



Interview bias and neurodivergence

a quick-reference resource

Research shows that hiring practices are demonstrably prone to bias, leading to the exclusion of qualified talent and a lack of truly diverse and inclusive workplaces.

One key element of almost every hiring process is the standard interview. Interviews can act as a barrier to neurodivergent talent accessing the workplace due to the focus on interpersonal communication skills, presentation skills and impression management, for example.

As such, the interview is a critical stage of the hiring process in which awareness and education around neurodivergence is key for fair and unbiased decision making.

Unconscious bias

Unconscious bias refers to beliefs and attitudes that occur outside of our conscious awareness. Meaning, our unconscious beliefs may contrast with our conscious beliefs and impact our behaviour and decision making without any realisation.

Unconscious bias can lead to stereotyping, shaping our perceptions of groups of people within society based on certain characteristics e.g., neurodivergence, disability, race, gender and age.

Having an awareness that unconscious bias exists, and reflecting on our immediate judgements or perceptions of people and situations can help to mitigate its impact.



Common Biases

Examples

Stereotyping bias	Judging a candidate based on beliefs and attitudes held towards the group characteristics rather than the individual characteristics.	You reject a candidate for a job because their disclosure of dyslexia makes you question their intelligence, even though they have years of relevant experience.
Halo/Horn bias	When a prominent characteristic or physical trait overshadows an applicant's other qualities. Positive traits result in a halo effect, negative traits result in a horn effect.	You dismiss a candidate's ability to take on the role because they took longer to respond to the questions, overlooking the strong quality of their answers.
Non-verbal bias	Judging a candidate based on physical mannerisms instead of skills	You perceive lack of eye contact as being rude or disengaged
Similarity bias	Favouring candidates with similar or common interests, behaviours, backgrounds, or experience.	Scoring a candidate more highly because they have similar hobbies with that of the team.

Interviewer considerations

Communication

Neurodivergent communication can vary, so it's important to be open-minded and allow the individual to communicate in a way that works best for them, without placing too much value on adherence to strict social norms and communication intricacies.

Processing

Neurodivergent candidates may need additional processing time to interpret and respond to questioning.

Some types of questions may be more difficult to interpret and answer such as open ended, double-barrel, or situational questions. In this case, candidates may require further prompts to answer appropriately.

Non-verbal behaviours

Neurodivergent candidates may stim during an interview to self-regulate and support with concentration. Stimming behaviours can look different for different people, but some examples include hair twirling, rocking back and forth, hand-flapping or finger picking.

Additionally, eye contact can be difficult for autistic individuals, so you may encounter decreased or no eye contact. This does not represent disengagement, instead it supports autistic people to focus on the interview and questions.

Appearance

Many neurodivergent candidates could experience sensory sensitivities. An important thing to note is that certain clothing can result in sensory discomfort or overload. As a result, neurodivergent individuals may opt for soft and comfortable clothing.

Accommodations

Accommodations can support neurodivergent candidates to showcase their best selves within an interview. It's important that these requests are respected and implemented. Accommodations are positive and allow candidates to balance out their strengths and challenges to be able to sustain employment.

Catching our bias

Interviewers can reflect on the following questions to identify and reduce potential biases toward neurodivergent candidates.

- Am I judging this candidate based on eye contact, body language, or social cues that may not reflect their actual abilities or professionalism?
- Am I assuming that a nontraditional communication style (e.g., monotone voice, long pauses, or direct speech) means the candidate lacks enthusiasm or interpersonal skills?
- Am I prioritising "polish" or "charisma" over the actual skills and qualifications required for the job?
- Am I allowing rigid expectations of "professionalism" to exclude candidates who may have different but equally effective work styles?
- Am I making assumptions about a candidate's ability to handle teamwork or social interactions without considering their actual experience and strategies?
- Am I interpreting a candidate's need for structure, clear instructions, or accommodations as a lack of flexibility or competence?
- Am I assuming that neurodivergence will be a disadvantage rather than recognizing how it can bring unique strengths to the role?
- Am I fairly assessing the candidate's problem-solving and technical skills without being overly influenced by how they communicate their thoughts?
- Am I treating accommodations as a red flag rather than as a reasonable and common workplace need?

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