurodivergent. By starting with a testing strategy such as a mock-up or pilot program, companies can gather valuable data on any design strategy before choosing a solution. By following the principles of offering choice, educating and de-stigmatizing, and keeping information accessible, companies can roll out simple but effective design changes that help neurodivergent employees stay productive, but also create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone.



**Next post:** *Your company has planned and designed a new workspace that offers more choice and options for neurodivergent employees. How do you introduce these changes company-wide? In our next and final post on neuroinclusivity in the workplace, we will reveal what a successful change management process should include.*

## Tell us what you think!

What are your workplace preferences? Click [here](#) to take a survey on neuroinclusivity in the workplace. Responses are anonymous and will help us gather data and have a better understanding of neuroinclusivity today.



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