



27 workplace adjustments to support neurodiversity

Top tips to empower different thinkers in your organisation and break down barriers in the workplace.

Introduction

If there's one thing a deliverable neuro-inclusion strategy can't live without, it's practical support; steps that reduce challenges and promote an inclusive workplace.

Organisations will stagnate if they don't promote wider cognitive diversity within teams and will limit their innovation and creativity.

An adaptive working environment needs to take an individualised approach that utilises employees' individual strengths and acknowledges areas of development. This approach also helps normalise our differences and create compassion for neurodiverse employees who may have more specific support needs.

Employers must invest in their people if they hope to retain diverse talent.

No budget or no leadership appetite is no excuse. Everyone can take small steps that support colleagues and friends to thrive in the workplace.

In our handbook, 'How to support neurodiverse employees', we look at common differences people can experience and ways to work to your strengths. We also outline how each of the 27 adjustments mentioned below relates to specific domains in your cognitive profile.

We want to break down how you can implement these adjustments, even if you don't have access to our digital cognitive



Check out our **How to support neurodiverse employees** handbook

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assessment and diversity data.

Cognassist's digital cognitive assessment measures different domains around communication, memory, attention and verbal and visual processing. Our platform is backed by cognitive science to help employers to quickly understand cognitive diversity in their organisation and take a more personalised approach to support different thinkers, including neurodiverse staff.

Without these digital tools, you may need a more trial and error approach to employee support. Although this can take time, it doesn't lessen the legal and moral duty that organisations have to make reasonable adjustments under The Equality Act 2010 or mean that we can allow employees to struggle on their own.

These tips, even though they may seem small, can have a big impact, helping employees to manage their workload and approach tasks in a way that works for them.

We want to build a world where every diverse mind can thrive. We hope this resource gives you more tools to support yourself, your colleagues and your organisation to drive innovation and inclusivity at once.



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Verbal and communication workplace adjustments

We all communicate and express our ideas in different ways.

Some of us might be excellent verbal communicators, or we might take a more visual approach when setting our ideas down and working with our colleagues.

There is no right or wrong here.

If we struggle to communicate our ideas, it does not reduce the value of the ideas themselves. We must find ways to enable effective communication as individuals and take a collaborative approach with colleagues to empower team performance.

From a neurodiversity perspective, the adjustments around written communication can support dyslexia and often, dyslexic employees would call themselves visual thinkers.

The verbal adjustments may also be helpful to support autism, where employees may interpret what we say more literally, vary in their speech and language fluency or have set communication during conversations.

Here are some workplace adjustments to support different types of communicators across your organisation.

01

Connect new information or ideas to prior knowledge or situations

Connecting our ideas to situations or knowledge that people already have, and how these might relate, can help your teams to form new ideas and strategies or solve issues as they occur. It's a good way to reinforce learning from your mistakes and successes as an organisation.

It also helps employees to build a more conceptual understanding of your organisation and ways of working to extrapolate their own ideas and build a culture of learning.

Repeat information but rephrase it slightly differently each time

Even just one word can change how people interpret what we say – this is just a fact of human interaction.

Learning information is always a process. Very few of us will understand something the first time around, and often explaining it differently is what finally makes it all click into place and the problem becomes clear.

Approaching a problem from different perspectives is also likely to bring the most creative and innovative solutions.

02



Discuss similarities and differences between ideas or approaches

Our verbal reasoning relates to our conceptual understanding of the world, so exploring similarities and differences encourages thinking at a more abstract and deeper, theoretical level.

Taking the time to explore ideas abstractly, through ideas meetings, sharing interesting and relevant research or doing a pre- or post-mortem on projects can help you anticipate or understand the unique requirements of a project or task.

It can help employees to think logically about certain topics or problems. Asking employees to identify these similarities and differences can inspire a deeper working understanding of their roles and responsibilities, while also supporting their personal development.

If you want to build leaders in your organisation, you have to inspire people and get them thinking beyond the day to day tasks and you can encourage these skills in your team over time.

Those of us in leadership roles are more likely to do this type of comparative thinking to direct and deliver overall strategy or operations, but even the most effective reasoners should never work by themselves.



Break down tasks and present information in small chunks

When our ability to store information in our memory is likely to differ depending on the individual, it can help us to be aware of how we present information to our colleagues.

Are we speaking too fast? Do we pause before changing the topic? Are we using a lot of text in our presentations or reports?

Breaking down the information we give to our colleagues and putting larger tasks or topics into smaller chunks helps us to process information more easily – this is especially important for employees who experience difficulties processing verbal information.



Provide supporting visual cues, directions or instructions

When we find it difficult to process verbal information, it makes sense to rely on visual abilities that we may be stronger in.

Try showing an employee the step-by-step process for tasks in advance, or what the result should look like for reference. For example, relating how their work might impact business processes through user journeys or referencing completed work. Related diagrams and visualisation tools can also reinforce written or spoken information.

06

Provide a glossary of terms

Every organisation or sector has its specific terminology. To help employees who may need more time to get to know the internal vocabulary or common acronyms, it can help to have reference materials like a glossary of terms to improve comprehension and maintain it over time.

Also, if you're speaking in a meeting or talking to a colleague, be aware if you need to explain a term or say the full name of any acronyms to avoid misunderstandings or leaving people out of the conversation.

Support employees in their writing tasks

This can mean setting out clear aims for each task, discussing the aims, writing a formal brief and listening to the employee's ideas to encourage their work in the right direction.

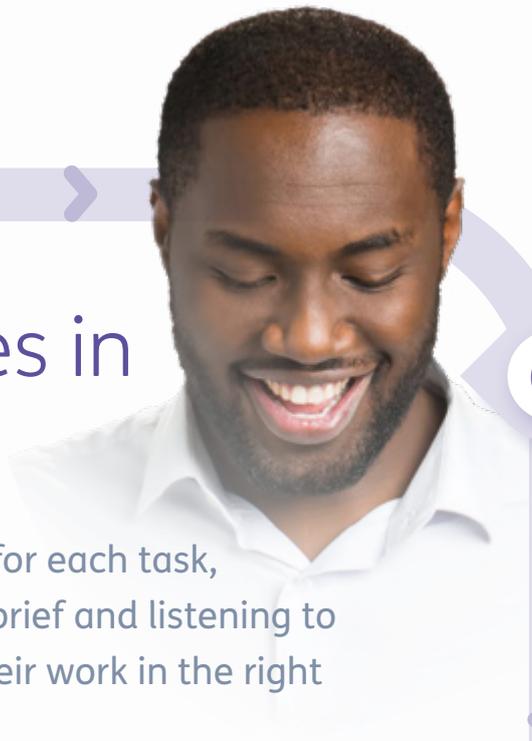
Individuals who struggle with literacy can get lost when they're writing, so having these clear aims can help them to have a coherent plan for their writing.

It's also possible to encourage this with tools like mind mapping software or double-spaced Word documents.

This writing could be reports, marketing pieces, emails, business cases, filling out forms, customer communications or newsletters – it doesn't just apply to office-based jobs.

If you know of any employees with strengths in literacy and writing, they can help to review work and provide feedback.

07





08

Keep internal communications short and to the point

It can be easy to send emails to colleagues that unintentionally bombard them with written information.

Onboarding information or new company policy can be notoriously dense documents.

Giving individuals who may struggle with their literacy more support and time to respond to such information is important, but it also helps to keep the information as concise and accessible as possible in the first place.

Incorporate visual communication and reporting tools into an employee's duties

When reading and decoding language isn't our strength, ways of working should be adapted to make our role easier. More visual-based reporting, like dashboards, graphs and Gantt charts can replace written monthly reports, for example.

There are plenty of free diagram or flowchart software packages available, but tablets with stylus pens for drawing can also aid communication for visual thinkers.

09

Accompany visual information with a verbal explanation

Employees with differences in visual perception, which affects how we make sense of what our eyes see, may find it difficult to read between the lines and interpret information that may seem obvious to our colleagues. Using verbal explanations for visual information can help contextualise what people are seeing.

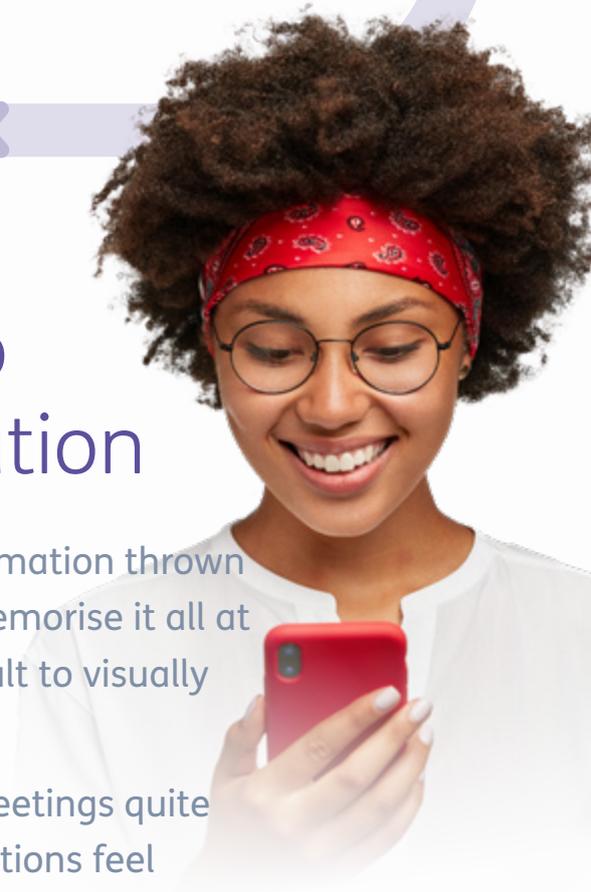
Our visual perception can also sometimes affect reading, so if employees find it difficult to read from a computer screen, you can try changing the contrast settings to make reading easier.

Avoid presenting too much visual information

Nobody likes having huge amounts of information thrown their way. Often, we feel like we need to memorise it all at once. For some of us, it may be more difficult to visually absorb lots of information in one go.

It might make presentations, training or meetings quite overwhelming, which can make these situations feel demoralising or unpleasant.

Keeping visual information paired back to the essentials, in everything from planning documents to final presentations, provides less visual strain for employees who may experience differences in visual processing.



Encourage discussions

Discussing visual problems or tasks together or in small groups allows employees to ask questions and also receive verbal explanations for visual problems they may otherwise struggle with.

Our brains make assumptions all the time, and we don't know when we're making mistakes – otherwise, we wouldn't let ourselves make them in the first place. Discussions help employees to see something from different perspectives and to recognise and question their assumptions.

The more discussions included in the workplace, the more comfortable employees become talking about what they don't understand and asking questions with their colleagues.

Provide slides or visual information in advance

This is another simple but incredibly effective tip.

It allows employees to see what they will be working on and get a head start on specific projects, topics or meetings. Preparation never goes to waste.

Giving employees time to prepare in advance and clearing some time in the calendar to do this can reduce the strain on their information processing speed and give people more confidence to communicate in the moment.





Environmental workplace adjustments

Alongside supporting communication in the workplace, we can look at ways to help navigate our work environment.

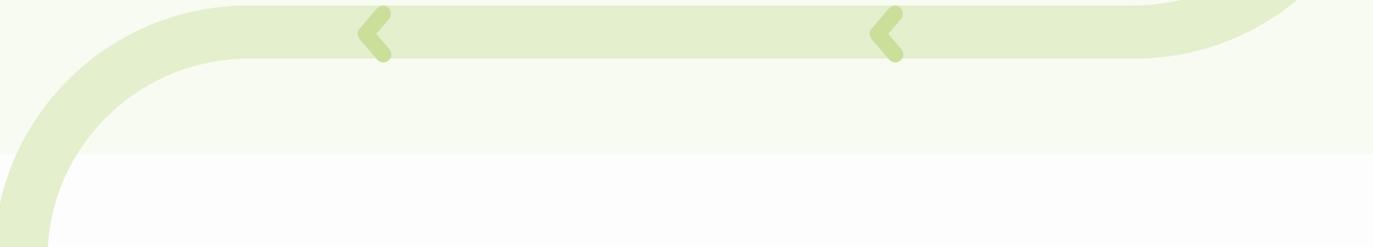
The structure and setup of each organisation are unique, and every employee will navigate the workplace differently. However, the necessity to ensure a flexible working environment that acknowledges people's different experiences in the workplace is the same for all organisations.

We cannot expect every employee to thrive in the same environment. People are like plants – it's a simplification, we know – but we all thrive in different climates, and we cannot grow in conditions that are not suited to our needs.

Your organisation is an ecosystem that can either foster diversity or destroy it.

From a neurodiversity perspective, autistic employees may benefit from support that helps them navigate the workplace and learn some of the unwritten rules of modern working life. The use of assistive technology is well-suited to supporting dyslexia for reading and writing skills and dyspraxia for reading and writing speed.

Here are some workplace adjustments to support a flexible workplace environment.



Create workplace mentors

Establishing partnerships between employees is great for learning and growth, but it also offers opportunities for employees to ask more abstract questions about their organisation to each other.

It's important to build rapport within organisations outside of only a manager, especially in online working environments where it can be harder to feel connected.

Mentoring can help us to build resilience and a shared understanding of some of the skills and knowledge expected in your workplace. It also offers opportunities for more creative solutions and supports people to navigate workplace interactions.



Encourage greater familiarity with your internal structure and procedures

Companies will nearly always put in the work to make ensure external resources and processes are easy to navigate, but internally it can be a different story.

Shared files could be all over the place, presentations can look different depending on who's presenting. The strong branding and consistency that comes across to customers or stakeholders can fail to reach employees, which can create confusion and reinforce bad practices.

Using clearly defined templates for different types of documents and easy 'drag and drop' components means that every staff member can help to create better internal consistency.

It also helps to familiarise your staff with more abstract structures like policies, procedures and support pathways to make it easier for staff to access information or find support when they need it.

This internal communication will need to be done at regular intervals to remind staff and also include new staff. This is part of providing an inclusive organisation that enables staff to know where they can find what they need and gain a more intuitive understanding of your organisation.

Provide assistive technology

As an example, text-to-speech or speech-to-text software are practical tools for supporting reading and writing and independent working.

Individuals might find that one tool, or both, offer a different approach that reduces stress and the time it takes to work on certain tasks.

For example, speech-to-text software is useful for quick transcription and text-to-speech software can reduce screen time and enable us to learn while doing other things. It can also enhance our literacy and reading skills over time.

If an employee has a physical or mental health condition or learning difficulty and needs communication support, Access to Work grants are available and can “help pay for practical support with your work.”²

Record meetings or important communications

In the era of online working, recording internal meetings has become part of the new normal, but not all workplaces do this. Recording meetings, even just using the audio recorder on our phone or laptop, can be much easier than relying on personal notes or written minutes.

Providing information in multiple formats is key. Listening back to what was said will be much easier for some employees than reading through notes afterwards.

For important communications, like policy changes, staff changes or procedural changes, it is a good idea to have a verbal conversation about this and keep a record of it, rather than just sending a company-wide email.

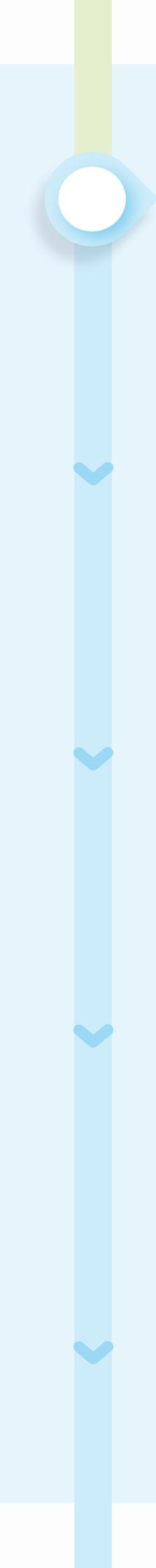
Suggest reading scribe or audio notetaking software

Using text-to-speech and notetaking software can make it easier for employees to focus on and complete certain tasks. It allows them to review the information and make notes in their own time, preventing cognitive overload.

If an employee feels overwhelmed by information, it can have a huge impact on productivity. If this situation carries on, the most likely outcome is that they will need to take time off due to stress. This situation is one we need to avoid, but from 2020 to 2021, stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 50% of all work-related ill health cases.³

Helping employees manage their workload and tasks in ways that work for them is even more important than ever.





Personal development workplace adjustments

Some aspects of our development will require more one to one support. Direct managers are best placed to ensure workplace adjustments are in place and are having a positive impact on an employee's wellbeing and workload.

Yet, according to our digital survey, only 21% of respondents agree that their managers and leaders receive appropriate training to support neurodiverse employees.⁴

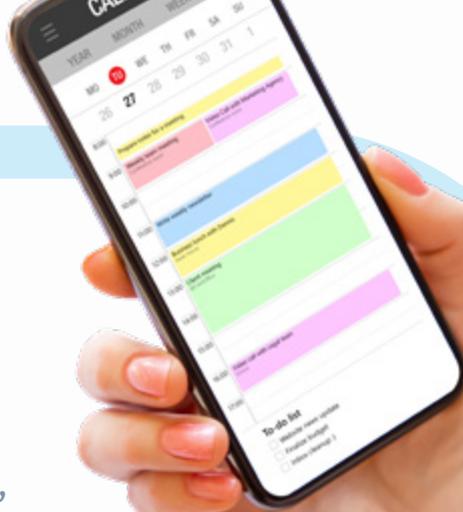
Our platform gives you access to our Knowledge Hub, full of expert-led content on how to support neurodiverse colleagues. Alongside neurodiversity resources, we also offer training to build your skills in areas like unconscious bias, dealing with uncertainty and understanding your cognitive profile.

From a neurodiversity perspective, employees who experience attentional differences related to ADHD are likely to benefit from goal-oriented ways of working and other support that helps them to stay focused on tasks and priorities.

Support with numeracy skills, time management and ranking priorities can also be useful for supporting dyscalculia, which can make tasks relating to numerical processing more challenging.

It's important to note that dyslexia and dyscalculia often co-occur, so you may need to provide a variety of suitable workplace adjustments.

Here are some workplace adjustments to support employees in a one to one setting.



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Spend more time on planning

Whether you use a checklist of tasks, visualise the process from start to finish or create a change management plan, spending extra time in planning stages can prevent unwanted and avoidable stress further down the line.

It can help staff to visualise what's going to happen and know what they have to do, which helps them to maintain their attention on a project and see it through until the end.

It also breaks it down and helps people to analyse performance and potentially see where they may have missed a step.

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Set realistic goals

The key to setting powerful goals is to try to be realistic and clear. Goals are there to inspire staff, but we can find ways to make them more achievable.

If someone can't see how they're going to achieve a goal, they run the risk of being unable to complete it, which defeats the purpose of setting goals in the first place.

It can help to make sub-goals, which create more manageable steps and improves our ability to visualise how we will achieve longer-term goals and projects. Business targets will need to be balanced with individual targets to create realistic expectations.

Practice ways of focusing attention

There are many small ways in which we can remove distractions and improve our attention. This can include working in a quiet space or home environment, simply pausing to take a deep breath or a short break, meditating for 10 minutes a day or focusing on one task at a time.

Scientific evidence suggests that mindful meditation reduces stress, anxiety and depression, and increases people's memory and some cognitive skills.

In educational studies, spaced learning has emerged as one of the most effective methods for long-term memory encoding. People in the working world may be familiar with the similar Pomodoro Technique for managing your time and tasks more effectively.

One thing to understand here is that multi-tasking doesn't exist.

When we think we're multi-tasking, what our brain is doing is switching between tasks very quickly and every time we do this, it has a cognitive cost.

If we spend our day switching between tasks endlessly and feeling like we haven't got much done, it's because this task switching is one of the fastest ways to exhaust our mental capacity. When we're stressed, we'll often notice that our attention suffers in this way too.

Always encourage regular breaks – even if it seems counter-intuitive, more work will get done.

Repeat information and summarise requirements for each task or skill

Repetition is vital for learning, and some employees may benefit from information being repeated several times.

Try going through the steps of a task more than once before asking someone to do it themselves, summarising processes and lessons learned to drive further comprehension.

Giving employees every opportunity to retain information is so useful, especially when you're working in a fast-paced environment. Patience and time for self-reflection will go a long way to improving their confidence and skills.

Clearly outline learning objectives or outcomes

Providing employees with clearly outlined verbal aims can help them visualise expected outcomes and their progress, especially when it comes to learning and development (L&D).

L&D teams can even make a list of each of the skills, knowledge or behaviours employees should gain throughout their training.

Providing weekly or monthly objectives can help people visualise progress. Give specific actions to those struggling more to take in each training session.

L&D teams will need to consider flexibilities on a case by case basis. However, having inclusivity as a standard consideration of L&D processes and practices ensures fewer employees are unintentionally excluded or disadvantaged.

Prioritise tasks in advance

It can benefit employees to prioritise their work in advance, with the help of managers or team leaders.

These priorities may need to be reviewed throughout the week, but also when new or unexpected tasks are introduced to always maintain clear priorities, even in changing or unpredictable circumstances.

Project management software can also help to build a visual workspace, which can take some of the cognitive load off using working memory to complete tasks.

Working memory can be thought of as our 'mental workspace', which is how we store and use information in the moment. Our working memory requires sustained attention, which can be difficult when we're faced with the daily distractions of working life.

Provide support for numerical-based tasks

Some workplace tasks, like budgeting, invoices, expenses, risk management and even business decisions require mathematical thinking and planning.

Providing training or mentoring around these activities can help employees to understand and complete these tasks with less stress.

When dealing with broader strategic decisions or metric and target-led tasks, there needs to be a collective responsibility for these decisions and opportunities for staff to learn about these processes as part of their progression plans.



Estimate how long tasks will take and set clear deadlines

It is easy to underestimate our time and deadlines and fall behind on our priorities afterwards. By making this part of your processes and refining estimations over time, it will be easier to plan and execute work more effectively.

Some employees may need more guidance on estimations and may benefit from management input on these refinement processes to reflect accurate work rates.

Equally, setting clear and appropriate deadlines with managers will help improve productivity and prevent an employee from feeling overwhelmed.

If employees are consistently missing deadlines or underestimating their workload, it helps to take a look at these expectations and whether they are realistic, rather than seeing this as an immediate performance issue with the individual, as it could lead to unintentional discrimination.

If needed, incremental and clearly defined progress targets can be put in place to address and support any potential challenges.

More time to complete work alongside consistent guidance on managing workload may be required to help employees perform at their best – you may also find that a higher quality of work is delivered as a result.

Extra time

Educators know all about offering learners more time to process information and complete tasks, but what about the workplace?

Creating space for people to work at their own pace is not a bad thing. Quality always suffers when you prioritise speed. There's a balance to be had here, of course, but it's important not to disadvantage employees with unrealistic expectations and allow some employees who need more time to process and act on information.

If you continue to put business needs above an individual's capacity, you will continue to lose talent and risk burning out your employees.

Extra time is a crucial adjustment for people who experience difficulties with processing speed – it's not just a nice to have but a necessity.



Taking steps to build resilience and sustainable employee growth

We all experience challenges or anxiety in the workplace to some extent – that’s just the reality of being human. But for people who may experience more substantial difficulties, it can have a greater impact on their lives and can put people at a disadvantage.

It’s our responsibility to level the playing field to give everyone an equal opportunity for success.

Choose as many of these adjustments as you think could be useful and try them out.

Getting to know your team and creating an environment where each person can thrive will help your team to remain resilient in the face of challenges and support each other’s personal growth.

At Cognassist, we believe in a culture of inclusion, embracing different perspectives and empowering people with the knowledge of how they think and learn.

The outcomes for organisations are an ongoing culture of learning and wider awareness of what it takes to build a supportive and collaborative workplace.

We have a collective responsibility to promote healthy and effective ways of working.

It’s time to join the cognitive revolution.



Get in touch

Contact our sales team today to find out how Cognassist can help your organisation:

sales@cognassist.com



Why Cognassist?

- Drive cognitive awareness throughout the workforce
- Build good managers into great leaders
- Create cognitively personalised HR processes
- Measure and demonstrate progressive neuro-inclusion

Helpful resources

[Top tips for raising neurodiversity awareness >](#)

[How neuro-inclusive are your hiring practices? >](#)

[Product guide >](#)



FREE to watch!

Check out our **Neurodiversity in the Workplace Masterclass** for a deeper dive into cognition and neurodiversity >

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