Neurodiversity in accountancy: navigating your career.

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Tania's journey includes navigating her own career with ADHD, diagnosed in 2022, providing a distinctive firsthand perspective on neurodiversity at work.

1. Introduction

From its foundation in 1904, ACCA has had inclusion and access for all as a core value. This isn't just a moral imperative – there is continued evidence that diverse and inclusive workforces are good for business and good for society.

In this report, we explore the issue of neurodiversity, a marker of diversity which is finally becoming more recognised in education systems across the world and in the world of work. For the accountancy profession, ensuring neurodivergent talent can access the profession and enjoy rewarding careers is key to its future success.

Here we present several stories from ACCA members and other professional accountants that illustrate how having a neurodivergent condition has presented both work-based challenges that needed to be overcome, yet also endowed individuals with unique strengths, capabilities and qualities they have used to their career advantage.

We also reflect on some of the practical strategies organisations can adopt to support neurodivergent employees better, as well as advice for individuals themselves too. This narrative is at heart a good-news story, serving to remind all of us of the strength that comes from fully embracing neurodivergent talent within the profession.

2. The evolution of neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is defined as a natural variation in how the brain processes information. Every single person thinks and behaves differently. Our brains are as unique as our fingerprints, and neural pathways are constantly evolving. A proportion of the population has a greater than usual cognitive variation from the 'norm' in how their brains process information.

From an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense. Historically, early humans required individuals who could leverage existing knowledge and others who could explore new opportunities. Examples include those who were experts in crafting tools versus those who were comfortable with ambiguity, risk-taking and decision-making. Having people at the extremes of thinking styles benefited us as a species as we evolved. You could go as far as saying it was fundamental to our survival.

For most of the twentieth century, however, these differences were viewed almost entirely through a medical lens. Diagnostic manuals focused on symptoms, deficits and impairment, providing useful clarity but reinforcing the idea that the 'problem' resided within the individual. This helped unlock support in education and health care, but it also meant that legitimacy depended on a clinical diagnosis.

From the 1970s onwards, activists began to challenge this framing, arguing that inaccessible environments and attitudes were the key problem. Over time, a societal expectation developed that people's behaviour would conform to workplace expectations. And those who did not conform to those expected behaviours had two choices: to try and fit in (by masking) or, often, face adverse employment consequences.

In the UK, fewer than 30% of individuals diagnosed with autism are in any form of paid employment (Office for National Statistics *Outcomes for Disabled People in the UK* 2021). This isn't a reflection of capability, but of recruitment and workplace systems designed around neurotypical patterns. Many others who are neurodivergent and in employment are afraid of sharing a diagnosis owing to fear of being judged or treated differently, leading to exhausting masking that harms both well-being and performance.

What is shifting now is visibility and perceived safety. Pioneers such as EY's Neuro-Diverse Centre of Excellence and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) deliberately recruit neurodivergent talent, proving that when environments adapt rather than individuals, excellence becomes possible. More significantly, social media have transformed who controls the narrative. Autistic, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexic professionals now share their experiences, describing both the costs of poorly designed workplaces and the gains when support is done well. Online communities have popularised terms such as 'spiky profile', 'AuDHD' and 'dyslexic thinking', along with a more confident, rights-based tone. As more leaders and professionals disclose publicly, stigma doesn't disappear but it is increasingly challenged rather than quietly accepted.

This represents a fundamental shift: from viewing neurodivergent individuals as either 'broken' or universally gifted with 'superpowers' to recognising them as professionals with varying strengths and challenges, like everyone else, whose thinking patterns may align well with certain tasks while creating friction with others. The real question isn't 'what's wrong with neurodivergent employees?' but rather 'what workplace systems, processes and cultural norms were designed assuming one way of thinking, thereby inadvertently excluding other equally valid cognitive approaches?'

This research is based on narratives from neurodivergent accountancy professionals navigating the workplace. It explores not just individual experiences but the conditions that enable success. The narrative is changing. Societies are beginning to recognise the significant strengths of individuals who are outliers in cognitive thinking and the contributions they make to the workplace. More importantly, neurodivergent professionals themselves are reclaiming their own stories, reshaping expectations of what workplaces should provide, and proving that when the environment changes rather than the person, everyone benefits.

Neurodivergent professionals are reclaiming their own stories, reshaping expectations of what workplaces should provide, and proving that when the environment changes rather than the person, everyone benefits.

3. Why neurodiversity matters

It is estimated that between 15% and 20% of the population are neurodivergent. This means that if you are reading this as someone who is neurodivergent, you are far from alone. You are part of a significant proportion of the workforce whose ways of thinking have always existed and have always contributed to human progress.

Understanding why neurodiversity matters isn't about proving your worth to employers or justifying your existence in the workplace. It's about recognising that the challenges you face are often the result of systems designed around one way of thinking, not a reflection of your capability or value.

The shifting landscape

Over the last 10 years, the conversation about neurodiversity has evolved significantly, and this evolution matters for you as a professional navigating your career. What began as targeted hiring programmes for specific roles has broadened into a wider recognition that neurodivergent people exist across all levels and functions of organisations. As the focus on neurodiversity has grown, more individuals who have been hiding or masking their neurodivergence have begun sharing their experiences with their organisations.

This shift has created both opportunities and tensions. On one hand, increased visibility means more conversations about support and adjustments. On the other hand, the gap between awareness and meaningful action remains frustratingly wide for many neurodivergent professionals. The narrative is moving from 'what can neurodivergent people do for organisations?' towards 'what systems need to change to enable everyone to work effectively?' This reframe matters because it shifts responsibility: you should not need to adapt to the workplace – the workplace needs to be designed better. But the gap is still far too wide.

What this means for you

When workplaces genuinely embrace neuro-inclusion, several things become possible.

- **Your cognitive style becomes an asset, not a liability:** different approaches to problem-solving, pattern recognition and creative thinking are valued rather than seen as departures from ‘normal’ working methods.
- **You can work in ways that align with how your brain functions:** rather than exhausting yourself trying to force-fit to neurotypical processes, you have access to flexibility, tools and adjustments that enable you to deliver your best work.
- **You’re not alone in navigating challenges:** inclusive workplaces normalise conversations about different working needs, reducing the isolation and fear that often accompany disclosure.
- **Your wellbeing is prioritised alongside performance:** masking takes a profound toll on mental and physical health. Environments that allow you to perform authentically reduce this burden.
- **Career progression becomes genuinely accessible:** when competency frameworks and promotion processes are designed to recognise diverse contributions rather than rewarding conformity, your pathway forward isn’t blocked by your neurotype.

The broader context

Organisations that genuinely invest in neuro-inclusion see tangible benefits: they attract talent who value authentic inclusion, retain people who might otherwise burn out from masking and access thinking styles that drive innovation. But these benefits are secondary to the fundamental point: you deserve to work in environments where your cognitive differences are accommodated not because you make a ‘business case’ for your presence but because designing inclusive systems is simply the right thing to do.

‘The stories in this research demonstrate that when the environment changes rather than the person, neurodivergent professionals in accountancy don’t just survive, they thrive. Your challenges with certain workplace systems don’t reflect a deficit in you. They reflect a design problem in how those systems were built. And increasingly, that’s a problem organisations are being called to address.’

4. Neurodiversity and language

The language surrounding neurodiversity can be emotive, powerful and at times even contentious. For a neurodivergent professional, understanding this terminology matters both for how you describe yourself and for navigating workplace conversations about cognitive differences.

Key terms

NEURODIVERSITY	Applies to everyone. It describes the natural variation among all human brains in how they are 'wired' and function. Most cognitive variation falls within a certain range considered typical, but the concept of neurodiversity acknowledges that all brains are different.
NEURODIVERGENT/ NEURO-DIFFERENCE/ NEUROMINORITY	Describes those whose cognitive variation falls outside what is considered typical, affecting how the brain learns, processes information and experiences the world. This includes neurotypes such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia (DCD), dyscalculia and Tourette's syndrome. Many neurodivergent people have more than one co-occurring condition – you may recognise this in your own experience.
NEUROTYPICAL/ NEUROMAJORITY	Describes individuals whose cognitive processing aligns with what society considers 'typical' or within the most common range of variation. It applies to the majority of people.

How you choose to describe yourself

Language preferences in the neurodivergent community are genuinely diverse, and you have the right to choose how you describe your own neurotype. There is no single 'correct' way and what seems right for you may differ from terms used by others.

Identity-first vs person-first language: many workplace training programmes teach people to use 'person-first' language (eg, 'a person with autism') rather than identity-first language (eg, 'an autistic person'). You may have your own view about how you want to be described.

Research and community surveys consistently show that the autistic community in particular has a strong preference for identity-first language, viewing autism as an integral part of who they are rather than something they 'have' like an illness. Hence, many people say 'I'm dyslexic' or 'I'm an ADHDer' rather than 'I have dyslexia' or 'I have ADHD'.

Your choice matters: how you describe yourself is your decision. If you prefer to say, 'I'm autistic', that's valid. If you prefer 'I'm a person with autism', that's equally valid. What you'll probably encounter is colleagues who've been trained to use person-first language 'to be respectful' – you can gently redirect them to your preference. A simple 'I actually prefer 'autistic person'' is enough.

Language you might want to challenge

Certain terms are outdated, stigmatising or reductive. You're not obligated to educate everyone, but knowing why these terms are problematic can help you advocate your own position.

- **'High functioning'** and **'low functioning'** are reductive and misleading. They typically measure how accommodating someone is for neurotypical people, not your actual experience or capability. You might be labelled 'high functioning' while struggling profoundly with daily tasks because you mask well. These labels can be used to deny you support ('you're too high functioning to need adjustments') or to lower expectations ('they're low functioning, so we can't expect much').
- **'Disorder' language:** while diagnostic manuals still use terms such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, many in the community prefer 'Autism Spectrum Condition' or simply 'autistic' and 'ADHD.' You may find the 'disorder' framing doesn't reflect your experience – particularly when many of your challenges arise from environments designed for neurotypical brains rather than from inherent dysfunction.
- **'Suffering from'** or **'afflicted by':** if someone describes you as 'suffering from ADHD' or 'afflicted by dyslexia', they're framing your neurotype as an inherent tragedy. While you may experience genuine challenges, many neurodivergent people wouldn't choose to be neurotypical. You can push back on this framing: 'I'm not suffering, I'm navigating a workplace that wasn't designed with my thinking style in mind'.

'Asperger's Syndrome' is no longer used in diagnostic manuals and carries problematic historical associations. Hans Asperger, after whom the condition was named, collaborated with the Nazi regime's eugenics programme. Beyond these origins, the term was historically used to create a hierarchy within autism – often distinguishing those deemed 'more acceptable' or 'higher functioning' from other autistic people. Since 2013, diagnostic manuals have replaced Asperger's with Autism Spectrum Disorder/Condition. That said, some people still identify with the term Asperger's, particularly if they received their diagnosis under that label, and we should respect their choice of language for themselves. If someone uses this term to describe you, you can clarify: 'I'm autistic' or 'I have an autism diagnosis' – language that doesn't carry these historical burdens or create artificial divisions within the autistic community.

Navigating workplace conversations

When discussing your neurodivergence with colleagues or managers:

- be clear about your own language preferences early on
- don't assume you are obligated to accept outdated or stigmatising terminology just because someone means well
- focus conversations on specific support needs rather than broad generalisations about your neurotype
- you don't owe anyone your diagnostic details or functioning labels.

The language matters less than the attitude behind it. What you're looking for in workplace conversations is genuine respect, openness to understanding your specific needs and a willingness to adapt systems that create unnecessary barriers. You don't need colleagues who get every term perfect; you need colleagues who treat you as a whole professional whose ways of thinking and working have inherent validity.

5. Introducing neurotypes and diagnosis

There are several neurotypes under the neurodiversity umbrella. The *main* neurotypes are detailed in this section, though this list isn't exhaustive.

It's important to note that most of these neurotypes are lifelong and neurological – you're born with them. Neurotypes have no bearing on intelligence.

If you're neurodivergent, you may recognise what's often described as a 'spiky profile' – peaks in certain strengths alongside areas where you experience more challenge than neurotypical colleagues, who tend to have a flatter, more consistent cognitive profile.

Table 5.1 below, offers some examples of common patterns but remember: **your individual experience is unique.**

Table 5.1: The main diagnosed neurotypes

	HIGH-LEVEL DEFINITION	MAY HAVE STRENGTHS SUCH AS:	MAY EXPERIENCE CHALLENGES WITH:
Attention deficient hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	Neurodevelopmental condition characterised by differences in attention regulation, activity levels and impulse control	Connecting disparate information; analytical skills; hyperfocus; creative problem-solving; crisis management	Executive functioning (planning, organisation, time management); sustained attention on non-preferred tasks; working memory
Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)	Varied condition characterised by differences in communication, social interaction and sensory processing	Attention to detail; systematic thinking; pattern recognition; deep focus; loyalty and reliability	Sensory processing; navigating unwritten social rules; context switching; processing ambiguity
Dyslexia	Specific learning difference affecting reading, writing and information processing	Visual-spatial thinking; big-picture perspective; creative problem-solving; verbal reasoning	Written communication; reading speed; spelling; processing written information under time pressure
Dyspraxia or Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)	Neurological difference affecting movement, coordination and planning	Holistic thinking; empathy; verbal communication; strategic perspective	Motor coordination; learning new physical processes; memory for sequences; handwriting
Dyscalculia	Specific learning difference affecting number processing and mathematical reasoning	Creative thinking; strategic thinking; organisational skills; lateral problem-solving	Number sense; mental arithmetic; pattern recognition in numerical data; time and money management
Tourette's syndrome	Neurological condition involving involuntary movements and vocalisations (tics)	Creativity; empathy; resilience; ability to multitask	Managing tics (verbal and non-verbal); anxiety; sensory processing; social situations where tics may be noticeable
Acquired brain injury	Damage sustained to the brain through injury, illness, or other causes	Effects will vary depending on the brain region that sustained the injury	

What this means for you.

There are several important points to keep in mind as you read this table and think about your own experience.

- **You are more than a list of traits:** these strengths and challenges are generalisations based on common patterns. Your specific profile may look quite different. You might have strengths not listed here and experience challenges that aren't mentioned. You're an individual, not a stereotype.
- **Multiple neurotypes are common:** there's a high chance you have more than one neurotype, whether formally diagnosed or not. The term 'AuDHD' reflects how common the autism and ADHD combination is. Co-occurring conditions can create compound effects – sometimes strengths amplify each other, sometimes challenges intersect in complex ways.
- **Context matters profoundly:** a 'challenge' in one role or environment may be irrelevant or even an asset in another. Difficulty with sustained attention on non-preferred tasks matters very differently if you're in a role you find genuinely engaging versus one that bores you. Sensory processing challenges are much more manageable in a quiet, predictable environment than in a noisy open-plan office.
- **Severity varies and changes continuously:** location on a spectrum of any given trait can change depending on stress, sleep, workload, environment and countless other factors. You're not 'faking' if your challenges seem more pronounced some days than others.

'Isn't everyone a little bit ADHD/autistic/dyslexic?'

You've probably heard this before, perhaps from well-meaning colleagues trying to relate to your experience. It's true that many neurotypical people occasionally struggle with focus, feel overwhelmed in social situations, or mix up words when reading. Nonetheless, there's a fundamental difference between occasionally experiencing these challenges and living with them as a consistent, pervasive pattern that significantly affects your daily functioning.

Frequency and severity matter: everyone occasionally loses their keys. Someone with ADHD could lose their keys multiple times a week, might spend 20 minutes searching for them while already late, and experiences this pattern across multiple areas of life – not just occasionally, but persistently. Everyone sometimes finds bright lights uncomfortable. Someone with sensory processing differences might find fluorescent office lighting physically painful, triggering migraines or shutting down their ability to think clearly for hours.

The spectrum isn't a sliding scale from 'a little bit' to 'very': when people say autism or ADHD exists on a spectrum, they don't mean everyone sits somewhere on that spectrum with neurotypical people at one end. Rather, the spectrum refers to how these neurotypes manifest differently in different individuals – the specific combination of traits, their intensity and how they affect functioning. You're either on the autism spectrum or you're not. You either have ADHD or you don't. Neurotypical people occasionally experiencing similar challenges doesn't put them 'on the lower end' of these spectrums.

Impact is what defines neurodivergence: the clinical threshold for neurodivergence isn't just about experiencing certain traits – it's about those traits causing substantial, continuous impact on your life. If you've spent years developing elaborate coping mechanisms just to appear 'normal', if you regularly experience burnout from masking, if your work performance suffers despite extraordinary effort, if you need significant accommodations to function in standard workplace environments – that's qualitatively different from someone who occasionally relates to a meme about executive dysfunction.

Why this distinction matters for you: when colleagues minimise your experience with 'everyone's a bit like that', they're often trying to be supportive by showing they can relate. But this equivalence can be harmful when you're trying to access support or adjustments. Your challenges aren't universal human experiences everyone shares equally – they're genuine differences in neurological functioning that require real accommodation, not just 'trying harder' or 'being more organised'.

You don't need to justify the severity or regularity of your challenges to prove you're 'neurodivergent enough' for support. But understanding this distinction can help you articulate why you need adjustments that neurotypical colleagues don't, and why 'everyone struggles sometimes' isn't a valid reason to deny you those adjustments.

Why many people remain undiagnosed

If you're reading this without a formal diagnosis but strongly recognise yourself in these descriptions, you're not alone. Many neurodivergent people go undiagnosed, often discovering their neurotype later in life. Others may not seek diagnosis despite recognising they're neurodivergent. This happens for multiple reasons.

- **Cultural differences:** how neurodiversity is perceived varies significantly across societies, generations and communities. In some cultures, there's significant stigma attached to diagnosis. Older generations may not have had access to the language or frameworks to understand their experiences as neurodivergent.
- **Gender bias:** diagnostic criteria were historically developed from how neurodivergence presents in boys and men. Women, non-binary people and those socialised as female are significantly under-diagnosed because they often present differently and may be more likely to mask their traits. Many women don't receive ADHD or autism diagnoses until their 30s, 40s or later.
- **Privilege and access:** getting a formal diagnosis requires access to appropriate healthcare professionals, which varies dramatically depending on your location, financial resources and healthcare system. In the UK, NHS waiting lists for adult ADHD and autism assessments can stretch to years. Private assessments cost thousands of pounds. This creates a two-tier system where diagnosis becomes a privilege.
- **Educational masking:** if you performed well academically, particularly if you compensated for challenges through intelligence or excessive effort, your struggles may have been dismissed. 'You can't be dyslexic/ADHD/autistic – you got good grades' is something many neurodivergent professionals hear, even when they are drowning internally.

What this means for disclosure and support

If you choose to self-identify as neurodivergent without formal diagnosis, that deserves respect. You know your own experience. Be aware, however, that accessing formal workplace adjustments under the disability discrimination legislation typically requires either a formal diagnosis or evidence of substantial impairment in most jurisdictions. This creates a frustrating catch-22 for many.

Some neurodivergent professionals choose to request adjustments based on specific needs without mentioning neurodivergence at all: 'I work more effectively with written rather than verbal instructions' doesn't require diagnostic disclosure. Others decide the formal diagnosis route is worth it for the protection and leverage it provides. There's no single right approach – it depends on your workplace, your specific needs and what seems most appropriate for you.

The takeaway: these neurotype descriptions are a starting point for understanding common patterns, not a checklist you need to match perfectly. Your neurodivergent experience is valid whether you have one diagnosis, multiple diagnoses, or no formal diagnosis at all. What matters is understanding your own cognitive profile well enough to advocate your needs for doing your best work.

6. Our stories

This research seeks to illuminate the stories of those who are neurodivergent within the accountancy profession. Interviews were conducted with a wide selection of participants, diverse across age, gender, ethnicity, cultural background and neurotype.

The research sought to understand the challenges individuals face at work and in education; their strengths; how organisations have implemented support at both the organisational and individual level; and thoughts about the future of neurodiversity at work.

If you're reading this as a neurodivergent professional in accountancy, or considering entering the profession, these stories are for you. They reflect experiences you may recognise in your own career: the moments of friction when workplace systems don't align with how your brain works, the relief of finally finding support that actually helps, the exhaustion of masking, and the satisfaction of being able to contribute your strengths authentically.

These stories ultimately celebrate thinking differently. They demonstrate that neurodivergent professionals aren't thriving despite their neurotype, but often because of the unique perspectives and approaches they bring. We hope you find validation, practical insights and encouragement in these accounts. You're not alone in navigating this profession as a neurodivergent person, and these stories prove that success is not only possible but can be genuinely fulfilling when the right conditions are in place.

As an ACCA trainee and restructuring administrator at Menzies LLP, **Clara MacDonald** represents a new generation of neurodivergent professionals who are reshaping workplace expectations and driving systemic change through open dialogue and practical advocacy.

From early diagnosis to advocacy: Clara MacDonald's journey in reshaping neurodiversity support

Clara MacDonald's neurodiversity journey began early. Diagnosed with dyslexia in primary school, she has navigated education and now her professional career with a clear understanding of her neurological difference. As a restructuring and insolvency administrator at Menzies LLP while pursuing her ACCA qualification, Clara brings both personal experience and a fresh perspective to conversations about neurodiversity in accountancy.

Breaking stereotypes about dyslexia

Clara's story challenges common misconceptions about dyslexia from the outset. Despite struggling with reading grades that placed her significantly behind peers, a teacher's introduction of coloured acetates revealed the power of simple accommodations. She explains:

'A lot of people with dyslexia have something called visual stress and prefer reading on certain colours because the words don't jump out of the page. As soon as I had that as a tool, reading became really accessible to me. I realised that actually I'm dyslexic, but that doesn't mean I don't love reading.'

This early discovery shaped her approach to her condition: dyslexia means tasks take longer and require specific tools, but it doesn't limit what she can enjoy or achieve. Her choice of restructuring and insolvency, with its emphasis on report writing and analytical thinking, deliberately plays to her strengths while acknowledging her challenges. 'It takes me longer to do a case file review or read through legal advice, but it doesn't mean I don't enjoy those things. I've learned that I just need the accommodations in place to be able to enjoy them'.

Driving organisational change from within

When Clara joined Menzies, neurodiversity testing wasn't in place and there was no concrete procedure for accommodations, such as extra study time. Rather than accepting the status quo, she found allies in her manager, Alex, and her team partner, John Cullen, himself neurodivergent. 'John literally set up a meeting

and said, “Let’s talk about you, but let’s also talk about your ideas for Menzies generally”’, Clara recalls. This openness to feedback proved transformative. ‘It’s so important for firms to be receptive to people’s ideas’, she emphasises.

‘It’s great having neurodivergent policies, but if it’s neurotypical people making these policies, they aren’t necessarily always going to be the best they could be. You need to hear from the people who live and breathe it and experience it.’

Her advocacy has yielded concrete results. Beyond personal accommodations such as screen colour overlays and extra time for both exams and study leave, Clara has helped shape broader organisational changes. She approaches neurodiversity support strategically, advocating universal design that benefits everyone, not just those with diagnoses.

‘There are so many people who are undiagnosed. Just having the options: they may have never tried something before, but then if they try it and realise it works for them.’

The neurodiversity–mental health connection

Clara’s journey has taken a new turn recently as mental health professionals suggested her struggle with her own mental health might stem from more than dyslexia alone. ‘A lot of symptoms people assume are depression or anxiety might actually be autism or ADHD related’, she explains. ‘The overwhelm, the stress – those are very typical of people who have ADHD, for example’.

Currently exploring potential ADHD or autism diagnoses, Clara represents many neurodivergent individuals discovering that conditions often travel together. ‘I’ve learned that neurodiversity is a whole spectrum and quite often conditions come hand in hand with each other. I always thought I was dyslexic and that was that’.

This exploration has deepened her understanding of workplace support needs. The open dialogue with her managers has proved crucial: ‘I’m really lucky in that they’ve created such a safe space for me to talk. If I need a 10-minute break, I’ll go for a walk. If I need to work somewhere else because the office is overstimulating and noisy, I just keep that open communication’.

Reshaping accountancy’s future

Clara sees both progress and challenges ahead for neurodiversity in accountancy. Her involvement in neurodiversity conferences and events revealed a vibrant but often hidden community. ‘I didn’t know about this community before. It needs to be more publicly talked about, not just this in-the-loop circle of “oh, you’re neurodivergent, so come along to this”’.

For those considering accountancy careers, Clara’s advice balances realism with optimism. ‘It’s important to be honest with yourself about what your challenges are and what your strengths are’, she counsels.

‘There’s a tendency to focus on obstacles, but actually there’s a whole bunch of strengths that come with neurodiversity that can be really applicable to the workspace.’

She points to her own analytical thinking and tendency to skip small talk in favour of deeper questions as advantages. ‘I’m quite critical, and it seems obvious to me, but it’s not necessarily obvious to someone else. That’s definitely a strength’.

A generational shift

Clara’s optimism about the future is tempered with realism. She sees younger generations raising the bar for workplace expectations: ‘Twenty years ago, neurodiverse accommodations perhaps weren’t seen as a bare minimum standard, whereas trainees coming in now go, “actually, yeah, this is just the bare minimum”’.

The key to progress, she believes, lies in recognising that support enables confidence.

‘There’s a lot of people who might be struggling with self-esteem, and it might be because of their neurodiversity. It just means they need the support in place to be able to thrive, and then they build that confidence.’

As Clara continues her ACCA journey while helping reshape Menzies’ approach to neurodiversity, her story exemplifies how early diagnosis, combined with workplace openness and practical advocacy, can transform individual challenges into organisational strengths. Her message to the profession is clear: the simplest changes often have the biggest impact, and listening to neurodivergent voices isn’t just the right thing to do – it’s essential for attracting and retaining the next generation of talent.

Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Condition in his mid-twenties, **David McCann FCCA** exemplifies how understanding one's cognitive strengths, finding the right managerial support and leveraging technology can create a fulfilling career path in complex group accounting roles.

Logic, leadership and leveraging technology: David McCann's blueprint for neurodivergent success

David McCann qualified as a Chartered Certified Accountant at 37, having navigated early academic challenges that would have deterred many. His journey from struggling with economics papers to gaining a (strong) proficiency in complex group consolidations illustrates not just personal resilience but the transformative power of both excellent management and self-awareness in unlocking neurodivergent potential.

Building on logical foundations

David's cognitive strengths were evident early in his educational journey, though not yet understood. He explains:

'I was good at, drawn to and really enjoyed mathematics and accounting. The answer is either right or wrong; a Balance Sheet balances or it does not.'

This preference for objective over subjective thinking created challenges with open-ended assessments such as 'The theme of X runs through William Wordsworth's poetry. Discuss' – questions with 'as many right or wrong answers as there are students' proved incompatible with his self-professed black-and-white cognitive thinking style.

When some of the initial ACCA qualification papers proved insurmountable despite multiple attempts, an education adviser suggested an alternative route through the ACCA Certified Accounting Technician qualification.

'The combination of the Accounting Technician qualification and the continued gaining of practical experience facilitated my learning, and from that the attainment of the ACCA qualification, rather than going down a pure academic route.'

This early example of reasonable adjustments – finding different pathways to the same destination – would become a theme throughout David's career.

The transformative power of exceptional management

David's career progression illustrates how management quality can make or break career experiences. Two managers stand out as exemplars of best practice, the first of whom encouraged his return to complete his professional accountancy qualification despite his exhaustion with academia. 'You have so much potential here, but without the piece of paper, you won't achieve it', he told him.

The manager who most facilitated David's development operated with remarkable accessibility and wisdom. He actively encouraged staff to seek advice and appreciated those who demonstrated foresight in requesting assistance. When David faced a delicate situation requiring pushback to another department, he struggled with the political nuances of corporate communication. The manager provided precise wording that would 'assign responsibility without assigning responsibility but simultaneously deflect it away from us' while maintaining professional relationships. The solution worked immediately.

'He had this great ability to walk a tightrope without losing balance and walk through an area of unexploded corporate and relationship landmines without detonating a single one', David reflects. This manager combined high intellect with exceptional soft skills, technical excellence and (critically) diplomatic tact. The ability to navigate work-based situations in a similarly tactful way, David openly admits, can be challenging for him.

The other exemplary manager, David recalls, operated slightly differently but with equal effectiveness. 'He was a real people's person with very strong people skills'. This manager had no personal experience with neurodivergence yet created an environment where David felt comfortable enough to disclose. 'You felt you would not be rebuked', David explains.

'While he may not have fully understood the topic, he would be open-minded enough to go off and research it for himself to be able to support you.'

This willingness to learn and adapt demonstrates how effective management transcends personal experience when built on genuine care and professional commitment.

Leveraging unique cognitive strengths

David's ability to maintain intense focus on complex analytical tasks translates into remarkable professional capabilities. He asserts that his hyperfocus enables sustained attention to complex problems that could overwhelm or bore other colleagues.

'I have had tasks involving spreadsheets that were up to six-digit counts of rows deep and double-digit counts of columns wide. I was able to deal with it totally unfazed and unaffected.'

David's hyperfocus enabled sustained attention to a problem that required deep logical analysis and pattern recognition.

This hyperfocus could be so intense that 'the house could be crashing down around you; you'd be none the wiser. Six hours can feel like 30 minutes when absorbed in problem-solving'. David describes building complex Excel arguments across five columns, then condensing them into a single formula that reflects his understanding of Excel's underlying 'if X = Y do this, or else do that' logical architecture. His strengths in these areas he attests are due in part to his neurodivergent diagnosis.

His strengths extend beyond technical capability. David identifies himself as 'affable, amenable, resilient' with strong 'adaptability, self-containment, attention to detail, honesty' and a preference for macro- rather than micro-management. The self-awareness to recognise these strengths – and complementary limitations – has guided career choices away from more political environments towards roles using analytical thinking and technical excellence.

Technology as a communication bridge

David demonstrates how technology can enhance communication effectiveness for professionals who think in logical, direct patterns. Recognising that certain communication styles don't come naturally to him, he has embraced artificial intelligence (AI) tools to bridge these gaps while maintaining authenticity.

When faced with a persistent sales approach that required firm but diplomatic rejection, David used Microsoft 365 Copilot with careful prompt engineering: 'Please reword this such that it is firm but fair, professional, empathetic response'. The result transformed his natural directness into nuanced communication.

Similarly, when crafting complex emails that require political sensitivity, David leverages AI to help structure his thoughts while preserving his authentic message. He notes:

'It has scope to reduce the burden on management's time and resources, with management now not needing to now help staff as much with communication challenges.'

Though he cautions against over-reliance: 'Be careful not to use only these drafts without tailoring, as recipients will recognise AI-generated content'.

Beyond normal day-to-day emails, David particularly values Copilot's ability in more technical accountancy issues and processes, for example, using it to explain complex Excel formulae in plain English, enabling clearer knowledge transfer across teams. 'It can provide an explanation of what the formula is doing and each of the steps Excel took to arrive at said formula', he explains. This is particularly beneficial when trying to explain a very complex analysis, using Excel, to individuals with more limited spreadsheet skills.

A vision for inclusive excellence

David advocates fundamental shifts in organisational thinking as the workplace continues to evolve and the younger generation seeks to attain leadership positions. He believes the future belongs to leaders who blend technical excellence with 'strong interpersonal skills, empathy, diplomacy, graciousness and approachability'.

He challenges recruitment practices that assume career progression must follow traditional patterns. Many professionals, including both neurotypical and neurodivergent, 'prioritise stability over rapid upward mobility' and excel in technical rather than management roles. Rather than viewing this as limitation, organisations should recognise these individuals as invaluable contributors to technical excellence and problem-solving capabilities.

David's advice to neurodivergent professionals entering accountancy reflects hard-won wisdom:

'Accept who you are and the uniqueness you can contribute. Job titles and big salaries are not the ultimate measure of success...instead prioritise work-life balance, health, quality of life, family and quality friends. If you want to feel rich, count all that you have which money cannot buy.'

David McCann's journey demonstrates that with the right management support, clear self-awareness and strategic use of technology, neurodivergent professionals can not only succeed in complex accountancy roles but also bring unique values that enhance organisational capability. His story serves as both an inspiration and a practical blueprint for creating workplaces where analytical excellence and individual potential thrive together.

John Cullen – Partner, Menzies

A late ADHD diagnosis at 52 transformed **John Cullen's** understanding of his career success, revealing how his unique ability to see solutions and patterns has made him an invaluable partner in restructuring and insolvency, while highlighting the importance of authentic leadership in driving organisational change.

From hiding in plain sight to leading with authenticity: John Cullen's journey to understanding

As a partner specialising in recovery, restructuring and insolvency at Menzies, and a licensed insolvency practitioner, John Cullen has built a successful career on his ability to see solutions where others see only complexity. His journey to understanding himself as a neurodivergent professional began during COVID-19, when the sudden shift from a bustling office environment to isolation triggered a crisis that would ultimately lead to profound self-discovery.

The COVID catalyst

Before the pandemic, John thrived in an office environment where he could 'disrupt' by moving around, checking on colleagues and engaging in strategic planning. The shift to remote work brought an immediate challenge: seven and a half to nine and a half hours of back-to-back meetings daily, with no natural breaks or movement. As the initial crisis period waned and meetings decreased, John found himself facing something unexpected. He recalls:

'I started sitting staring at my computer screen like I was frozen, unable to do the work that was in front of me. I'd always thought that I had this inherent laziness. The odd time I'd let people down, and I couldn't really understand why my motivation for getting stuff done sometimes wasn't there.'

The breakthrough came through family connections. John's cousin, Michael Cullen, known as 'Speedo Mick' for his charitable walks in swimming trunks, had been diagnosed with ADHD alongside other conditions. When John's nephew also received an ADHD diagnosis, John began to recognise patterns. 'I looked at the symptoms and thought, 'this is me. I can't be. I surely can't be ADHD. But as I did a little bit of research into it, I realised that everything that I was struggling with appeared to be'.

At 52, John sought and received his diagnosis. In Wales, where public waiting lists stretch five to six years, he was fortunate to access a private assessment. The official diagnosis was 'ADHD tendencies', though he is being treated for ADHD. John notes the complexity of adult diagnosis: 'The criteria tend to look at whether you're constantly moving from job to job, whether you're able to hold down a job, what your current status is. I'm in a really privileged position because of where I am'.

Understanding brings relief, but also complexity

The diagnosis initially brought immense relief. John reflects:

‘I’ve got a reason, I’ve got an understanding of why some things are so different. It can feel sometimes like you’re an alien in a world where the majority are neurotypical, so it began to make sense.’

Even so, John quickly discovered that understanding neurodiversity is far more nuanced than having a label. ‘As soon as you meet one neurodiverse person, you understand one neurodiverse person’, he observes.

‘My neurodiversity with all of the “co-morbidities”, as they describe them, means I’m my own flavour of chocolate cake. I’m still not sure what particular type of chocolate cake I am yet, and probably never will get there.’

John describes himself as self-diagnosed autistic and ‘definitely having dysgraphia’, with handwriting that reveals the challenge. He was hyperlexic as a child, able to read at the same time he could speak, which became a ‘party trick’. These various traits create what he likens to an ‘under-inflated balloon’ where addressing one area causes another to emerge: ‘You look after your sleep and then you find your diet’s gone. You look after your diet and you find something else has gone… all of that has been a journey’.

Leading through disclosure

As the leader of Menzies’ diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging strategy, John has chosen complete openness about his diagnosis. ‘I’ve totally thoroughly disclosed’, he states. ‘I overshare. I love oversharing. I don’t know whether it’s proved helpful to me. I’m not so sure that’s true. I think it’s proved immensely helpful to my 1,100 colleagues’.

His immediate team has been exceptionally supportive.

‘My colleagues know me really well. They know where they have to fill in for me, they know the bits that don’t work so well. They know how many times I come back from my desk after I leave for a meeting to collect my keys. Some people shout at me: *“Keys, wallet, phone”* as I’m walking away.’

Nonetheless, disclosure has brought challenges. Among a small group of more distant colleagues, John sometimes encounters dismissiveness. ‘Oh yeah, it’s the ADHD bloke who talks too much’, he characterises some attitudes. This experience has given him a new perspective on discrimination:

‘I’ve got all of those other privileges. I’ve never faced any prejudices as other groups have to face every day. So I’m beginning to see some of them, and as we can talk about unconscious bias in my firm, I hope it has facilitated conversations for others.’

Creating systemic change

John’s disclosure has helped catalyse organisational change. A trainee colleague who disclosed her dyslexia and requested accommodations inspired Menzies to contract with a service providing comprehensive accommodation reports for all trainees who want them. The firm is also implementing software and accommodation tools available to everyone, eliminating the need to ‘put their hand up’.

When asked about advising others on disclosure, John is nuanced:

‘I’d recommend people be open about it if it helps them. The other side is that we’ve also got to consider the people who feel that they can’t, for whatever reason. You can create the open environment where people can think, *“OK, I can actually help myself here”* but not force them down a particular route.’

Pattern recognition as professional superpower

John's neurodivergent traits directly contribute to his professional success. 'I tend to be able to see a solution to a problem and help others get to that solution', he explains. His pattern recognition abilities allow him to assess complex financial situations quickly and identify viable paths forward.

He describes being able to see 'the end result' in complex cases, whether structuring distributions from employee benefit trusts or determining whether struggling businesses can be salvaged.

'By the time I speak to a client and say, *"Look, this is the route for you"*, and justify it, it looks a little bit like I'm waving a magic wand. But in reality, I've just got this inherent idea about how to get someone from A to B with the problems that they have.'

Yet John also recognises how neurodivergent traits can be misunderstood in professional settings. His emotional dysregulation and tendency to 'contribute too much' in meetings are characteristics he actively manages through mindfulness and meditation, while acknowledging these same traits drive his passion for fairness and opportunity.

The future of neurodiversity in organisations

John sees neurodiversity accommodation as beneficial for everyone. He observes:

'The more accommodations we make for the individual, the more we see our business succeeding.'

He points to dyslexia screen filters now being used by many non-dyslexic colleagues who find they reduce headaches and migraines. Wellness rooms and spaces for regulation benefit all employees dealing with the pressures of modern work.

'The journey to success is wider than just dealing with the neurodiverse population', he argues. 'What it's opening up is doors to the rest of the community because everyone's got their difference'. He notes that post-COVID, issues such as literacy have become more prominent across all demographics, with tools developed for neurodivergent employees now supporting broader populations. Reflecting on his career, John notes:

'I've been told I've failed quite a lot over my career. In reality, I wasn't failing. I just didn't have the support I needed to get from A to B. I do take that with me now when I'm approaching people who aren't delivering the type of work they want. They're not failing because they want to fail, and they're not failing because they don't care.'

A philosophy of giving and growth

John's approach to neurodiversity is deeply connected to his broader philosophy. 'I'm built on fairness. I'm built on looking at opportunities', he explains. These drivers of his success, rooted in his neurodivergent perspective, now inform his leadership approach. 'One thing I have learned, especially with my time at the ACCA Council and the like, is the more I give, the more I get back', John reflects.

'There's no direct connection, but the more I can give to anything that ACCA is doing on neurodiversity, the more I get back.'

His journey from 'hiding in plain sight', through masking and leveraging certain talents to offset ADHD challenges, to becoming an open advocate for neurodiversity, illustrates both personal growth and organisational evolution. While acknowledging that understanding and acceptance remain works in progress, John's story demonstrates how authentic leadership can drive meaningful change.

For John, the goal isn't just accommodation but transformation: creating workplaces where neurodivergent individuals don't just survive but thrive, where differences are recognised as strengths, and where the accommodations that support neurodivergent employees ultimately benefit everyone. His message to organisations is clear: when businesses can't accommodate talented individuals, the failure lies not with the person but with the system. Understanding this distinction, he believes, is the key to unlocking the full potential of neurodivergent talent in accountancy and beyond.

Shi Yee's late autism diagnosis at 34 transformed her understanding of herself and her career path, revealing how structure and preparation have been the keys to her success as a programme leader and ACCA tutor in Malaysia.

Finding structure in a world of uncertainty: Shi Yee's journey to self-understanding

For many years Shi Yee navigated the professional world without knowing she was autistic. As a Fellow of ACCA and programme leader at Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology in Penang, Malaysia, her journey illustrates both the challenges of being undiagnosed and the profound relief that comes with finally understanding oneself.

The path to discovery

Shi Yee's route to diagnosis began unexpectedly when a friend since secondary school, who was also a clinical psychologist, recognised similarities between them. Her friend suggested Shi Yee might also be on the autism spectrum. Initially, Shi Yee dismissed the possibility, influenced by common stereotypes about autism. She reflects:

'Whenever we talk about autistic individuals, the stereotype actually causes us to think, you know, autistic individuals must have some slow learning issues. I thought I had ADHD but, in the end, it turned out to be an autism diagnosis.'

(Shi Yee was, however, later diagnosed with ADHD too).

The journey to a formal diagnosis proved challenging, particularly as a high-achieving woman in Malaysia.

Medical officers initially refused to believe she could be neurodivergent, pointing to her excellent academic results and successful career. Shi Yee recalls:

'They said, *"You have eye contact. You can talk well. You can answer my questions. You won't be neurodivergent"*.'

Instead, she was diagnosed with generalised anxiety disorder and prescribed antidepressants, treatments that felt insufficient for what she was experiencing.

Her persistence eventually led her to a doctor who understood ASD. When Shi Yee explained her lifelong difficulty maintaining friendships and her distress when schedules changed unexpectedly, the pieces finally fell into place. 'That is pretty much like ASD', the doctor confirmed, providing the diagnosis that would transform her self-understanding.

Masking takes its toll, but unmasking requires careful balance

Shi Yee's experience with masking reveals the complex reality many neurodivergent professionals face. Her colleagues would describe her as excellent at socialisation, capable of entertaining guests with apparent ease. Yet this social competence came at a significant cost. 'I always prepare my script before I actually meet the guest', she explains. 'I always think about what are the potential topics that I can tell them'.

Post-diagnosis, Shi Yee embarked on a journey of recognising and carefully removing these masks. She discovered that unmasking isn't simply about dropping pretences overnight.

'It's not that simple. You need to unmask, you need to unlearn, you need to reverse everything to see what the real presentation would be if there were no masks.'

Rather than completely abandoning socialisation, she now strategically chooses when to engage, scheduling meetings when she can adequately prepare and ensuring she has the energy required for these interactions.

Finding the right fit

Shi Yee's career journey powerfully demonstrates how the workplace environment profoundly affects neurodivergent professionals. After graduation, she spent five years in commercial accountancy roles, first in a large organisation where customer demands created constant ad hoc tasks, then in a smaller company that lacked the structure she needed to thrive.

'I face challenges doing ad hoc tasks. A lot of requests actually come suddenly, and I have to respond immediately', she describes her time in commercial accountancy. The combination of unpredictable demands and difficulty prioritising tasks led to overwhelming stress.

'I did not know whether I should have done this first or that first. I thought everything must be done, so I kept pressing myself to do everything before I actually left work.'

Her move to academia proved transformative. 'In lecturing, we know the timetable of the entire semester. We already know what we are going to teach. We can plan ahead', she explains. This predictable structure, combined with the primarily one-way delivery of lectures, suits her neurological profile perfectly. While spontaneous consultations with students remain challenging, she manages them by asking students to specify their concerns in advance, which allows her to prepare thoroughly.

Strengths that make a difference

Shi Yee's autism brings distinctive strengths to her role. Her ability to identify root causes rather than surface symptoms helps her solve student issues effectively and improve course delivery.

'A lot of people tend to solve problems on the surface but not really look into the root cause. I noticed myself having this ability to actually spot the real problem underneath.'

Her need for structure translates into exceptional teaching ability, particularly in complex subjects such as Strategic Business Leader. She creates clear frameworks that help students organise their thoughts and deliver their points effectively, a skill her colleagues openly admire.

Tools for success

Two primary tools support Shi Yee's professional success. Google Calendar provides essential structure, allowing her to review the next day's schedule each evening and prepare mentally for upcoming tasks. Crucially, she schedules 'active recovery time', between social interactions, recognising that communication requires significant energy expenditure for autistic individuals.

Additionally, she maintains a structured diary in Google Spreadsheets for self-reflection, a practice that has deepened her self-understanding since diagnosis. This combination of external structure and internal reflection enables her to navigate professional demands while honouring her neurological needs.

Cultural context and advocacy

In Malaysia's multicultural society, understanding of neurodiversity varies significantly across communities. Within her Chinese community, Shi Yee encounters scepticism about her diagnosis, with relatives struggling to reconcile her professional success with their stereotypes about autism. 'How come it is ASD? She has been performing so well', they question.

Despite these challenges, Shi Yee has become a passionate advocate for neurodiversity awareness. She maintains a Facebook page where she shares her experiences, helping others recognise themselves in her story. Her openness at work has prompted colleagues to seek her advice about supporting neurodivergent students, gradually shifting institutional understanding.

Looking forward

For neurodivergent individuals considering careers in accountancy, Shi Yee offers encouragement tempered with self-awareness.

'There is no restriction on whether neurodivergent individuals can pursue a certain career path.'

The key lies in understanding one's strengths and finding the right match within accountancy's diverse specialisms, whether that's the detail-focused required for tax work or the innovation needed in consultancy.

Her story ultimately celebrates the power of self-knowledge. She says of her diagnosis:

'It represents a brand-new identity for me. I get to know myself better, understand my needs, and became an advocate for my own needs.'

For Shi Yee, autism isn't a limitation to overcome but an integral part of who she is, bringing both challenges and unique strengths to her professional life.

Through understanding and accepting her neurodivergent identity, Shi Yee has crafted a career that works with, rather than against, her neurological profile. Her journey offers valuable insights for organisations seeking to support neurodivergent talent and for individuals still searching for their own path to self-understanding and professional fulfilment.

A late ADHD diagnosis during a career break transformed how **Subhasis Mishra**, Human Resources (HR) leader at Schneider Electric, understands both his remarkable career trajectory and personal struggles, inspiring him to become a vocal advocate for neurodiversity awareness in India's corporate landscape, as well as recognising why neurodivergence can be such an asset for finance teams in particular.

Reframing a life through new understanding: Subhasis Mishra's journey from self-blame to self-acceptance

For Subhasis Mishra, head of HR for the global R&D and digital organisation at Schneider Electric India, neurodiversity remained an academic concept until a therapist's observation during a 2024 career break changed everything. Leading a team of 25 supporting over 10,000 employees and contractors, Subhasis now views his entire life story through a radically different lens following his adult ADHD diagnosis.

An unexpected discovery

'I was doing some therapy during my break just to reflect on life', Subhasis recalls. 'My therapist said, "Hearing your story, I feel like you need to get diagnosed for ADHD. The thread of your story makes me feel like there might be an underlying condition here"'. The subsequent diagnosis revealed he had lived with ADHD his entire life, triggering what he describes as 'a complete "Aha!" moment' that flipped his worldview about everything. The impact struck at his core.

'You are processing everything that you have had in your life in a very internalised way. The whole cycle of shame and guilt, *"I'm bad at this"* or *"I'm guilty of having done that"* – that's your narrative.'

He explains. 'The first impact is that, "well, I'm not that bad after all". A lot of it is not because I'm inherently bad'.

From silence to advocacy

Initially keeping his diagnosis private, Subhasis found his voice through an unexpected avenue: his award-winning podcast on fatherhood, which has won two consecutive best podcast awards in India. After interviewing Neal Mankey, chair of ADHD UK, about ADHD's impact on parenting, there was 'no point in not talking about it at the workplace'.

His disclosure at Schneider Electric met with surprising acceptance. 'To my positive surprise, there was literally no reaction, which I really loved', he reflects. 'I did not get any weird reactions'. This response aligned with Schneider's commitment to inclusivity, where diversity ambitions form part of publicly announced sustainability goals. The impact of his openness rippled outward immediately.

'As soon as I started sharing about it, I could see the shift in the tone of my own team. They started opening up pretty quickly.'

During ADHD Awareness Month in October 2024, Schneider Electric India celebrated the occasion for the first time, though Subhasis acknowledges the conversation remains ‘very quiet’ in most Indian workplaces.

Building a sustainable framework

Rather than medication, Subhasis chose lifestyle changes and coaching to manage his ADHD. His approach centres on what doctors’ call ‘MEDS’: Meditation, Exercise, Diet and Sleep.

‘It has worked beautifully in addressing this from an energy and being-centred perspective. My level of ups and downs and volatility have gone down substantially.’

Meditation proved particularly transformative, despite initial scepticism about quieting a racing ADHD mind. Using an app called ‘The Way’ that provides a journey-based approach with different trails, he has maintained the practice for nearly a year, missing only six or seven days. ‘The goal is consistency, which beats everything else’, he reflects, noting how the app’s structure feeds the ADHD brain’s need for novelty while building routine.

Through coaching, Subhasis is learning to reframe tasks through his character strengths of kindness, compassion and forgiveness. ‘Every piece of work, I’m trying to reframe through the lens of my strengths’, he explains. This helps him tackle the ‘many small things in service of your big dream’ – a concept that, while obvious, he admits he ‘hadn’t been able to do most of my life’.

ADHD’s double-edged impact on career

Looking back, Subhasis recognises how ADHD shaped his remarkable career trajectory ‘profoundly, beyond doubt’ – both positively and negatively. His passion and hyperfocus helped secure unlikely opportunities, such as beating senior candidates through 16 interview rounds to lead HR for Disney India’s launch, and later earning a move to Disney’s Los Angeles headquarters after just seven years in HR.

‘Because of your hyperfocus, when you love something, you lose context of what is within scope and what is beyond. You basically take on everything that comes your way’, he reflects. This strength, however, became a liability when roles didn’t align with his abilities. ‘When I find myself in a place where my role is not lending itself to my strengths, I unravel. The fall is as dramatic as the rise’.

Catalysing change in India

In India’s corporate landscape, adult ADHD conversations remain ‘almost non-existent’. Despite actively discussing his diagnosis for six months, Subhasis has encountered only two other Indians who have shared their diagnoses – a striking statistic given neurodivergence affects an estimated 20% of the population.

His vision for the next decade focuses on cascading awareness. ‘If we can uncover and make diagnosis available to people in the workplace and general society, any number of people that get diagnosed and get help has a real ripple effect’, he argues, particularly for the ‘whole generation of children growing up who may go about their life not knowing just because their parents didn’t have awareness’.

Recognising the power of neurodivergent talent in finance teams

As an HR leader, Subhasis is determined to continue to build neurodiversity conversations in India’s corporate world. He is clear that the differential thinking that neurodivergent talent can bring can really unlock new ways of thinking and have a ‘profound impact on businesses, organisations, strategies, decisions and initiatives’. Similarly, he sees obvious benefits for finance teams themselves in embracing neurodivergent talent.

‘Finance is becoming much more critical to business strategies and CEOs, and you have, for example, more CFOs becoming CEOs – so skills like being able to take data and think differently, laterally, strategically…much more “big picture”, is an incredibly valuable capability to have for the future. It’s also important to think in those leadership positions about how you hire people in your team to complement your own skills and possible areas of weakness.’

Subhasis’s journey from self-blame to self-acceptance, from silence to advocacy, embodies the transformation that understanding neurodivergence can bring. His message to others resonates with hard-won clarity: awareness enables structured, informed changes rather than relying solely on willpower. His personal story offers hope that even late diagnosis can reframe a lifetime of struggle into a pathway for growth and advocacy.

Vivien Ng, Senior Director, Centre of Excellence in Accounting, Micron In Malaysia, where conscious neurodivergent hiring remains rare, Micron is breaking barriers. Led by Vivien Ng, the company's pioneering programme is redefining inclusion and reshaping workplace practices for the future.

Building bridges to untapped talent: Micron's pioneering neurodiversity programme in Malaysia

As senior director of the Centre of Excellence in Accounting at Micron, Vivien Ng oversees a team of 170 professionals across multiple countries. But her boldest work yet is launching Micron Malaysia's first neurodiversity hiring programme – a move that challenges conventional recruitment and sets a new standard for inclusive employment. In a country where neurodivergent hiring remains largely unexplored territory, Vivien and her team are charting a new course for inclusive employment in the accountancy sector.

Seeds of purpose

The seeds of this initiative were planted decades ago. 'What happens when neurodivergent children grow up? What will happen to them when their caregivers are gone?' Vivien reflected on questions like this in her youth. Today, she's answering that question through action. Her involvement with Micron's Capable employee resource group (ERG) reignited this passion. Initially focusing on mentoring caregivers of special needs children, Vivien saw an opportunity to go further when a talent acquisition leader with neurodivergent hiring experience joined the conversation.

Capable, one of several ERGs at Micron, focuses on supporting employees with various disabilities and differences, from hearing impairments to dyslexia to colour blindness. As leader of the career pillar within Capable, Vivien initially developed mentoring programmes for caregivers in Micron. When a senior talent acquisition manager with experience in neurodivergent hiring from their previous company joined the conversation, the pieces began falling into place.

'Being a leader now, I wanted to bring it into reality. *"Could we pilot a small group?"* That question sparked the journey.'

Building foundations through partnership

Vivien knew success required expertise beyond Micron's walls. Her team partnered with NGOs in Penang and Kuala Lumpur that prepare neurodivergent graduates for work through immersive training and coaching.

These NGOs became critical allies, attending interviews, advising on sensory needs and even bringing candidates to experience Micron's office environment. 'They checked everything – even lighting levels – because sensory sensitivities matter', Vivien notes.

These organisations run three-month workshops providing experimental learning about workplace expectations, challenges and practical skills needed for professional environments.

This collaboration inspired physical changes too. Micron plans to convert a meeting room into a calm space for sensory breaks, providing a retreat space for anyone needing a sensory break. Importantly, while created with neurodivergent needs in mind, Vivien is thinking of making such a facility available to all employees, reinforcing the principle that accommodations benefit everyone.

Preparing hearts and minds

Long before the first hire, Vivien launched awareness sessions for leaders and teams. 'The conversation is a must', she emphasises. 'People need to understand the why, the what and the strengths neurodivergent individuals bring'.

This preparation extended beyond leadership to all team members, ensuring everyone understood what was coming and why it mattered.

Recruitment practices were reimagined:

- **clear, specific interview questions replaced vague, open-ended ones**
- **onboarding details were crystal clear—meeting times, locations, even family engagement for support.**

Vivien discovered a universal truth:

'Clarity in communication benefits everyone – not just neurodivergent employees.'

Rethinking recruitment practices

Traditional recruitment, with its emphasis on 'well-rounded' candidates and standardised processes, often screens out neurodivergent talent. Vivien's team consciously adapted their approach, working with NGO coaches to understand individual candidates' strengths and needs. Interview questions were tailored to be specific and clear, moving away from the general, open-ended queries that can challenge neurodivergent candidates.

'The preparation during that interview has to be set up for us to get ourselves comfortable to understand their needs, what are their triggers. The questions and approach we use have to be more tailored to the individual rather than a general rule of thumb.'

'Even as a neurotypical, if I am able to give a lot of clarity to my team members, we actually reduce a lot of unnecessary reworking'.

Rather than seeing these adaptations as special accommodations, Vivien recognised them as improvements to management practice overall. 'We were so used to being very general in the way we do things, say things as leaders to team members. Sometimes the disengagement that we see in neurotypicals is because of the way we communicate'.

Early success and ongoing support

In November 2025, Micron welcomed its first neurodivergent employee into the accountancy team, specifically in a banking operations role. The hiring followed months of preparation, including autism awareness workshops for managers and team members who would work directly with the new colleague.

The NGO partnership continues post-hiring, providing coaching and mentoring to help navigate any challenges. 'That kind of coaching and mentoring has already been done', Vivien confirms. 'I think that's important to get the people around to be prepared. When certain things happen, how should you help that person or give them space? How would you react? That's a must-do thing'.

While it's early days, Vivien is already looking ahead to how AI might reshape job roles to leverage neurodivergent strengths better. 'With AI, we are building a lot of AI technology into our processes'. Vivien sees AI as a game-changer:

'As roles become more specialised, neurodivergent strengths in detail and analysis will be invaluable.'

Navigating cultural challenges

Despite early success, significant challenges remain. 'In the Malaysian context, neurodivergent hiring is still not something that is publicly accepted by a lot of companies', Vivien acknowledges. 'Not all leaders are aware about what is neurodivergent, what are their strengths, what are the challenges. The awareness is still very lacking in Malaysian society'.

The stigma and perception challenges mean that many managers prefer ‘comfort hiring’ of neurotypical candidates. Vivien recognises that shifting this mindset requires multiple approaches: showcasing successful examples, creating more dialogue and potentially even setting diversity key performance indicators (KPIs) at senior leadership levels.

Yet she remains undeterred. ‘Will I stop here? Definitely no. It’s just more about being creative, about whom should I be engaging, what should I be doing differently to encourage even a little bit of passion for neurodiversity?’

A vision for systemic change

Vivien’s aspirations extend far beyond Micron’s walls. Within the company, she envisions neurodivergent employees in specialised roles across finance and operations, particularly in areas requiring high attention to detail and quality control.

‘I know neurodivergent individuals are very detailed. In terms of accuracy, they are there. If we need quality output, should we be putting neurodivergent people who have these strengths into these areas?’

She sees particular potential in manufacturing and production roles, where consistency and attention to detail are paramount. ‘The quality of the output could be excellent. I would not need to put in lots of checks and controls but could have neurodivergent individuals actually doing that’.

Beyond Micron, Vivien hopes to pioneer change across Malaysia, building partnerships with other industries and continuing dialogue with business leaders. She recognises the importance of government engagement and educational reform, noting that NGOs are working hard to promote early detection and tailored education programmes from primary school through university.

Lessons for leaders

For other organisations considering neurodiversity programmes, Vivien emphasises the critical importance of NGO partnerships.

‘The partnership with NGOs or even with government has to start first to really give opportunities for neurodivergent individuals after they have graduated, to coach them for employment, to get them ready.’

She also stresses the need for awareness-building to ‘dispel all these negative perceptions’ while focusing on strengths rather than deficits. ‘As neurotypicals, we also want to focus on our strengths and not so much on the weakness side. It’s still the same thing’.

Perhaps most presciently, Vivien links neurodiversity hiring to the future of work itself. ‘Now with AI changing the world and the way we work, in the future the workforce will not be too generalist in nature. The way we scope out roles will be more specialised. It might be that because of AI we need more neurodivergent people. We do not know’.

Creating ripples of change

Micron’s neurodiversity programme, while still in its infancy with just one hire, represents something much larger: a blueprint for change in a region where such initiatives remain rare. Through careful preparation, strategic partnerships and a willingness to challenge conventional thinking about recruitment and management, Vivien and her team are demonstrating what’s possible.

The programme’s early insights already point to broader benefits. The clarity of communication needed for neurodivergent employees improves management practice for everyone. The calm room created for sensory needs provides respite for all employees. The focus on individual strengths rather than generic competencies could reshape how organisations think about talent altogether.

Vivien’s question from her earlier life on what happens to neurodivergent children has evolved into a mission: ‘We need to showcase success to build confidence. One hire at a time, we’re shaping a more inclusive future’. The children she once wondered about now have a champion working to ensure they have meaningful opportunities in the professional world. While challenges remain substantial, particularly in shifting cultural perceptions, Micron’s programme offers hope that change, however gradual, is possible.

‘It’s a very challenging journey in Malaysia because of the stigma and perception’, Vivien acknowledges. But her commitment remains unwavering: ‘We need to showcase more examples of successful hiring to give confidence to companies and hiring managers’. In doing so, one hire at a time, Micron is helping to build a more inclusive future for neurodivergent professionals in Malaysia and beyond.

Diagnosed with autism at age seven when understanding was minimal, **Katherine Fisher's** transformation from struggling in silence to leading Sodexo's neurodiversity initiatives demonstrates how community connection and purposeful disclosure can reshape both personal and professional trajectories.

Finding your voice through community: Katherine Fisher's journey from isolation to leadership

Katherine Fisher's neurodiversity story spans 43 years, from being one of Manchester's autism test cases in the 1980s to now co-leading Sodexo's Neurodiversity Café. As compliance and VAT finance manager for Sodexo Ireland, Katherine manages contracts across the Republic while navigating the complexities of being openly autistic in a role that demands constant interaction and adaptation.

A diagnosis before its time

Katherine was diagnosed with autism and epilepsy simultaneously at age seven, when understanding of autism was virtually non-existent. 'My parents were both teachers, so they knew something wasn't quite right, but didn't know what it was', she recalls. The diagnosis brought little support: 'If I had tantrums, when I just couldn't cope, you got put outside at school because nobody knew how to deal with it'.

This early diagnosis shaped but didn't define her path. Katherine left school at 16, she was informed she 'wasn't clever enough' for college, yet later attended university, where writing essays was challenging to 'make them make sense' for tutors. She explains:

'I think sometimes when you're autistic, you write as you talk. It makes perfect sense to me.'

For decades, Katherine kept her diagnosis largely private. The turning point came through an unexpected source: parkrun. After volunteering at her local event, she received a call from the event's managing director (EMEA), Tom Williams, asking her to become the event director. 'I'm not sure I can do this', she told him. His response was simple: 'Just try it'. Within six years, her parkrun grew from 30–40 runners to over 300.

Finding voice through service

Parkrun transformed Katherine's relationship with social interaction. Initially unable to use the megaphone for briefings, she found others to help while she built confidence behind the scenes. 'That's when I found my voice for things', she reflects. 'People would come to me and say, "This week I've had a hard week", or "This has happened". I grew as a person. I stopped hiding'.

This growth coincided with raising her son, also diagnosed with ADHD, as a single parent. 'I had to deal with everything. It wasn't easy'. The combination of leadership responsibility at parkrun and parenting challenges forced Katherine to develop skills she never thought possible, fundamentally changing her professional capabilities.

Strategic disclosure and professional growth

Katherine's workplace disclosure came dramatically: during a presentation to approximately 200 finance work colleagues about her volunteering activities, she revealed her autism diagnosis as being integral to her professional journey. 'It wasn't in my work record, it wasn't in anything, but it felt like a key part of my journey. Parkrun helped me develop at work, enabled me to stand up in front of people'.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. 'I got lots of messages saying, "Thanks, it's enabled me to think differently about neurodiversity"'. Other colleagues confided about their own children's diagnoses. These developments and her own disclosure neatly positioned Katherine to co-lead Sodexo's Neurodiversity Café, which launched in April 2024. The Neurodiversity Café has evolved from quarterly speakers to organic monthly conversations where people 'share and support each other'.

Yet Katherine refuses to tick disability boxes on forms:

'I always want to be seen as the right person that can do the job, irrespective of my diagnosis. You should recruit the best person. If they're not right for that job, everyone is impacted.'

Leveraging autistic strengths

Katherine's autism brings distinct advantages to her finance role.

'I'm really good at communicating with lots of different people and making them understand, especially non-finance people.'

Her approach to training exemplifies this: 'I give people what they need to know, not generic system stuff. I'm not interested in generic system stuff'.

Her systematic thinking drives process improvement. When presented with an overcomplicated process plan – 'an A3 full piece of paper with things that were red, green, yellow, lines everywhere' – she immediately recognised its impracticality. 'Somebody at the site will not understand that. They won't even look at it. I make the process as easy as possible for somebody new who just walks in'.

These strengths come with challenges. Katherine works 11-hour days and is unable to delegate effectively or deprioritise tasks.

'My bosses keep saying, *"Let things fail"*, but I can't because I feel that's a reflection on me.'

This perfectionism, combined with being the only person understanding all systems, creates constant pressure.

Wisdom through experience

Katherine's 18-year ACCA qualification journey illustrates both determination and the systemic challenges neurodivergent professionals face. 'Sometimes, if you're autistic, you don't always understand all the questions', she notes, highlighting how exams coincide with month-end – 'the most stressed week of your life'. Her advice reflects hard-won wisdom:

'Life's a journey and you just have to navigate it the best way you can. There's no rule book.'

Katherine's transformation from isolation to leadership demonstrates that neurodivergent professionals don't need fixing: they need opportunities to contribute authentically. Through parkrun, she found community. Through disclosure, she found purpose. Through leading Sodexo's neurodiversity initiatives, she's ensuring others find both sooner than she did.

From professional motocross rider to CFO by age 28, **Sophia Levell's** journey illustrates how ADHD's drive for adrenaline and dopamine can fuel extraordinary career acceleration when channelled through passion for finance and strategic thinking.

From motocross to CFO: Sophia Levell's high-octane journey through finance

Sophia Levell's story defies conventional career progression. An individual who left traditional education at 17, who became a finance director at 25 and CFO at 28, her journey from Birmingham motocross tracks to London boardrooms demonstrates how ADHD can drive exceptional achievement when passion meets opportunity. Now CFO of Access Fertility and founder of fintech platform Numiii, Sophia exemplifies the modern strategic finance leader who leverages neurodivergent strengths while building teams that complement her challenges.

From adrenaline to accounting

Sophia's early years revolved around professional motocross, providing crucial regulation for her ADHD brain. 'I grew up doing professional motocross, which was a massive outlet for my ADHD because it was very "adrenaline junkie". I could put the overstimulation, the dopamine hit I could put to that', she explains. From ages 6 to 18, this high-octane sport managed her neurodivergent traits before she understood them, providing the intense stimulation her brain craved.

Education presented typical ADHD challenges. 'School was challenging for me, particularly because I had a short attention span', she recalls. At 13, convinced her environment was the problem, she persuaded her parents to move her from a UK state school to a private school.

'I thought to myself I'm really clever and I know I am, but I keep getting distracted. If I change my environment, it will get better.'

When this predictably failed to solve her attention difficulties, a teacher's observation planted the first seeds of understanding: 'Do you think she has ADHD?'

Rather than following the traditional route through her schooling, she briefly studied accounting at college because she loved maths and then attended a 'career day' at PwC in Birmingham that inspired her. It was from there that the desire to get into the workforce and become an accountant began, and she secured a full-time job at age 17. This pivotal moment would reshape her entire career trajectory.

The power of passion-driven focus

Once Sophia found her passion for finance, her ADHD became a career accelerator. ‘I became obsessed with wanting to be an accountant’, she explains. ‘My ADHD definitely helped because there’s that focus – “Oh my gosh, I’m going to do this”’. Her approach to career progression reflects classic ADHD traits but channelled productively.

‘Some people look at my CV and say, *“Maybe you jumped around all over the place”,* but it wasn’t [like that]. It was just that I’d got to a certain place and thought, *“I’m not progressing anymore here. What’s the next thing?”*’

The unambiguous nature of accounting initially appealed to her ADHD brain.

‘What I loved about accounting was that it was right or wrong – the debits and credit had to balance, or it didn’t balance. There’s no grey area.’

This clear feedback loop provided immediate gratification while building strong technical accounting foundations.

Recognition and strategic evolution

Despite early suspicions, formal diagnosis came much later through a workplace conversation. As finance director in a startup environment, Sophia’s enthusiasm was entirely unleashed: As she recalls ‘I was using a whiteboard and thinking, “We should grow the business to here and here”, very ambitiously’. When the business owner asked directly, ‘Have you got ADHD?’, the moment of recognition arrived. Understanding her neurodivergence enabled more strategic self-management while preserving the creative energy that leads to her success.

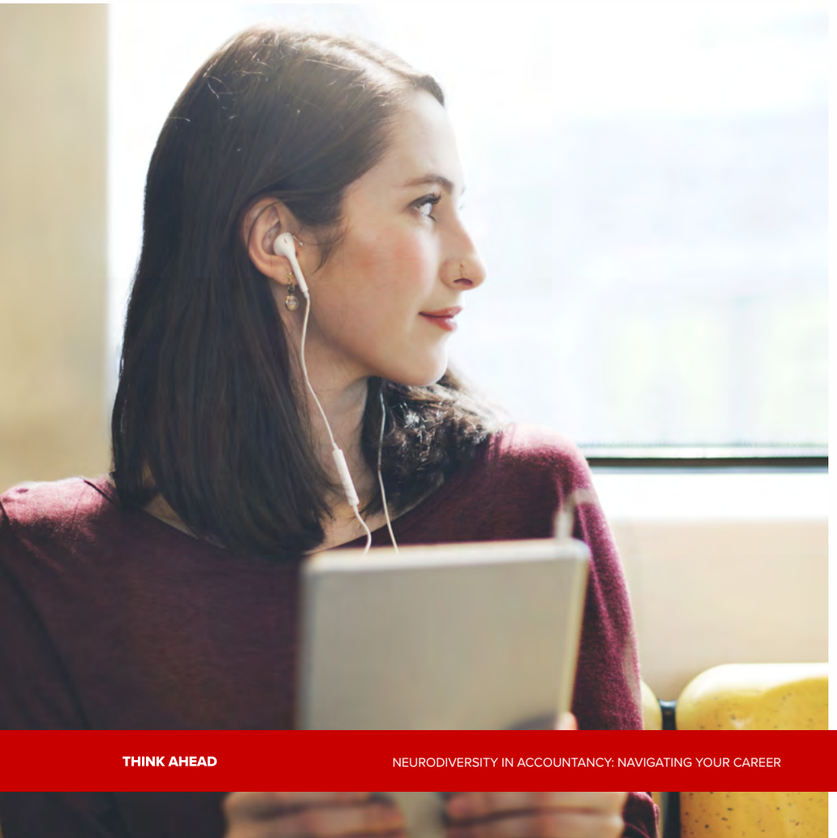
Sophia’s evolution exemplifies the modern CFO transition from traditional accountancy to strategic leadership. She explains:

‘I can probably see things that someone else who doesn’t have ADHD but has knowledge from experience might miss.’

This pattern recognition strength manifests powerfully: ‘Someone will say something to me and when I reflect on it, I’m able to draw instantly on so many experiences in my past career to see if there’s a correlation somewhere. Then I can put pieces together and say, “Why don’t you try this because this might work?”’. Sophia is convinced her neurodivergence helps her connect the dots and see the big picture.

Her approach to the ACCA qualification reflected this strategic mindset. Demonstrating early recognition of finance's evolving role from pure number-crunching to strategic business partnership, she notes:

'I chose ACCA because I felt it was more outward-looking and opened up more options to be strategic rather than just looking at accounting.'



Performing the balancing act

Sophia acknowledges both the superpowers and struggles of ADHD. When colleagues suggested simply 'writing a list' to help manage and prioritise workloads, the overwhelming nature of having to organise in that way became clear: 'The thought of just organising something was so overwhelming. I just started crying and was like, "I can't do it"'. These moments highlight the importance of understanding neurodivergent challenges alongside strengths.

Her advice to others is to try to be as self-aware as possible: 'If you understand your strengths and weaknesses, I think it would be important to advise your managers about those. For me, my weaknesses are around task administration and organisation, but I'm very good at other skills that are really valuable in finance leadership roles today, such as commerciality, being creative and being able to think about other areas of the business and how they are connected. Really thinking "outside the box"'.

Sophia also reflects on the valuable lessons she has learned about team composition. 'When recruiting people to my teams earlier in my career, I would naturally sway to people who brought that same energy because I thought we'd get on really well. But what I realised is they didn't necessarily make up for my weaknesses'. This realisation drove a fundamental shift in her approach:

'I learned I'm better off hiring people who make up for my weaknesses, who are organised, who are more structured, who complement where I have gaps, because then as a team we are much more effective.'

Embracing authentic leadership

Sophia's advice to other accountancy professionals reflects hard-won wisdom: 'You can't rely on your neurodivergence to solely get you where you want to go in your career, because there is this reality, too, of accepting how the workplace operates and how careers develop. But if you can understand your own ADHD and understand more what your strengths and weaknesses are, you are much better placed to achieve your ambitions, as well as finding career opportunities that you are suited to'.

Her vision for the future of neurodiversity in the workplace is optimistic:

'It will just become a normal part of any conversation, similar to mental health or personal interests. Thankfully the business world is becoming less corporate, more human-centric, but that doesn't negate the ongoing responsibility for self-management and professional development.'

Sophia Levell's journey from motocross tracks to CFO suites demonstrates that, with passion, self-awareness and an acute sense of your own strengths and weaknesses in a team environment, ADHD can become a powerful driver of career success. Her story offers both inspiration and practical guidance for those seeking to harness neurodivergent strengths while building sustainable, high-performing careers in modern finance.

7. From stories to action: what the evidence tells us

The stories you've read throughout this report aren't isolated examples of exceptional individuals overcoming odds. They're evidence of patterns – patterns that reveal both what enables neurodivergent professionals to thrive and what creates unnecessary barriers.

Across diverse neurotypes, career stages and geographical contexts, certain themes have emerged with striking consistency. Manager quality emerged as one of the most critical factors. Technology served as an equaliser and amplifier. Clear communication benefited everyone, while being essential for some. Psychological safety determined whether people could show up authentically or exhaust themselves through constant masking. Alternative career pathways and flexible qualification routes proved critical for accessing talent that conventional systems screened out.

These patterns point to actionable solutions at both organisational and individual levels. They demonstrate that neurodiversity inclusion isn't an abstract theory – it's a practical implementation grounded in real experience.

What follows

The recommendations in this section are structured around five strategic areas that emerged directly from these narratives.

1. **Systemic organisational change:** the foundational shifts in management, processes and culture that create environments where neurodivergent professionals can contribute effectively.
2. **Individual empowerment:** the strategies, tools and approaches that enable YOU to navigate your career strategically, regardless of organisational readiness.
3. **Leveraging cognitive strengths:** reframing attitudes from deficit-based accommodation to recognising genuine competitive advantages.
4. **Recognising diverse career paths:** expanding what success looks like beyond traditional progression routes.
5. **Cultural context:** acknowledging that neurodiversity acceptance varies dramatically across regions and cultures.

These aren't theoretical ideals. They're practical actions grounded in what has actually worked for the neurodivergent accountancy professionals who shared their experiences. Whether you're an individual navigating your career or an organisation building inclusive practices, these recommendations offer concrete starting points for meaningful change.

8. Systemic organisational change

While this report focuses on supporting neurodivergent individuals in navigating their careers, it would be remiss to ignore the critical role organisations play in enabling this.

From the interviews, management development, process redesign and cultural shifts emerged as foundational requirements for creating environments where neurodivergent professionals can thrive.

The recurring message from participants was stark: individual resilience and self-advocacy can only take you so far when systems are designed to exclude. This section explores six key areas where organisational action creates the conditions for neurodivergent success, shifting responsibility from neurodivergent individuals, obliging them to adapt to neurotypical systems, towards organisations, encouraging them to design inclusive systems that enable everyone to contribute their best work.

8.1 Manager capability development

Manager quality is consistently identified as one of the most influential factors in neurodivergent career success or struggle. In practice, we must acknowledge two realities: we cannot expect managers to be neurodiversity experts, and many managers occupy their roles by accident rather than because they wanted to manage teams. Organisations can support managers through four key actions.

1. **Investing in neurodiversity-aware leadership training:** awareness alone is insufficient. Managers need practical guidance on creating environments where disclosure doesn't carry professional risk and authenticity is valued over conformity.
2. **Equipping managers with accessible resources:** ensure managers have ready access to toolkits, policies and expert consultation. They need to understand what happens when someone discloses, what 'reasonable adjustments' are in practice and where to seek advice. Without clear processes, well-meaning managers often default to inaction out of fear.
3. **Encouraging understanding while respecting individuality:** managers must recognise that everyone is individual. The most effective managers in the research asked, 'What do you need?' rather than making assumptions based on diagnosis.
4. **Building capability to leverage cognitive diversity:** when managers facilitate conversations about strengths, challenges and preferences in their team, they normalise discussion of different working needs. This shifts the conversation from 'accommodating neurodivergent employees' to 'enabling everyone to do their best work' – a principle that benefits all while being essential for some.

8.2 Clear communication as standard practice

One of the most powerful discoveries from our neurodiversity research is that the adjustments neurodivergent professionals need often represent better practice for everyone. What neurodivergent employees require for clarity – explicit expectations, specific outcomes, unambiguous instructions – neurotypical employees also simply appreciate. The difference is that for neurodivergent professionals, vague communication creates genuine performance barriers.

Consider the difference between 'Can you look into the Q3 figures?' and 'Can you review the Q3 revenue figures, identify any variances over 5% from budget, and send me a summary by Thursday 3pm?' The first relies on implicit understanding; the second removes ambiguity entirely.

Practical implementation

- **Make the implicit explicit:** train leaders to articulate assumptions about deadlines, scope and priorities. Much workplace communication relies on unwritten rules that disadvantage neurodivergent employees disproportionately.
- **Replace generic advice with actionable guidance:** 'You need to be more organised' provides no direction. 'Let's try the project tracker template to break this deliverable into smaller tasks' offers a concrete starting point.
- **Check understanding actively:** rather than asking 'Any questions?', try 'Can you walk me through your understanding of what needs to happen next?'

This is not about micromanaging: it is recognising that clarity is a professional skill that enables better performance across the board.

8.3 Organisational preparation and inclusive recruitment

The difference between neurodivergent professionals who thrive and those who struggle often comes down to organisational readiness, not individual capability. Reactive accommodation rarely succeeds. Proactive preparation creates environments where neurodivergent talent can contribute effectively from day one.

- Build baseline understanding: integrate basic neurodiversity education into standard manager training. When teams already understand cognitive diversity as normal variation, individual disclosure becomes a practical conversation rather than an awkward revelation.
- Audit the physical environment: assess lighting levels, evaluate noise in open-plan spaces and create quiet spaces for focused work. These improve concentration for everyone while being essential for some.
- Build flexibility into standard processes: provide structured onboarding with written documentation, replace vague performance feedback with specific guidance, ensure career frameworks recognise diverse contribution styles, and normalise conversations about working preferences for all employees.
- Reimagine recruitment practices: traditional hiring practices favour candidates who excel across all competencies rather than those with 'spiky profiles'.
  - Signal safety through visible representation on careers websites and explicit mention of neurodiversity.
  - Focus job descriptions on essential requirements rather than 'nice to haves'.
  - Simplify applications and communicate timelines clearly.
  - Move beyond traditional interviews by implementing work simulations and technical tests.
  - Provide questions in advance and allow processing time.
  - Apply the universal design principle: what helps neurodivergent candidates often improves the experience for everyone.
  - Be also mindful that the increasing use of AI may introduce implicit biases that discriminate against neurodivergent professionals.
- **Develop expertise and partnerships:** designate people within HR to be champions who can confidently handle neurodiversity questions. Partner with specialist organisations who can provide relevant expertise before urgent needs arise.

8.4 Creating psychological safety for disclosure

The decision to disclose neurodivergence at work is deeply personal and often fraught with risk. Creating psychological safety means removing the need for constant risk assessment.

- **Decouple support from disclosure:** frame adjustments as being available to anyone. This matters particularly for those awaiting assessment, those who cannot afford a private diagnosis, or those for whom disclosure seems unsafe.
- **Model disclosure from leadership:** when leaders share their own neurodivergent experiences or champion neurodiversity openly, it signals that disclosure doesn't limit career progression.
- **Respond with practical support:** the most effective responses are 'What do you need to do your best work?' rather than expressions of sympathy or concern about capability.
- **Challenge stigma consistently:** push back on jokes that trivialise experiences and colleagues who describe neurodivergent traits as unprofessional. Small, repeated acts of dismissal create hostile environments even when policies appear supportive.

8.5 Facilitating community and connection

Finding community with other neurodivergent professionals can be transformative. Multiple participants described the profound impact of connecting with others who shared their experiences.

- **Support formal and organic connection:** employee resource groups provide structure, but the most meaningful connections often happen organically. Create both formal spaces and conditions for informal connections to emerge naturally.
- **Connect across teams and levels:** being 'the only one' is isolating. Create opportunities for neurodivergent professionals to meet across organisational boundaries, even when they have different cognitive profiles.
- **Include allies while ensuring safety:** welcome neurotypical allies but ensure neurodivergent members can connect privately when needed. The balance matters: visible allyship creates safety, but neurodivergent employees also need spaces where they're not constantly educating others.

8.6 Leveraging external partnerships

Few organisations possess sufficient in-house expertise to implement neuro-inclusive practices effectively on their own. This challenge is particularly acute for smaller organisations that may lack dedicated HR or diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) resources. The most successful neurodiversity initiatives involve partnerships with specialist external organisations that bring essential knowledge and experience that accelerate implementation while avoiding common pitfalls.

Why external expertise matters

Most HR teams, however well-intentioned, lack a detailed understanding of how neurodivergent professionals experience recruitment processes, workplace environments and performance-management systems. For smaller organisations, this expertise gap is compounded by limited specialist resources. External partners provide this perspective through both professional expertise and experience.

What support looks like across different scales

- **Formal partnerships:** conducting neuro-inclusion audits, designing and delivering manager training beyond awareness, advising on reasonable adjustments, supporting neurodivergent employees through coaching and providing consultation as challenges arise.
- **Accessible resources:** industry conferences and networking events, professional body guidance and toolkits (ACCA's Neurodiversity in Accountancy report (2024) provides some useful insights for organisations), recorded training and self-study materials, peer learning through practice-sharing forums and integration with existing DEI frameworks and initiatives.

9. Individual empowerment for you!

While we recognise that organisations have a critical role in creating work environments where everyone can thrive, we also know that we all individually have a role to play in supporting ourselves. Developing self-awareness, knowing when and how to disclose and building your own coping mechanisms can be powerful ways of helping to set yourself up for success.

This isn't about placing responsibility on you as an individual, if you have a neurodivergent condition, to 'fix' yourself or compensate for broken systems. Rather, it's about equipping you with strategies that create agency when you cannot control organisational culture or manager quality. The reality is that systemic change takes time, and while we work towards genuinely inclusive workplaces, understanding your own cognitive profile and building personal support structures can make the difference between struggling and thriving.

This section explores five key areas where individual action creates conditions for your success and reflects some of the strategies explained by our interviewees in this research:

- understanding your own cognitive profile;
- making strategic disclosure decisions;
- leveraging technology;
- advocating individualised support, and
- building your own personal support system.

These are interconnected strategies that shift you from passively hoping for organisational support towards actively shaping your work environment.

9.1 Understanding your own cognitive profile

Self-awareness is foundational to navigating your career strategically as a neurodivergent professional. When you understand your specific cognitive strengths and challenges, you can make informed decisions about roles, environments and the support you need.

Several interview participants described how understanding their cognitive profile transformed their careers. One recognised his exceptional analytical strengths alongside limitations with political navigation, steering him towards technical excellence roles. Another identified her weakness with admin but strength in commerciality and creativity, enabling her to build teams that complemented her profile as a chief financial officer (CFO).

For many neurodivergent professionals, formal diagnosis provides transformative reframing. One participant described it as 'a complete 'Aha!' moment – the whole cycle of shame and guilt, 'I'm bad at this'—that's your narrative. The first impact is that, 'well, I'm not that bad after all''. Late diagnosis is remarkably common, particularly for women and those who excelled academically.

Even so, diagnosis isn't required for success. What matters is self-understanding: knowing what energises you versus what drains you, which environments enable your best work and which career paths align with your cognitive strengths. Consider how your cognitive profile aligns with different roles – neither is better, they're different, and recognising your own enables strategic career decisions.

9.2 Strategic disclosure decisions

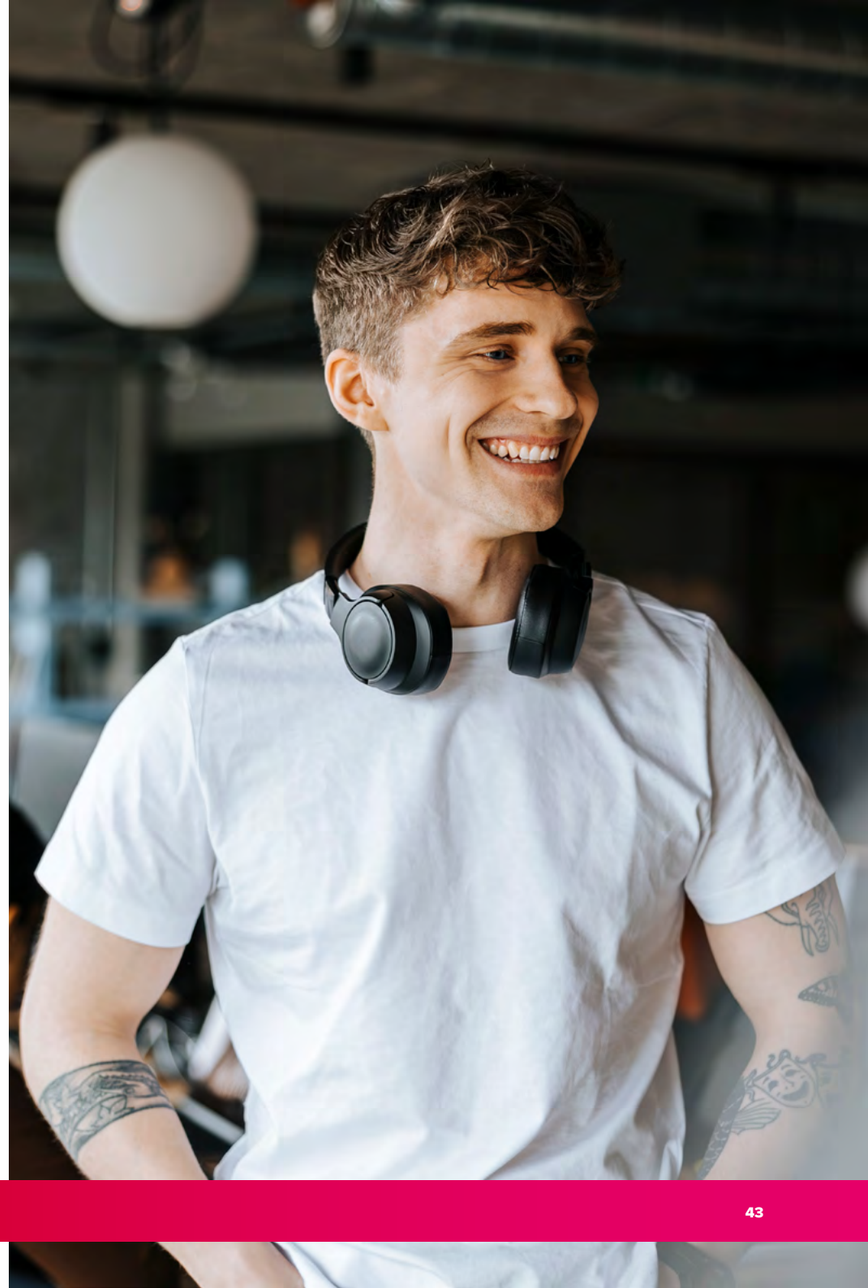
The decision to disclose your neurodivergence at work is deeply personal and profoundly strategic. Disclosure is not an obligation – it's a choice based on careful assessment of your circumstances, organisational culture and what you hope to gain.

Disclosure can open access to formal adjustments and legal protections and reduce the exhausting burden of masking. As we saw in Section 6, Katherine Fisher's strategic public disclosure transformed her trajectory, leading to co-leadership of her organisation's Neurodiversity Café. But disclosure also carries risks. You may face lowered expectations or assumptions about capabilities that are based on diagnostic 'labels'.

Before disclosing, honestly evaluate: is your manager creating a team environment based on trust and safety? Does your organisational culture genuinely value diversity? Are there visible examples of neurodivergent professionals thriving at senior levels? If the answers raise concerns, you have options.

Many adjustments can be requested for specific needs without mentioning neurodivergence: 'I work more effectively with written instructions' or 'Could we schedule meetings in the morning when I'm most focused?' These preference-based requests avoid diagnostic disclosure while accessing what you need.

All choices are valid. Some successful neurodivergent professionals never disclose formally, relying on careful job selection and preference-based adjustments. Others disclose selectively. The right decision serves your specific goals while protecting your wellbeing and career trajectory.



Why organisations want you to disclose – and what that means for you.

It's worth understanding organisational motivations for encouraging disclosure, because this shapes the environment you're navigating and helps you assess whether disclosure will genuinely serve your interests.

Benefits that directly serve you

- **Access to formal adjustments:** disclosure enables organisations to formally document reasonable adjustments, creating consistency and protection if managers change. This can genuinely improve your day-to-day working experience and provides a record you can refer to if support lapses.
- **Legal protections:** In some jurisdictions, disclosure triggers formal duties under law, such as the UK Equality Act, meaning the organisation must consider reasonable accommodations. This gives you leverage if support is denied or you face discrimination – you have legal recourse that undisclosed employees don't.
- **Reduced masking burden:** In psychologically safe environments, disclosure can reduce the exhausting effort of hiding your neurodivergence, enabling you to work more authentically and sustainably. Masking takes a profound toll on mental and physical health; disclosure can lift that weight.

Benefits that serve both you and the organisation

- **Proactive support during organisational changes:** when managers know about your neurodivergence, they can proactively consider adjustments during restructuring, team moves or system changes, rather than reacting after problems arise.
- **Data-driven systemic improvement:** your disclosure contributes to data that helps organisations identify barriers in recruitment, retention and progression. Good organisations use this to drive genuine change – investing in manager training, redesigning processes and addressing systemic issues.
- **Cultural shift through visibility:** in some organisations, visibly neurodivergent professionals – particularly at senior levels – help shift culture and attract talent who value authentic inclusion. If you're comfortable with visibility, this can create meaningful change beyond your own experience.

The critical assessment

These benefits become real when organisational culture prioritises genuine inclusion over compliance 'theatre'. Before disclosing, honestly assess: does your organisation use disclosure data to improve systems, or to populate diversity dashboards? Do neurodivergent employees visibly thrive at senior levels, or does disclosure seem to stall careers? Has anyone you know disclosed and received meaningful, sustained support?

The right disclosure decision depends on whether these organisational motivations translate into genuine support for you.

9.3 Leveraging technology as your cognitive assistant

Technology can be transformative for neurodivergent professionals – not as compensation for deficiency, but as amplification of capability. The right tools bridge gaps, enhance productivity and enable you to work to your cognitive strengths.

AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude and Copilot can serve as external cognitive assistants. One participant described using Copilot to refine communication: 'Please reword this such that it is firm but fair, professional, empathetic'. AI can explain complex formulas, synthesise information, structure chaotic thoughts and provide step-by-step breakdowns of previously overwhelming tasks.

Beyond AI, many tools have built-in functionality to support executive function: editor functionality for spelling and grammar, dictation functions for speech-to-text, Microsoft's Immersive Reader to adjust fonts and read aloud. These aren't crutches – they're professional tools readily available that align with neurodivergent needs and are usually free and easily accessible.

Neurodivergent professionals are often power users of AI and technology – early adopters who intuitively understand how to leverage these tools strategically. In workplaces increasingly shaped by AI, this positions you at the forefront, not the margins. Technology doesn't make you less capable. It makes you strategically resourceful.

9.4 Advocating individualised support

The most effective workplace support is co-created, not prescribed. Generic 'neurodiversity adjustments' rarely work because they assume all neurodivergent brains function identically.

- **Reject one-size-fits-all approaches:** what works for a neurodivergent colleague may be counterproductive for you. When managers offer generic advice such a 'just make a list', you can push back: 'What would actually work better for me is [specific alternative]'.
- **Be specific about your needs:** instead of 'I struggle with meetings', try 'I find it difficult to process verbal information. Could I have agendas 24 hours in advance and the option to follow up in writing?' Specificity makes it easier for managers to say yes.
- **Educate about your profile:** your manager doesn't need a masterclass in your neurotype – they need to understand how your individual brain works. Focus on personal patterns rather than generalisations.
- **Recognise fluctuations:** support requirements aren't static. Life circumstances, stress, hormonal changes and workload affect how your neurodivergence affects you. Communicate these fluctuations rather than struggling silently.
- **Advocate your needs from your position of authority:** you're the expert on your own experience. Your personal experience is the most reliable guide, not theoretical knowledge.

SELF-REFLECTION EXERCISE: Identifying what actually works for YOU.

Part 1: Understanding your patterns

Over the course of a couple of weeks, keep a daily note of the following points.

1. **Reflect on patterns:** consider when you've been most productive and engaged versus most stressed and ineffective. What environmental factors, communication styles, or work approaches contributed to each? For example, did you work better in a quiet space or with background noise? Were you more effective when given written instructions rather than verbal briefings? Do morning meetings energise you or do afternoon sessions work better?
2. **Track energy levels:** notice which activities energise you and which drain you. These patterns can reveal important information about your working style. You might discover that detailed analytical work energises you while multitasking exhausts you, or that client-facing work is energising but internal politics are draining.
3. **Identify specific challenges:** rather than thinking 'I'm bad at meetings', pinpoint the challenging aspect: 'I struggle when I'm put on the spot without preparation time'. This specificity is crucial for requesting effective adjustments. Other examples might include 'I find it difficult to process verbal information quickly and am quicker with written text ' or 'Open-plan offices make it hard for me to concentrate on detailed work'.
4. **Recognise strengths:** what do colleagues compliment you on? Where do you excel naturally? These are clues to your cognitive strengths. Perhaps you spot patterns others miss, explain complex concepts clearly, solve problems creatively, or maintain exceptional attention to detail. Document these – they're as important as understanding your challenges.
5. **Consider solutions:** for each challenge, brainstorm potential adjustments or strategies. For example, if you struggle with interruptions, solutions might include headphones, a 'do not disturb' sign, scheduled focus time, working from home on certain days, or using a quiet room. If verbal instructions don't stick, perhaps written follow-ups or access to meeting recordings would help.

Part 2: Communicating your needs

Once you understand your patterns, communicating them effectively is crucial.

- **Focus on performance:** frame requests in terms of productivity and effectiveness: 'I can deliver better results if I have agendas in advance' rather than 'I need special treatment because I'm neurodivergent'. This positions adjustments as enabling better work, not as concessions.
- **Be specific and solution-oriented:** rather than 'I struggle with noise', try 'I'd be more productive if I could wear headphones during focus work or use the quiet room for two hours each day'. Offering specific solutions makes it easier for managers to say yes and actually implement what helps.
- **Use 'I' statements:** 'I work best when I have written instructions' rather than 'You don't give clear directions'. This keeps the conversation constructive and focused on your needs rather than sounding like criticism of your manager's approach.
- **Timing matters:** choose moments when your manager isn't stressed or rushed. Consider scheduling a dedicated conversation rather than bringing up needs reactively when problems arise. A calm, planned discussion is more likely to result in meaningful support than a crisis conversation.
- **Start small:** instead of presenting a comprehensive list of needs, which might overwhelm your manager, begin with one or two key adjustments that would make the biggest difference. Once these are successfully implemented, you can introduce additional adjustments as needed.

A simple framework

'I've noticed I perform best when [condition]. Would it be possible for me to [specific adjustment]? This would help me [specific benefit to work]'.

For example: *'I've noticed I perform best when I have time to process complex information before responding. Would it be possible for me to receive meeting agendas 24 hours in advance? This would help me contribute more effectively to discussions and make better strategic recommendations'.*

This two-part process – understanding yourself through reflection, then communicating strategically – forms the foundation for effective advocacy.

9.5 Building your personal support system

Throughout this section, we've explored interconnected elements of a comprehensive personal support system that will enable you to navigate your career sustainably. Consider the following aspects.

- **Design for flexibility:** your support needs will change across life stages. Build regular check-ins with yourself to reflect on what's working and what needs to evolve.
- **Invest in specialist support:** consider coaching from neurodiversity-specialist professionals. External coaches provide perspectives and strategies that workplace support rarely offers.
- **Build support beyond your workplace:** develop external networks – professional associations, neurodivergent community groups, online networks. These provide validation and remind you you're not alone when workplace support falters.
- **Identify allies strategically:** beyond your direct manager, identify sponsors and allies who could champion you. Distribute support across multiple relationships so you're not dependent on any single person.

The combination of self-awareness, strategic disclosure, technology adoption, individualised advocacy and multi-layered support creates resilience. You cannot control organisational culture, but you can build a personal system that enables you to thrive regardless. That agency – knowing yourself deeply, advocating effectively and building support strategically – transforms neurodivergence from a career barrier to a navigable situation.

10. Leveraging your cognitive strengths

The narrative around neurodivergence too often centres on accommodation – what adjustments you need, what support organisations must provide, what challenges require management. This framing, while important, misses something fundamental: *neurodivergent professionals bring genuine cognitive advantages to accountancy, not despite their neurotype but because of it.*

Why accountancy attracts neurodivergent talent

Many interview participants described being drawn to accountancy precisely because it aligned with how their brains naturally work. The logical, rule-based nature of the profession, with clear right and wrong answers, is intuitively comfortable. As one participant explained: 'I was good at, drawn to, and really enjoyed mathematics and accounting. The answer is either right or wrong; a Balance Sheet balances or it does not'. Another echoed: 'What I loved about accounting was it was black and white – it had to balance, or it didn't balance. There's no grey area'.

This isn't coincidence. Accountancy's inherent structure – systematic processes, objective frameworks, pattern-based analysis – maps naturally onto neurodivergent cognitive strengths. Where some professionals may need to develop systematic thinking through training, many neurodivergent professionals think systemically by default.

Specific cognitive advantages in practice

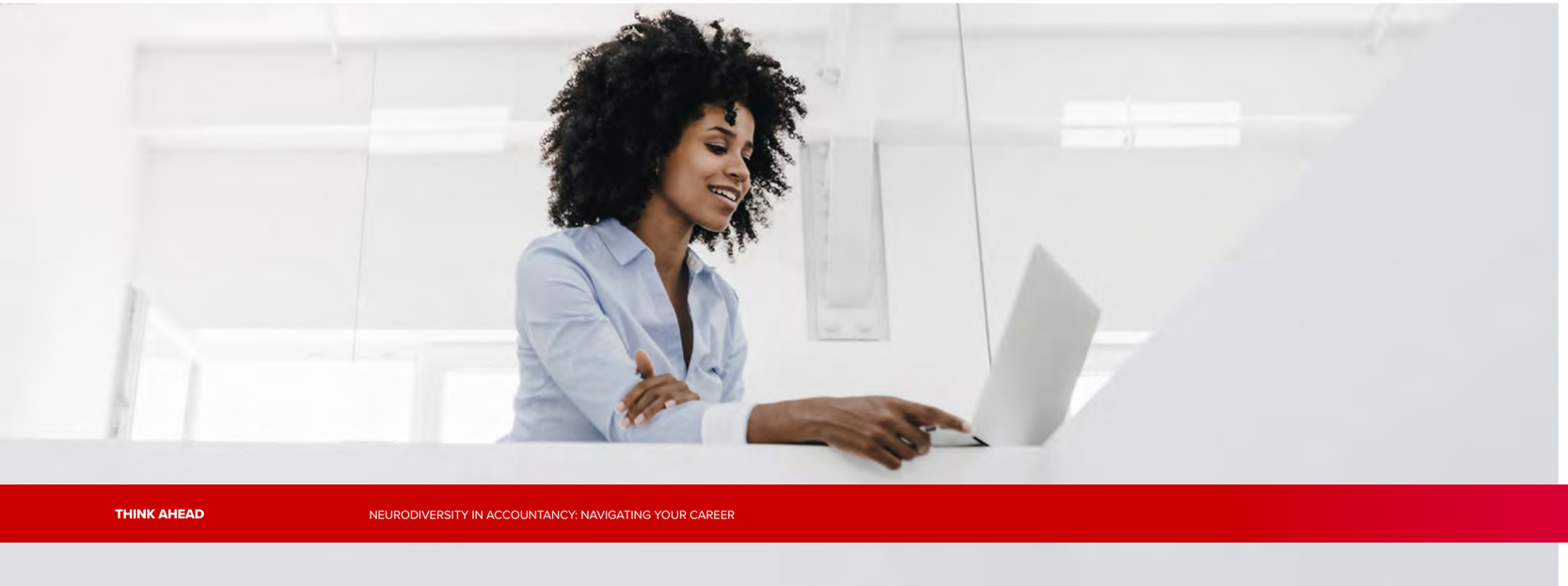
Interview interviewees escribed strengths that create genuine competitive advantages: hyperfocus enabling sustained attention to complex problems-as we saw in section 6, David McCann managed a spreadsheet with 750,000 rows, unfazed, pattern recognition that spots anomalies colleagues overlook, the ability to connect the smallest details to bigger picture perspectives, systematic thinking that drives process improvement, and the capacity to communicate complex financial concepts to non-finance audiences.

These aren't compensatory features or happy accidents. They're cognitive strengths that, when properly deployed deliver exceptional value.

Navigating the dual nature of neurodivergence

Nonetheless, many neurodivergent strengths have challenging edges. Hyperfocus enables extraordinary productivity on engaging tasks but creates difficulty with task-switching, prioritisation, and work-life boundaries. Our interviewee, David McCann described hyperfocus so intense that 'six hours can feel like 30 minutes'. Katherine Fisher works 11-hour days, unable to delegate: 'My bosses keep saying, 'Let things fail', but I can't because I feel that's a reflection on me'.

Strategic self-management means harnessing these strengths while establishing boundaries. This might include setting alarms to prompt breaks during hyperfocus, building teams with complementary profiles who excel at organisation when you don't, or consciously developing delegation skills as you progress into leadership roles.



Strategic positioning for success

Understanding your specific cognitive profile enables strategic career decisions. If you excel at technical precision and systematic analysis but find ambiguous strategic work draining, technical specialist or subject matter expert roles may suit you better than traditional management progression. If you connect details to big-picture thinking naturally, strategic finance leadership roles may leverage your strengths more effectively than heads-down technical accountancy.

The transition from technical to strategic roles requires different cognitive skills, and neurodivergent professionals may need specific support for this evolution. But the goal isn't abandoning your technical strengths: it's building strategic capability on top of them, not instead of them.

'The most successful neurodivergent professionals in this research positioned themselves in roles that used their cognitive strengths rather than leaving them constantly battling their challenges. That strategic alignment matters more than any workplace adjustment.'

11. Navigating non-traditional career paths

Success in accountancy doesn't require following traditional progression routes, and recognising this early can save years of trying to force-fit yourself into career paths that don't align with how you work best.

The good news: as ACCA's recently released report *Career Paths Reimagined* (ACCA 2026) demonstrates, careers of the future will be more flexible and personalised in nature.

Beyond the management ladder

Traditional career progression assumes everyone aspires to people management and seeks rapid upward mobility. Many neurodivergent professionals thrive instead as technical specialists, subject matter experts, or in roles that prioritise depth over breadth. Organisations increasingly recognise the value of technical excellence tracks, but you may need to advocate progression routes that don't require managing people if that doesn't play to your strengths.

The entrepreneurial option

Several interview participants found that entrepreneurial environments accommodated their thinking styles better than corporate structures. One founded a fintech platform while serving as CFO for another company, demonstrating how the need for stimulation and variety can drive multiple ventures successfully. Entrepreneurship offers autonomy, flexibility and freedom from neurotypical corporate norms – though it also demands skills in business development, client management and financial sustainability that shouldn't be underestimated. It's also interesting to note that within ACCA's Global Talent Trends research (ACCA 2025), entrepreneurial roles are a significant future career ambition for many accountants.

Redefining success on your terms

Define success on terms that reflect your values, not just external markers. Professional advancement that requires sacrificing your wellbeing, authenticity or relationships is unsustainable. Recognising when a role or environment fundamentally misaligns with how you work best isn't giving up – it's strategic career management that enables long-term success.

If you think you are stuck

Many neurodivergent professionals find themselves in situations where disclosure seems unsafe, career progression seems blocked, or daily work has become unsustainable. If you're struggling and can't see a way forward in your current situation, remember you have more options than it might seem.

- **Explore internal mobility:** different teams, departments or roles within your current organisation may offer a better fit without requiring disclosure or career disruption. Technical specialist roles, project-based work, or different business units often have varied cultures and expectations.
- **Investigate alternative employers:** not all organisations handle neurodiversity equally. Research potential employers through LinkedIn connections and Glassdoor reviews focused on culture, and by asking specific questions during interviews about working styles and flexibility. Some organisations genuinely are inclusive.
- **Consider a portfolio career:** rather than one full-time role, some neurodivergent professionals thrive with multiple part-time engagements, consulting arrangements, or mixing employment with self-employment. This provides variety and autonomy, and reduces dependence on any single toxic environment.
- **Reassess financial necessities:** sometimes, feeling trapped stems from an unnecessary expensive lifestyle or assumptions about what you 'need' financially. Could downsizing, relocating, or other changes create space to prioritise wellbeing over salary? This isn't possible for everyone, but it's worth an honest evaluation.
- **Use external support strategically:** career coaches specialising in neurodiversity, occupational health assessments (which can be accessed without employer involvement), or vocational rehabilitation services can provide objective perspectives and practical pathways when you're too close to your own situation to see options clearly.
- **Know when to leave:** sometimes the healthiest choice is exit. If your workplace is actively hostile, if masking has become unbearable, if your mental or physical health is deteriorating – you don't owe them indefinite loyalty. Protecting yourself isn't failure; it's survival. Plan strategically, build a financial runway if possible, but don't stay in situations that are destroying you.

The goal isn't convincing yourself to tolerate intolerable situations: it's recognising that even when circumstances seem unchangeable, you retain agency. Small strategic changes – adjusting working patterns, building external networks, researching alternatives, developing new skills – create momentum when immediate transformation isn't possible. You're not powerless, even when it seems that way.

12. Cultural context matters

The guidance throughout this report assumes a baseline of legal protection, organisational awareness and cultural acceptance that not all readers will experience. Neurodiversity acceptance varies dramatically across cultures, regions and generations, creating profoundly different challenges and opportunities depending on where you work.

Regional variations in acceptance

Interview participants from Malaysia and India described contexts where neurodivergent hiring remains rare and adult neurodiversity conversations are 'almost non-existent'. In Malaysia, one participant noted: 'The awareness is still very lacking in Malaysian society'. Another, despite actively discussing his ADHD diagnosis for six months in India, had encountered only two other Indians who shared their diagnoses.

Cultural expectations of conformity, family pressure about career choices and limited access to diagnosis or support create additional barriers beyond those described in this report.

What this means for you

If you're navigating neurodivergence in a region or culture with limited awareness, your journey will be harder. The strategies in this report still apply – self-awareness, strategic choices about disclosure, technology adoption, building personal support systems – but you may need greater resourcefulness and resilience to implement them. Connecting with international neurodiversity communities online, seeking support from global professional networks, and recognising that cultural norms are slowly shifting may provide some consolation, even when local progress seems glacial.

You're navigating challenges that colleagues in more progressive environments don't face. That doesn't diminish your capability or potential – it reflects the uneven landscape of neurodiversity acceptance globally. Your perseverance in difficult contexts matters profoundly, both for your own career and for those who will follow.

Conclusion.

The stories and insights in this report paint a clear picture: neurodivergent professionals bring immense value to the accountancy profession, but their success depends on a fundamental shift in how we approach inclusion. Moving from awareness to action requires work at both organisational and individual levels, with neither alone being sufficient.

For organisations: from accommodation to transformation

The evidence is unambiguous: systemic change creates environments where neurodivergent professionals don't just survive but thrive. Manager capability development, clear communication as standard practice, reimagined recruitment processes and psychologically safe environments for disclosure aren't optional initiatives. They're foundational requirements for accessing and retaining talent that represents 15–20% of the population (Doyle 2020).

Organisations that treat neurodiversity as a compliance exercise or diversity metric will fail. Those who recognise it as fundamental to how they design work, build teams and enable performance will unlock genuine competitive advantage. The adjustments that neurodivergent professionals need often benefit everyone – a principle that should guide all inclusion efforts.

For neurodivergent professionals: agency within systems

While organisations must change, you cannot wait passively for perfect conditions. The strategies outlined in this report – deep self-awareness, strategic disclosure decisions, technology adoption, individualised advocacy and multi-layered support systems – create agency even in imperfect environments.

Your cognitive differences are not deficits requiring accommodation. They're variations that align naturally with accountancy's systematic, logical, pattern-based work. The challenge isn't your capability: it's navigating systems designed around different cognitive profiles. Understanding your strengths, managing the double-edged nature of traits such as hyperfocusing and positioning yourself strategically enables sustainable success.

If you're struggling, remember you have options. Internal mobility, alternative employers, portfolio careers, external support networks – these aren't admissions of failure but strategic choices that prioritise your wellbeing and long-term success. You're not powerless, even when circumstances seem overwhelming.

Looking forward

The neurodiversity movement has shifted from medical deficit models to recognising cognitive variation as normal human diversity. Social media have given neurodivergent professionals unprecedented ability to shape narratives, share experiences and hold employers accountable. This momentum won't reverse.

The question isn't whether workplaces will become more neuro-inclusive – it's how quickly, and which organisations will lead and which will fall behind. For neurodivergent professionals reading this: your experiences, challenges and successes are valid. You belong in this profession. The barriers you face reflect design problems in systems, not deficits in you.

For organisations: the talent is there, the business case is clear and the tools exist. What's required now is commitment to genuine transformation, not performative pretences of inclusion.

'The future of accountancy is neurodiverse. Let's build it intentionally.'

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ACCA's global themes.

Why neurodivergent talent matters to the future of the accountancy profession

This report makes the case for why inclusivity matters for the future of the profession, and why neurodivergent talent is critical to its success. ACCA's global themes reflect the change we want to drive for the prosperity of the future global economy. We believe neurodivergent talent in accountancy is crucial to the realisation of these ambitions.

BRIDGE THE ACCOUNTANCY SKILLS GAP

Build accountancy capacity so that businesses, the public sector and economies have access to skills and expertise to thrive.

Call to action for policymakers:

- Widen access to the accountancy profession through inclusive educational, vocational and workplace policies that allow anyone to develop the accountancy skills needed.
- Develop and grow the accountancy profession across all sectors, championing sustainability and technology skills to ensure the profession meets market needs.

DRIVE SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

Drive policies, regulations and standards that |deliver prosperous, ethical, sustainable organisations and economies.

Call to action to policymakers:

- Drive the adoption of policies and regulations related to sustainable practices and ethical decision-making which reinforce corporate responsibility and enable the transition to net zero while fostering diverse and inclusive workforces.
- Drive the adoption of international standards which draw on global best practice, enable harmonisation across jurisdictions, facilitate international trade and maintain accountability and trust.

CHAMPION THE PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANT

Champion a refreshed understanding of the vital contribution of professional accountants in a changed world.

Call to action to policymakers:

- Champion and draw on the insights of professional accountants to influence policy linked to audit, tax, public sector reform and easing the SME regulatory burden, as well as sustainability and technology risks and opportunities.
- Champion the role of professional accountants in creating and delivering value in the public interest – from entrepreneurship to organisations of all sizes and sectors – through their ethical, sustainable and innovative contribution to business and society.

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THINK AHEAD