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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the concept of neurodiversity, highlighting its relevance in the workplace and analyzing how organizations can adapt to be more inclusive of neurodivergent individuals.

Chapter 1 provides an in-depth definition of neurodiversity, exploring the historical and theoretical roots of the concept and how it relates to neurological conditions such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and other cognitive variations. This chapter emphasizes the view of neurodiversity as a form of human diversity to be understood and valued, rather than something to be "cured" or "normalized."

In **Chapter 2**, the importance of neurodiversity in the workplace is analyzed, focusing on the challenges and opportunities it presents. The chapter explores the issues neurodivergent individuals face in professional settings, such as difficulties in communication, social interaction, and emotional regulation, as well as the opportunities offered by their cognitive uniqueness, such as the ability to think innovatively and approach tasks in unconventional ways.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of organizational structures and work environments, examining company policies and practices that can be implemented to promote the inclusion of neurodivergent employees. Concrete tools such as adapting the physical workspace, introducing assistive technologies, and training staff to raise awareness and provide support for cognitive diversity are discussed. The text also reviews companies that have implemented inclusive practices, highlighting how these efforts have made their workplaces more accessible, engaging, and productive for everyone.

Chapter 4 focuses on the case of **Auticon**, a company that has distinguished itself for its innovative organizational model employing autistic individuals in the IT sector. This chapter explores how Auticon has created a work environment that values the skills of neurodivergent employees by adopting inclusive practices and specific support strategies, and how this approach has contributed to the company's success. This analysis examines how inclusiveness positively impacts both employees and the organization's productivity and innovation.

The **Conclusions** reflect on the outcomes and future implications of neurodiversity in the workplace. The suggestion is that, over time, organizations should shift toward more inclusive approaches that recognize neurological diversity as an asset. The text provides useful advice for organizations aiming to adopt inclusive policies, highlighting that encouraging cognitive diversity through changes in culture and structure is essential for driving innovation and growth.

For linguistic clarity and grammatical accuracy, the author used AI-based tools exclusively as a proofreading and language-editing support.

CHAPTER 1

Neurodiversity: Definition and Understanding ^[4]

“Wisdom is being able to live with differences without wanting to eliminate them.” This is what Gregory Bateson—anthropologist and sociologist—says, and in trying to explain “difference” he used this metaphor.

In my work, I would like to start here, from what is too often seen as different in our eyes, even just from its very definition: **neuro divergent**.

The term actually refers to being neurologically different from what is seen as typical, meaning it applies to people whose brain’s function, learn, or act in ways not commonly expected. Although this term may seem divisive, it was coined with the intention of being inclusive and of overcoming the normal/pathological dichotomy.

Within neurodivergence fall all the ways—such as ADHD—in which the brain functions differently from the norm, including Autism, Giftedness, SLDs (Specific Learning Disorders), and Intellectual Disability. We can also say that, by now, autism, ADHD, and SLDs constitute a real “**cultural phenomenon**,” in the sense that they are conditions that transcend clinical practice and psychiatric theory and end up involving important aspects of the social world. In fact, they can be considered “**disorders of a social nature**,” as they concern empathy, sociality, communication, language, attention, and self-control.

It is important to emphasize that, in recent years, these disabilities are being discussed more and more, to the point that some even speak of a real epidemic. For example, in the United States in recent years there has been an increase in cases of ADHD, while in Italy and Western countries in general, an increase in cases of autism. The cause of this phenomenon can be attributed to advances in science; indeed, such disorders have always existed, but only in recent years have more specific and in-depth studies been conducted, thanks also to diagnostic tools that have become increasingly sensitive and precise in identifying disorders.

Over the years, however, there have been numerous interpretations of the causes of autism, many of which have been completely invalidated. In a study published in Great Britain in 1998 in *The Lancet* by Wakefield (1998), for example, it was hypothesized that the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine caused intestinal inflammation with a consequent increase in intestinal permeability, followed by toxic substances entering the bloodstream, damaging the brain, and causing autism. Later, in a series of articles published in the *British Medical Journal*, journalist Brian Deer (2011) completely disproved this theory, demonstrating that Wakefield had constructed a true scientific fraud. Supporting the lack of correlation between vaccines and autism, many other studies have been conducted, such as one published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (2015).

Additionally, in the twenty-first century, **neuroscience** has risen to prominence, seeking to investigate the functioning of the brain and neural processes by bringing together biology, chemistry, physiology, and neurology, and explaining social behavior in light of brain activity. The concept of the “**social brain**” best expresses the neuroscience project aimed precisely at understanding social phenomena in neuroscientific terms (Canaglia, 2021). Disorders such as autism, ADHD, and SLDs are today among the most prominent topics for the rise of neuroscience and have become one of its main areas of research.

It is important to stress that, often, the strongest supporters of neuroscience are the patients themselves. Consider that in recent years there have been numerous ADHD diagnoses

among adults who fought to have their disorder recognized, seeking to ally themselves with people with similar impairments. The strength of this battle arises precisely from the need to recognize that the origin of their condition does not lie in moral or personal attitudes but in certain neural characteristics, highlighted through objective data and outside their control. In this way, autistic, hyperactive, and dyslexic individuals seek to distance themselves from the category of “disorder,” bringing out the importance of diversity.

1.1. A Comparison of Several Models What is ADHD? ^[1]

Unlike other disorders, ADHD, Autism, and SLDs are characterized by a general impairment affecting organic, cognitive, and social domains. For this reason, there are two distinct schools of thought that compete in the study of these phenomena: the biomedical model and the constructionist model.

The first proposes the paradigm of the life sciences as the valid one for studying human phenomena; in this regard, neuroscience stands as its forerunner. This model has become a fundamental reference point for the cognitivist-oriented psychological approach, also giving rise to the psychomedical model (Caniglia, 2021). The second perspective is the constructionist one, which argues for the specificity and irreducibility of human phenomena compared to life phenomena, and therefore tends to keep the human sciences separate from the life sciences (Caniglia, 2021). Consequently, the biomedical model applies to the life sciences (biology, biochemistry, physiology, genetics, etc.) to the human being. According to Ian Hacking (2008), applying biology is useful if, for example, autism becomes “a new kind of brain,” as is the search for the genetic origin of a neurological condition, even in view of its medicalization.

In fact, today, for example in the case of ADHD, several types of therapy exist: a pharmacological one, based on psychostimulants, and a behavioral one with psychoeducation and psychotherapy pathways aimed at working on awareness and acceptance of one’s functioning. In other cases, such as dyscalculia, strategies are implemented to help individuals better tackle specific tasks. A particularly effective and useful intervention is Precision Teaching, a measurement system that allows any skill to be taught accurately and quickly. Indeed, the key word of this intervention is *fluency*, understood as the combination of accuracy and speed, and identified as the true mastery of a given skill (Cavallini, 2023).

To better understand the biomedical model, one must investigate its reference perspective: positivism. Five fundamental assumptions can be identified: objectivism, aetiology, correctionism, quantitativism, and individualization. Let us analyze them one by one.

Objectivism: According to the positive perspective, illness or disorders are objective entities that exist in the world independently of observers. The scholar’s task is to discover such pathologies and consider clinical classifications in neutral and objective terms, that is, as descriptions of natural human types that exist in the world (Caniglia, 2021).

Aetiology: The biomedical model focuses on searching for the causes of a phenomenon, also investigating the relationship between different variables and factors. This allows for a better understanding of a disorder from an organic perspective, and therefore biologically, neurologically, and biochemically. Social factors, however, are often not considered or are taken as environmental variables.

Correctionism: In this case, the search for causes is associated with the desire to resolve the disorder. Correctionism, in fact, is the idea that research must aim to intervene in order to cure or improve the subject's condition (Caniglia, 2021). The goal, therefore, is to find a cure or therapy capable of restoring the body to proper functioning or, in any case, to a condition of normality.

Quantitativism: According to the biomedical model, deviant phenomena must be studied through the collection of objective data and transparency in the knowledge procedures, exactly as in the natural sciences. The main properties of disorders must be measured and therefore described precisely and objectively through the collection of biological data or, where this is not possible, through scales measuring behaviors or psychometric tests (Caniglia, 2021).

Individualization: The biomedical model holds that fundamental human phenomena, such as intelligence, empathy, and solidarity, are elements possessed by individuals just like physical traits—height, weight, etc. This view results in the reduction of human phenomena to psychological or neurobiological phenomena. Empathy, intelligence, and solidarity are mental attributes, and a deficiency in these areas would be considered an individual characteristic. Consequently, measurements and corrective interventions are conducted on an individual basis.

The constructionist approach, instead, is based on assumptions that can be summarized in methodological dualism, discursiveness, double hermeneutics, and indexical conception.

Methodological dualism: As stated earlier, the constructionist approach argues that the life sciences and the human sciences have two different objects of study and therefore must also employ two different methods. While natural phenomena can be considered independent of the observer and therefore endowed with objective properties that the researcher merely measures as though they had intrinsic meaning, social phenomena do not possess a given meaning but are the product of human activity. Before asking questions about causes or properties, one must study how a phenomenon emerged as such through human action. Therefore, one can argue that human phenomena are not entities but social constructions (Caniglia, 2021).

Discursiveness: Most social phenomena include activities that require language; language not only describes the world of people but constitutes a living part of it. Therefore, by modifying language, the world people live in is also modified. Constructionism, in this sense, criticizes positivism for ignoring the importance of language. In social sciences in particular, this phenomenon is important since language may reveal not only what the world is like but may also shape it.

Double hermeneutics: In the social sciences, unlike the life sciences, the scholar must investigate phenomena that have already been interpreted by the very people who experience them, according to what is called “common sense.” Thus, in the human sciences there is an interaction between description and the object described, between scientific knowledge and the object of that knowledge (Caniglia, 2021).

Indexical conception: The constructionist approach maintains that concepts referring to human phenomena – such as intelligence, empathy, and sociality – have a contextual and never absolute meaning; this means that each subject's identity is influenced by the social context in which they are situated. For example, one may be a teacher in one context but a friend, mother, or wife in another. Intelligence, empathy, and identity are indexical concepts, meaning phenomena that acquire their full sense only within the specific context in which they are considered (Caniglia, 2021).

To better illustrate this concept, sociologist David Goode used the case of the “wild child.” Victor, apparently a 12-year-old boy, was found in the woods, where he had lived alone since early childhood; at the moment of his discovery, he was unable to speak and lacked basic notions of sociality. Doctors and some educators defined him as having communicative and intellectual deficits, to the point of being unable to take care of himself. Constructionists, however, propose a shift in perspective: Victor certainly did not possess some cultural skills typical of society, but he had managed to survive alone in the woods for about eight years, demonstrating remarkable cognitive and intellectual abilities. The assessment of who is intelligent, cognitively impaired, or in need of assistance changes when shifting from life in society to life in the woods (Caniglia, 2021).

1.2. What is ADHD?^[1]

ADHD, also known as “*Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder*”, in Italian *Disturbo da Deficit di Attenzione e Iperattività*, is defined by the DSM-V as a neurodevelopmental disorder involving impairing levels of inattention, disorganization, and/or hyperactivity–impulsivity. Inattention and disorganization involve an inability to stay focused, not listening, and losing materials, at levels inconsistent with age or developmental stage (DSM-V, 2013). It is mainly identified in school-age children and consists of a sort of liveliness and excessive activity that makes it impossible to maintain attention for the time required by school activities, remain seated, or follow lessons, and leads to being easily distracted by external stimuli (Caniglia, 2021). Furthermore, it often overlaps with disorders considered “externalizing,” such as oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder. ADHD often persists in adulthood, with consequent impairments in social, academic, and occupational functioning (DSM-V, 2013).

The first to describe ADHD was the English pediatrician George Still, who in 1902 published an article in *The Lancet* in which he described certain behaviors exhibited by a group of children he observed; he compiled a list of symptoms, giving a moral interpretation to the children’s character and behavioral traits: “*motivity; spitefulness, cruelty; jealousy; unruliness; dishonesty; licentious malice; destructiveness; absence of shame; sexual immorality; viciousness. The key to these characteristics is self-gratification, the search for an immediate gratification of oneself without regard either for the good of others or for the true good of oneself*” (Still, 1902).

The children described by Still appeared to be unable to control emotional impulses and therefore unable to place a limit on their anger; he also described them as children who found satisfaction in the suffering of others. Still defined ADHD as a “disorder of the will” that makes it impossible to control both inappropriate behaviors, such as aggressive impulses, and appropriate ones, such as sitting still and following lessons. He also emphasized that these children did not present intellectual impairments, thus excluding the hypothesis of mental retardation. According to Still, these behaviors were due to brain lesions occurring during birth and not to inadequate family upbringing. It was the first time that immoral or deviant behaviors in very young children were linked to biological aspects rather than sociocultural ones (Caniglia, 2021).

Starting from Still’s observations, a long debate has developed in the biomedical field, one that continues today. Over the years, in fact, the definition of ADHD has evolved within the various editions of the DSM. In the DSM-II, it was described as *hyperkinetic syndrome*—from *hyper* meaning excessive, and *kinesis* meaning movement. In the DSM-III, it was defined instead as *attention deficit disorder*, which presupposed a change in the interpretation of the

syndrome by focusing more on cognitive aspects than behavioral ones. The most recent definition of ADHD is provided by the DSM-IV, which divides symptoms into inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness, mostly observed in school-age children.

Several scholars, in fact, identify the main deficit of this syndrome as the difficulty in maintaining sustained attention not only in boring and repetitive activities but also during play activities, in which the child often moves from one game to another without completing any of them. Moreover, teachers and parents report that at times, when someone speaks to the child, they seem disconnected from reality, meaning not present in the here and now; they show poor care for school materials, and their desk often appears disorganized; they have difficulty staying seated and are always in motion even when playing or doing homework (Cornoldi, De Meo, Offredi, Vio, 2013).

According to other authors, the main feature of ADHD is impulsivity, which manifests as difficulty delaying a response, inhibiting inappropriate behavior, or waiting for gratification. It may also manifest in undertaking dangerous actions without considering possible negative consequences. This feature remains fairly stable with age and is also present in adults with ADHD (Cornoldi, De Meo, Offredi, Vio, 2013).

1.3. Autism [22]

The term *autism* has a 130-year history and was coined by Eugen Bleuler at the beginning of the twentieth century; he observed in some of his patients a deficiency in certain social abilities, such as a tendency to be introverted and to give inappropriate responses. Later, the term was taken up by child psychiatrist Leo Kanner, who used it to describe children, until that moment considered “retarded,” who presented echolalia, obsessive fear of environmental changes, and an inability to relate. Kanner had also noticed that these children did not show intellectual deficits and that their impairments concerned the relational-empathic sphere and the communicative-linguistic one (Caniglia, 2021).

In the following decades, the causes of autism were attributed to an early dysfunction in the mother–child relationship, especially due to the work of the American psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim. He believed that autism was caused by a combination of relational deficiencies and solipsistic tendencies, going so far as to speak of the so-called “refrigerator mothers”—women who, having entered the workforce, cared for their children with emotional and affective coldness (Caniglia, 2021). This supposedly led mothers not to be fully involved on an emotional and affective level with their children from the earliest months of life, which was believed to cause their lack of relational and emotional development. However, this explanation did not account for the communicative and linguistic deficits.

In the 1970s, research conducted by Folstein and Rutter showed a high incidence of autism in monozygotic twins and a much lower one in dizygotic twins, thus directing scholars toward a neurobiological causation of autism and eliminating theories related to the dysfunctional mother–child relationship.

Another pioneer of autism research was pediatrician Hans Asperger, who noted some elements different from Kanner’s observations, including more fluent speech, difficulty performing gross motor movements but not fine ones, and a different pattern of learning abilities (Giglio, 2022). The perspectives of these two authors were partially incorporated into the definitions given both in the DSM-IV and the DSM-V.

The DSM-V, in fact, describes autism spectrum disorders as characterized by severe and pervasive impairment in two areas of development: the ability to communicate and interact

socially, and the area of interests and activities. This description highlights how the autism spectrum does not concern cognitive abilities, but rather strictly social aspects such as empathy, communication, and peer interaction. As already emphasized for ADHD, the core of autism symptomatology also consists of social aspects and an inability to establish normal social relationships (Caniglia, 2021). Indeed, social incapacity coexists with intellectual competence, and this is precisely what has made this disorder so fascinating to scientists.

Furthermore, a key feature of autism is the inability to understand what others think or to interpret their emotions. Since the late 1980s, this behavior has been explained through ToM or “Theory of Mind,” which appears to be deficient in most cases of autism. This theory was developed by a group of developmental psychologists at an important research center in London. It is called “Theory of Mind” because it posits that we are all capable of theorizing about the mental states of others.

According to this theory, autistic individuals appear to lack an important human mental ability: the ability to attribute mental states—thoughts, knowledge, intentions, or emotional states—to themselves and others in order to predict or explain their own or others’ behavior (Caniglia, 2021). This ability is considered indispensable because it constitutes a sort of prerequisite for both self-reflection and participation in normal social interactions, and it is also essential in cooperation and competition, as it allows one to anticipate others’ moves (Caniglia, 2021).

This ability is already present in two-year-old children and becomes consolidated by age four. In the case of autistic children, this does not occur; however, this does not mean that once adults they are incapable of reflecting on their own or others’ mental states, even though it is a very challenging task (Frith & Happe, 1999).

Neuroscience has contributed to advancing research in order to better understand autism. According to Frith and Baron-Cohen (2012), autism is due to a brain abnormality of genetic origin that triggers the development of a different brain; this means that autistic individuals have a brain that functions differently with specific characteristics in behavioral domains such as social relationships and communication. In particular, London-based psychologist Baron-Cohen (2012) argues that it is as if autistic people had a sort of malfunctioning chip in their brain, leading to deficits in empathy or Theory of Mind.

In any case, London psychologists argue that the causes must be sought in the biochemical and genetic domain. According to Frith and her collaborators, during early childhood the brain undergoes internal development—both neurological and psychologically independent of environmental and social factors. Potential disturbances of genetic origin may compromise this development and impede the formation of a normally social individual (Caniglia, 2021).

Another theory which, with the rise of neuroscience, is being integrated with ToM is that of mirror neurons. These neurons would constitute a sort of cerebral substrate for the mentalizing ability upon which the subject’s actions are based. According to experimental data, we know that neurons in the motor system are activated both during movement and during the observation of movement. Neurons cannot attribute meaning to bodily movements, since these consist mainly of mechanical action, thereby activating mentalizing capacity (Caniglia, 2021).

In this sense, autism consists of a malfunction of mirror neurons, which leads to a deficit in Theory of Mind, which in turn causes difficulties in social relationships. However, to this day no biological markers have been identified that can diagnose autism from a biological or genetic standpoint (Caniglia, 2021).

More recent studies have shown that a deficit in Theory of Mind is not specific to autism alone but also appears in people with schizophrenic and mood disorders; moreover, it has also been observed that autistic children and adolescents with good intellectual abilities do not show any alteration of ToM (Zappella, 2018).

In recent years, there has often been talk of a true epidemic of autism, which would seem to contradict the search for genetic or morphological causes. Sociologist Gil Eyal (2013) argues that the primary cause is the decline of institutionalization. In the past, children with deficits were placed in institutions where diagnoses associated with intellectual disabilities or psychopathologies were made. Indeed, while today there is an increase in autism diagnoses, there is a decline in diagnoses of psychopathologies—what was previously labeled as childhood schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, and it is now defined as autism.

Deinstitutionalization has also led to a new type of intervention that no longer consists of hospitalization but rather of an “enabling” treatment aimed at providing skills to autistic individuals, especially for their integration into society. This is possible not only through pharmacological treatments but especially through psychological ones, thanks to methods such as ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis), which, through the stimulus–response–reinforcement technique, helps develop different skills and competencies (Caniglia, 2021).

The spread of this so-called “epidemic” also coincides with early diagnoses; indeed, diagnostic screenings can already be conducted at 18 months of age. Furthermore, increasing attention from families, institutions, and the media has contributed to the spread of autism and its diagnoses.

Zappella (2018) cites a prevalence study conducted in China which found that the increase in autism diagnoses is predominantly a Western phenomenon—likely because China has fewer “promoters” of diagnosis compared to the West.

In this regard, Carlos Novas pointed out that family members often become the primary supporters of research activities aimed at discovering new medical treatments, defining this phenomenon as a “new political economy of hope.”

Moreover, autism does not appear to show geographical or ethnic prevalence, as it is present in all populations of the world, across all races and social environments. However, it does show sex-based prevalence, affecting males three to four times more often than females (SNLG ISS, 2011).

Finally, Neurodiversity has contributed to changing the perception of autism, ultimately producing a true shift in perspective. Moving away from the medical model, which recognizes autism as a pathology and something to cure, Neurodiversity seeks to recognize autism as a human condition—as a constitutive property of an individual’s identity. In this regard, the pioneer of Neurodiversity, Judy Singer, argues that the current information revolution would never have existed without the contribution of autistic minds, emphasizing how autism can be a gift. This view, however, sometimes generates contradictions: on the one hand, it seeks to highlight the extraordinary abilities of these individuals; on the other, it aims to counteract the disabling effects of stigmatization.

It must be emphasized that, despite promoting a paradigm shift, Neurodiversity does not completely detach from the biomedical model. Sinclair (1999), for example, when describing autism, uses neuroscientific metaphors, stating: *“Autism is the way my brain works. I am autistic because I cannot separate myself from how my brain functions... autism influences*

how we are connected to our bodies. If I did not have an autistic brain, the person I am would not exist.”

1.4. Specific Learning Disorders ^[25]

SLD, or Specific Learning Disorders, constitute a diagnostic category related to Specific Developmental Learning Disorders, which in turn belong to neurodevelopmental disorders. In 1990 Hamill defined them as “Learning disability,” that is, a *“heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, reasoning, and mathematical skills, presumably due to dysfunctions of the central nervous system. Learning disabilities may occur alongside other handicapping conditions or extrinsic influences but are not the result of those conditions or influences.”* They include Dyslexia, Dysorthography, Dysgraphia, and Dyscalculia. These disorders, therefore, manifest as difficulties in language, writing, arithmetic, and the acquisition of certain motor milestones. They also involve attentional skills, social interaction, and may appear separately or together. They are defined as “specific” precisely because they concern a specific domain of abilities in a significant but circumscribed way, leaving general intellectual functioning intact (Fantoni, 2012).

As reported in ICD-10 (2007): *“These disorders are thought to derive from abnormalities in cognitive processing largely related to some type of biological dysfunction.”*

The general criterion for diagnosing specific learning disorders is the “discrepancy” between the skills of the affected domain and the child’s general intelligence, which is usually adequate for their chronological age (Fantoni). This concept was defined in 2007 by the Consensus Conference, a document drafted by the Italian Dyslexia Association with the purpose of sharing clinical standards for the diagnostic process and coherently organizing rehabilitative interventions (Vio, Lo Presti, Tressoldi, 2022).

Recognizing discrepancy as the core principle for diagnosing specific learning disorders allows for the identification of some diagnostic implications: first of all, the need to use standardized tests both to measure general intelligence and specific abilities; secondly, the need to exclude the presence of other conditions that could influence test results, such as severe sensory or neurological impairments or situations of sociocultural disadvantage (Cornoldi, 2011). The Consensus Conference also identified other characteristics of SLD, such as their developmental nature, the varied expression of the disorder in different developmental phases, comorbidity with other disorders, the neurobiological nature of processing anomalies, and the fact that the disorder must have a significant negative impact on school adaptation and/or daily life activities.

According to Doris Johnson (1986), a pioneer in the study of learning difficulties, the first case of SLD is contained in a work by Philostratus, who described the reading difficulties of the son of Herodes Atticus. To help his son, he allegedly associated the 24 letters of the alphabet with 24 slaves, making them easier to distinguish.

Furthermore, as previously stated, to determine whether a learning difficulty is truly an SLD, one must consider exclusionary factors, which in practice are closely linked to the diagnosis. A first element to consider is classical deficits—sensory, motor, or intellectual. Another exclusionary factor is sociocultural disadvantage. Research by IARLD and studies related to the standardization of learning tests have highlighted that children whose parents have low educational levels show significantly lower performance (Cornoldi, 2011). Several elements

contribute to this disadvantage, including early sensory and emotional deprivation, lack of intellectual stimulation, poor environmental conditions, linguistic poverty, cultural and linguistic differences, lack of help at home and learning materials, and poor school–family relationships (Cornoldi, 2011). This situation is exemplified by many foreign children, who in most cases exhibit learning difficulties.

1.4.1. *Dyslexia*

Dyslexia is a reading disorder caused by difficulties in decoding text, with a failure to recognize the correspondence between graphemes and phonemes. The ability to discriminate between certain letters—such as m/n, f/v, d/b, p/q—negatively affects accurate and fluent reading. Indeed, one of the first warning signs is slow, effortful reading with various types of errors.

Dyslexia is also defined as “developmental,” meaning a specific disorder in the functional automatization of decoding skills. Like all neurodevelopmental disorders, it changes with the student’s age and level of schooling (Vio, Lo Presti, Tressoldi, 2022). Typically, automatization processes begin to consolidate by third grade of primary school, but when this does not occur, consequences may arise even at the behavioral level, such as avoiding required tasks. Difficulties may also occur in learning foreign languages, especially English, where there is no one-to-one grapheme–phoneme correspondence.

There are various hypotheses concerning the causes of dyslexia. For example, according to Wolf and Bowers (1999), dyslexia may involve a double deficit: one involving phonological components and the other involving inefficiency in the rapid retrieval of phonological information, i.e., rapid naming of words. Thus, the real obstacle would be fluency, caused by a slowdown in the retrieval of relevant and lexical information from long-term memory (Cornoldi, 2011). Even when dyslexic children achieve adequate accuracy in reading, their speed struggles to normalize. Supporting this theory, Zoccolotti et al. (2006) found that reading times, depending on the number of graphemes in a word, were reduced when children were required to read after a delay of at least one second from the appearance of the word on a screen. This delay may facilitate certain prelexical processes.

One of the most studied models in neuropsychology is the dual-route hypothesis, which suggests that the cognitive processes needed for word decoding involve two routes: the phonological route and the direct or lexical route. The first relies on transformation rules converting written text into phonemes, while the second leads to recognition of the whole word as familiar (Vio, Lo Presti, Tressoldi, 2022). Thus, in some reading disorders, the phonological route or the direct route may be impaired, and in other cases, access to meaning may be compromised. However, this model has been frequently critiqued by many scholars.

Regarding the Italian language, Zoccolotti and colleagues argue that, according to this model, the primarily impaired route in reading disorders is the lexical route, which would allow complete reading of the word without needing intermediate transformations between orthography and phonology using individual graphemes, syllables, or morphemes (Cornoldi, 2011). Additionally, according to Stein and Fowler, dyslexia may be linked to a deficit in the magnocellular visual pathway, which detects movement and rapid changes in the peripheral visual field. In reading, this affects the ability to direct eye movements toward a word or part of it, which must then be focused on to be recognized and associated with phonological counterparts (Cornoldi, 2011). Supporting this theory, Facchetti and colleagues (2006) argue that dyslexic individuals have a real problem in shifting spatial attention, both visual and auditory.

Finally, a useful element in analyzing dyslexia, as well as other learning disorders, is examining the typical development of the skill. These disorders often appear as delays; the issue is that the child is in a developmental stage earlier than peers. Even when no true delay is present, it is still important to analyze the process to identify where gaps occurred and intervene more effectively. It has been noted that even early exposures, such as storytelling, contribute to the development of cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational skills underlying reading (Cornoldi, 2011).

1.4.2. Dysgraphia and Dysorthography

The Consensus Conference (2007) distinguished between dysgraphia and dysorthography, even though international literature often uses the single term “dysgraphia” to describe both writing disorders. Dysgraphia consists of specific difficulty in the manual realization of graphemes; consequently, handwriting often appears unclear and sometimes illegible. This difficulty also affects the ability to handle drawing tools (Fantoni, 2012). This disorder is usually associated with dyslexia but can also appear independently.

Dysorthography, on the other hand, refers to a deficit in the processes involved in encoding the orthographic code or orthographic transcoding (Vio, Lo Presti, Tressoldi, 2022). Thus, a child with dysorthography not only fails to recognize orthographic rules but also has processing difficulties, such as analyzing the phonological composition of words and converting a phonetic code into a graphemic one (Cornoldi, 2011). According to Frith (1980), orthography is not merely a matter of memory but a complex linguistic process.

As with dyslexia, the dual-route hypothesis has been proposed for dysorthography. In fact, phonological errors—those due to incorrect application of phoneme–grapheme relationships—decrease more rapidly than non-phonological or “surface” errors, where the spelling is incorrect despite respecting phonology–orthography correspondence (e.g., *cucina/qucina*, *l'erba/lerba*) (Tressoldi, 1996). Angelelli and colleagues (2010) support this theory: their analysis of errors in a group of dyslexics third- and fifth graders showed that third graders produced mixed errors, whereas fifth graders produced mostly surface errors (Cornoldi, 2011).

Regarding the identification of dysgraphia, there are no detection systems capable of identifying manifestations according to different severity levels. As noted earlier, one distinguishing sign is poor legibility. Another important aspect is spatial organization on the page, including spacing between letters and words. Thus, as with reading, handwriting requires the acquisition of automatization and the child’s ability to keep up with teacher demands (Cornoldi, 2011).

1.4.3. Dyscalculia or Calculation Disorders

Developmental dyscalculia is a disorder that affects the production or understanding of quantities, the recognition of numerical symbols, and the ability to perform basic arithmetic operations (Vio, Lo Presti, Tressoldi, 2022). The Consensus Conference (2007) identified two branches of dyscalculia: one related to alterations in basic numerical cognition components, and one related to weaknesses in procedural execution and calculation.

Currently, in Italy, five children per class are reported as having a suspected calculation disorder. However, according to studies by the International Academy for Research in

Learning Disabilities, only 2.5% of the school population should present difficulty in numerical competence, often in comorbidity with other disorders.

ICD-10 managed to define calculation disorders by delimiting the specific domain and excluding characteristics that could be attributed to other disorders, such as dissociation between numerical processing and comprehension/solving of word problems.

Studies on dyscalculia fall into two branches: one regarding preverbal processes and one regarding counting processes. Piaget was the first to discuss the concept of numerosity, claiming that this notion is acquired between ages 6 and 7, as it is linked to the development of certain abilities typical of the operational stage. Current psychological research has shown that the ability to understand the world in numerical terms is innate. Starkey and Cooper (1980) demonstrated this using habituation–dishabituation techniques, showing that 4-6-month-old infants respond to numerosity. The idea is that infants look longer at new stimuli, while prolonged exposure to the same stimulus leads to habituation; the less attention they show to an object, the more they remember it and find it less interesting (Cornoldi, 2011). To address novelty effects, Starkey, Spelke, and Gelman (1990) presented infants with pictures of common objects such as keys or combs so that each card was new. The dishabituation card also contained new objects, but the numerosity differed.

These studies revealed that infants and adults appear to possess a specific visual perception process called “subitizing” or “mediatization,” which allows them to determine the numerosity of a set instantly, without counting (Cornoldi, 2011).

According to Gelman and Gallistel (1978), verbal counting ability is based on similarities between preverbal counting processes and verbal ones. Five priority points:

- The one-to-one correspondence principle
- The stable-order principle
- The cardinality principle
- The abstraction principle
- The order-irrelevance principle

According to this model, by age three, children begin counting items in a set, satisfying the cardinality principle, yet when asked to bring a specific number of objects, some bring a handful. Wynn (1990) calls these children *grabbers*, in contrast with *counters*, children who count all objects aloud or silently. The cardinality principle requires the ability to count—that is, understanding that counting reveals the numerosity of a set (Cornoldi, 2011). For young children, counting may still lack meaning, even if they begin deriving certain number properties.

To investigate difficulties involved in dyscalculia, one must analyze counting mechanisms and the related abilities. Calculation ability refers to the set of processes allowing individuals to operate on numbers using arithmetic operations (Cornoldi, 2011). Learning true calculation procedures is based on arithmetic facts—basic operations whose results are stored in long-term memory and can be retrieved directly without activating procedural computation (Cornoldi, 2011). Therefore, strategies can be classified as based on memory retrieval versus procedural processes.

1.5. Giftedness

The term giftedness, or “*plusdotazione*,” is usually used to describe a set of genetic, psychological, and behavioral characteristics that distinguish children and adolescents who make up about 2% of the school population (Milan, 2023). The most widespread definition is the one from the National Association for Gifted Children, which in a 2019 statement defines gifted individuals as: “those who, when compared to their peers, demonstrate or have the potential to demonstrate exceptional levels of performance in one or more of the following areas: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts” (NAGC, 2019).

Recognizing gifted individuals is not simple, as it requires a multicriteria identification system. A first factor is the intelligence quotient test: in Italy, a *high potential* student is defined by an IQ above 120, while a gifted individual typically has an IQ above 130 (Milan, 2023).

Giftedness, however, is not identified only through a high IQ but also through other qualitative factors such as the ability to think divergently and creatively, solve complex problems, think abstractly, and learn quickly by processing a large amount of information, doing so faster than others (Milan, 2023).

At times, this speed of thought does not match the speed of handwriting; consequently, writing is often illegible. In such cases, learning disorders such as dysgraphia may hide giftedness, and in turn, giftedness may mask specific learning disorders (Milan, 2023).

Moreover, especially within school contexts, a lack of stimulation may lead gifted students to develop behavioral or adjustment problems (Milan, 2023).

It is, however, necessary to distinguish between bright students and gifted students. Bright students appear particularly studious, attentive, and learn easily after a certain number of repetitions. Instead, students, instead, display high curiosity and intuition, go beyond the teacher’s explanations by asking numerous questions or showing that they have independently acquired certain skills. For them, repetition of concepts is unnecessary, and they are characterized by rapid learning (Milan, 2023).

All this may be considered a strength, but it often becomes a weakness, because while gifted students can excel, they also risk becoming bored, eventually experiencing a true sense of frustration that may lead to oppositional behaviors (Milan, 2023).

Finally, several false myths and prejudices surround giftedness, the first of which is the belief that possessing high potential guarantees success, both academically and professionally. This can occur only if giftedness is diagnosed early and effectively supported within the school environment (Milan, 2023).

1.6. Intellectual Disability

According to the DSM-V (2013), intellectual disability is a disorder with onset during the developmental period that includes deficits in both intellectual and adaptive functioning in the conceptual, social, and practical domains. For this diagnosis, three criteria must be met:

Deficits in intellectual functions, such as reasoning, problem-solving, planning, abstract thinking, and academic learning.

Deficits in adaptive functioning result in failure to meet developmental and sociocultural standards for personal independence and social responsibility. Without continuous support, these deficits may limit one or more daily activities such as communication, social participation, and achieving independence.

Onset of intellectual and adaptive deficits during the developmental period (DSM-V, 2013).

It is estimated that in Italy, 1.30% of primary school students are certified as having intellectual disability (Cornoldi, 2011).

As reported by Cornoldi (2011), based on the measurement of intellectual abilities through IQ assessment tests, four levels of severity have been identified:

- **Mild intellectual disability** → IQ from 50–55 to about 70
- **Moderate intellectual disability** → IQ from 35–40 to 50–55
- **Severe intellectual disability** → IQ from 20–25 to 35–40
- **Profound intellectual disability** → IQ below 20–25

As stated earlier, intellectual disability also affects academic learning. Various studies have shown that fundamental academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic are better acquired from a perspective of “**adaptive functional use**” rather than as purely **instrumental skills** (Cornoldi, 2011).

In this regard, two main theories offer opposing views:

the **intellectual deficit hypothesis**, supported by Zigler and Bennet-Gates (1999), who argue for a homogeneous delay in the subject’s performance.

The **heterochronic development theory**, supported by Dykens, Hodapp, and Finucane (2000), who argue for non-homogeneous development, thus preferring the term “intellectual disabilities”.

Intellectual disability may be due to both biological and environmental factors. It can be associated with certain genetic syndromes, the most well-known being **Down syndrome**. Nonetheless, it has been found that less than 50% of all individuals with genetic syndromes also present intellectual disability (Cornoldi, 2011).

Among non-genetic factors that may cause intellectual disability, there are **prenatal risks**, such as rubella, toxoplasmosis, syphilis, cytomegalovirus, and incompatibility between maternal and fetal blood; **perinatal causes**, such as premature birth or asphyxia; and **postnatal conditions**, such as encephalitis, meningitis, trauma, brain tumors, cerebrovascular accidents, and lead or methylmercury poisoning (Cornoldi, 2011).

Other factors that might influence diagnosis, although to a lesser extent, are related to inadequate educational or socio-educational environments. Indeed, situations characterized by environmental deprivation may lead to delayed development of cognitive functioning (Cornoldi, 2011). Some studies conducted in the United States reported that severe educational deprivation caused an average delay of around 15–25 IQ points (Baroff, 1986). Therefore, for an accurate diagnosis, the cultural context of origin should be taken into consideration; otherwise, cognitive difficulties may be overestimated or underestimated (Cornoldi, 2011).

Intellectual disability often occurs in comorbidity with other disorders, such as specific learning disorders or autism.

As noted earlier, several genetic syndromes may include intellectual disability, such as **Down syndrome**, **Fragile X syndrome**, **Angelman syndrome**, and **Prader–Willi syndrome** (Cornoldi, 2011).

Regarding the first, it is the most widespread chromosomal cause of intellectual disability; it occurs in all ethnic groups, in both males and females, and its incidence is also related to maternal age (Cornoldi, 2011). Down syndrome consists of the presence of an extra chromosome 21, meaning three instead of two. Moreover, the vast majority of the population is assessed with an IQ below 70. From a linguistic standpoint, individuals show a heterogeneous profile, with production being lower than comprehension and pragmatics (Cornoldi, 2011).

In conclusion, effective cognitive habilitation requires early diagnosis and a thorough evaluation of various developmental aspects. Furthermore, habilitative intervention cannot be limited to the first years of life but should continue at least until ages 18–20 (Vianello, 2006).

From an academic perspective, the teaching of functional skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic is preferred. Therefore, the main instructional strategies used are based on repetition, producing effective results but with limited generalizability (Cornoldi, 2011).

Moreover, the primary intervention techniques, especially regarding autonomy and other specific skills—are based on **behaviorist approaches**, such as behavior modification techniques including shaping, fading, prompting, modeling, errorless learning, and reinforcement programs (Cornoldi, 2011).

CHAPTER 2

Neurodiversity and the Workplace

With the writing of this second chapter, I aim to investigate, analyze, and synthesize scientific literature concerning the employment situation of neurodivergent individuals.

The decision to focus on the work context arises from the fact that, although neurodivergent people have been widely studied in educational settings, the challenges related to labor market entry and career development have received less attention. This has resulted in significant gaps in support strategies for adults. Considering the profound impact that work has on people's lives, both at the individual and social levels, it becomes even more urgent to reflect on the consequences that this lack of protection and support may entail.

Work, in fact, is not merely a source of economic sustenance, but a crucial existential domain for dignity, well-being, and personal development (Soren C Ryff, 2023). Its influence on psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and self-perception is therefore fundamental. For these reasons, ensuring equitable access to the world of work for neurodivergent individuals is not only a matter of rights, but also represents a concrete opportunity to enhance human potential and promote social inclusion.

Work constitutes a central component of an individual's life, providing economic security and a social context in which to express talents and abilities (Saleh C Bruyere, 2018). The World Health Organization recognizes that employment contributes to providing time structure, social contacts, collective purposes, social identity, and regular activity, all of which are essential elements for maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Flower, Hedley, Spoor, C Dissanayake, 2019; Hedley et al., 2018). These "intangible" benefits include an improved quality of life and greater personal fulfillment.

Before proceeding to define interventions aimed at the inclusion of neurodivergent individuals in the workforce, it is necessary to outline, in broad terms, the Italian and international legislative processes concerning their integration into society.

2.1. Legislation on neurodivergent individuals in Italy and abroad ^[25]

In recent years, the growing attention paid to neurodivergent individuals has contributed to the gradual development of a regulatory framework aimed at guaranteeing rights and opportunities. However, regarding employment inclusion and full participation in adult life, legislation remains fragmented, with less structured protections and an implementation that is often left to the initiative of individual organizations and institutions.

I will first analyze the Italian context and then the international one.

2.2.1. *The Italian legislative pathway*

In Italy, the legal recognition of neurodivergent individuals has followed an evolutionary path, moving from an initial focus on the educational context to more recently including the employment sphere as well. The legislative pathway in Italy begins only in 2010, with an important law that is, however, exclusively aimed at students and the field of school education.

Law no. 170 of 8 October 2010 represents the first formal recognition of neurological disorders within the Italian legal system. It is a piece of legislation that marked a significant turning point in the field of educational inclusion, introducing the fundamental principle of equal opportunities for neurodivergent students.

Despite the undeniable relevance of this law, its application is limited exclusively to school and university contexts, completely excluding the subsequent stages of life, particularly the world of work. No reference is made to the needs of neurodivergent individuals once their educational pathways have been completed, leaving a regulatory gap that has only recently begun to be addressed.

Law no. 25 of 28 March 2022 represents the first Italian legislative intervention to explicitly include neurodivergent individuals within the framework of employment protections. By amending Article 3 of Law no. 68 of 12 March 1999, this provision introduces concrete measures aimed at guaranteeing equal opportunities and professional inclusion, extending to the world of work the protections that had previously been reserved for the educational context. In particular, it establishes a ban on all forms of discrimination against neurodivergent workers and recognizes the right to reasonable accommodations. The approval of this law marks the official recognition of the difficulties that neurodivergent individuals may encounter in the workplace and represents an important step toward the creation of more equitable and inclusive professional environments.

However, despite its pioneering nature, it is crucial to highlight the significant limitations of Law no. 25/2022 and the gaps that still characterize the Italian regulatory system.

First, its origin is distinctive: it did not emerge as a specific, standalone law, but rather as a Decree Law issued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This transversal origin may have implications for the coherence of the legislation and for the clarity of its implementing provisions. Second, and more critically, the regulation is largely limited to statements of principle, lacking binding operational guidelines. There is no clear framework defining criteria for personnel selection, job adaptation measures, or targeted training pathways for organizational contexts, thereby leaving individual employers and institutions to independently interpret and implement the provisions.

Finally, the limited availability of specific training on neurodivergence among employers and employment service professionals represents an additional barrier to effective inclusion.

2.2.2. International overview

In recent years, the protection of individuals with neurodivergence has gained increasing importance in the international debate on educational and social inclusion. A universal point of reference in this context is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), an international treaty ratified by numerous countries, including Italy (through Law no. 18 of 3 March 2009). The CRPD, and in particular Article 27, affirms the right of people with disabilities to work and employ in an open, inclusive, and accessible labor market, promoting equal opportunities and the elimination of discrimination.

Despite the existence of this international normative pillar, the global landscape reveals significant divergences in the recognition of neurodivergence and in the implementation of effective inclusive policies. An emblematic indication of how protection varies across countries emerges from UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2020), which reports that only 17% of States have laws guaranteeing inclusive education for students with disabilities, while 25% continue to provide for segregated education. Within this context of diversity and

complexity, Europe presents a particularly articulated framework, characterized by both specific progress and persistent challenges that warrant analysis.

On the European continent, the *EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030* represents a fundamental pillar of the European approach to inclusion, placing a clear emphasis on the importance of inclusive education and promoting equitable access to education and employment for all persons with disabilities. However, as can also be observed in other continental contexts, significant differences persist in Europe in both normative and non-normative protection for neurodivergent individuals, particularly with regard to entry into and progression within the labor market.

The United Kingdom stands out as a European country at the forefront of anti-discrimination legislation. In England, Scotland, and Wales (with Northern Ireland maintaining its own legislation), the principal legal framework is the Equality Act of 2010. This wide-ranging law has the merit of consolidating and unifying into a single legislative framework the numerous anti-discrimination measures enacted in previous decades. Another distinctive feature of this legislation is its broad scope, which includes schools, universities, and workplaces. This aspect significantly differentiates it from many other countries, where anti-discrimination regulations are limited or entirely absent in such crucial contexts.

Germany and Switzerland offer an interesting example of how regional autonomy influences the protection of neurodivergent individuals. Both countries are composed of multiple regions (the *Länder* in Germany and the Cantons in Switzerland), each enjoying broad independence in legislative and educational matters. This decentralization results in a variety of approaches and levels of protection. On the one hand, it allows the emergence of best practices in educational and occupational settings in certain areas; on the other hand, it creates significant disparities between regions. Consequently, depending on where one lives or studies, access to diagnosis, specific supports, and protections can vary considerably. In practice, this leads to the coexistence of examples of excellence in the management of neurodivergence alongside situations in which protection is less structured or entirely lacking.

The United States of America represent another country that has promoted anti-discrimination legislation for decades. In contrast, in several Asian countries such as Japan, China, and South Korea, attempts to protect individuals with disabilities can be observed, but the primary solution relies on systems of mandatory employment quotas. While this model leads to the hiring of a certain percentage of individuals with neurodivergence, it does not address the underlying social and attitudinal barriers present in these countries (Lee C Lee, 2016). As a result, genuine inclusion and the full valorization of neurodivergent individuals remain limited, extending little beyond mere numerical compliance.

In contrast to the countries mentioned above, which have for years sought to strengthen the protection of neurodivergent individuals (with varying degrees of success), there are unfortunately contexts in which, even in the presence of specialized legislation, social, educational, and occupational conditions remain disabling for many people. These countries, typically classified as developing nations, struggle to prioritize or financially sustain state-led inclusion and non-discrimination initiatives (despite having ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – CRPD). This results not only in a lack of institutional progress but also in the persistence of social, educational, and occupational barriers that are still widespread across many parts of the world (Sijuola C Davidova, 2022).

It is important, however, to emphasize that even in developing countries, such as Tanzania, the presence of strong dedicated organizations—such as the Dyslexia Tanzania association—

represents a significant signal. On the one hand, these organizations are able to mitigate some of the difficulties related to educational and occupational inclusion that developing countries face. On the other hand, their very existence clearly demonstrates that there is a strong and widespread need, in all countries worldwide, to protect the many individuals with neurodivergence. Ultimately, although awareness of disability issues is increasing and initial legislative steps have been taken, the real labor market integration of adults continues to face substantial legislative, operational, and cultural gaps. These critical issues highlight the need to move beyond the mere declaration of principles toward the development of a more cohesive regulatory framework and concrete support systems.

2.2. Barriers, resources, and strategies for professional inclusion ^[20]

The aim of this section is to reflect, on the basis of the knowledge acquired through an extensive review of the literature, on the main critical issues that hinder the inclusion of people with disabilities, and to identify the resources, strategies, and good practices that states, institutions, associations, and individuals can adopt in order to promote effective and sustainable inclusion.

2.2.3. Barriers to inclusion

Neurodivergent individuals encounter a complex set of obstacles in the workplace. These primary difficulties intersect with and are often amplified by a range of additional barriers of a psychosocial, contextual, and practical–operational nature, which characterize the entire professional trajectory. The impact of these barriers becomes particularly evident during career transitions, often resulting in an overrepresentation of neurodivergent individuals in lower-skilled jobs and an underrepresentation in managerial or professional positions (Eseadi C Diale, 2023).

The characteristics associated with neurodivergence do not end with the educational pathway but continue into adulthood, manifesting in new forms within the work context. Fully understanding these characteristics is essential both to reduce stigma and to begin envisioning effective solutions and strategies for inclusion.

Among the main contextual and psychosocial barriers, those related to recruitment and hiring processes are particularly salient. Many traditional procedures—such as timed written tests, complex application forms, standardized assessments, or even conventional interviews—may inadvertently disadvantage neurodivergent candidates, not due to a lack of skills or potential, but because of the evaluation methods employed (Rollnik-Sadowska C Grabińska, 2024). The absence of reasonable accommodation during these initial stages, from application completion to interviews or entry tests, can effectively preclude access to employment opportunities.

Added to this is the persistence of stigma and prejudice. Limited awareness of neurodivergence within work environments often leads to unfounded stereotypes and an underestimation of individuals' real potential. The scientific literature has widely confirmed that neurodivergent people face numerous barriers in both accessing and maintaining employment, often influenced precisely by stigma and inconsistent inclusion policies (Vargas-Salas et al., 2025). Insufficient understanding on the part of employers, human resources professionals, or inclusion offices may hinder the adoption of reasonable accommodations

and the full recognition of individual competencies. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the importance of overcoming stigma, which is considered a key factor in enabling more favorable career pathways (Omotara et al., 2023).

Alongside these critical issues, several relational and intrapersonal limitations also emerge. Individuals with mild forms of neurodivergence often avoid disclosing their condition in the workplace due to fear of stigma or negative perceptions regarding their competence (AID, 2023).

Recent studies have also shown that neurodivergent individuals tend to experience higher levels of anxiety and depression, as well as lower resilience (Bonuomo et al., 2024). If left unaddressed, these conditions can significantly affect professional well-being, the ability to cope with challenges, and adaptation to new work situations. The lack of adequate guidance and support during the transition from a more protected educational context to a more autonomous work environment can further exacerbate these difficulties.

The importance of consistent support and guidance from reference figures such as parents, teachers, school administrators, peers, and counselors is therefore strongly emphasized in facilitating the transition to the world of work (Omotara et al., 2023).

Understanding and analyzing these multiple barriers—both those arising from organizational and social contexts and those of an intrapersonal nature—are thus crucial. They form the foundation for the development of effective inclusive policies and practices capable of promoting not only access to employment but also full participation and career progression for neurodivergent individuals.

Despite the significant barriers that may hinder the professional pathways of neurodivergent individuals, it is essential to recognize and value the existence of a range of resources that can be activated, both at the personal and contextual levels, to foster effective and sustainable professional inclusion.

At the personal level (internal resources), neurodivergent individuals often develop, in response to the challenges they face and because of their specific cognitive profiles, a set of metacognitive skills and adaptive strategies.

These resources, which emerge and consolidate through a process of managing one's own specificities, transforming potential difficulties into strengths, include:

- **Resilience:** the ability to face and overcome difficulties, shaped by a learning trajectory that is often more demanding and that contributes to greater perseverance and determination in pursuing professional goals. This quality is frequently recognized by employers as a strength in neurodivergent employees (Wissell et al., 2022).
- **Metacognitive awareness and adaptive strategies:** the experience of having to find alternative solutions to compensate for one's difficulties often leads to a deep understanding of one's own cognitive processes and to a marked ability in creative problem-solving and lateral thinking (Beetham C Okhai, 2017). This also includes the development of excellent organizational and time-management skills, as well as the proactive use of compensatory technologies, often in highly personalized forms.
- **The development of strong self-esteem:** a pathway of self-awareness and acceptance is crucial in transforming potential limitations into unique advantages,

culminating in positive self-esteem, which is essential for well-being and success in adult and working life (Bonuomo et al., 2024; Omotara et al., 2023).

At the contextual level (**external resources**), potential support derives from the surrounding environment, including family, institutions, associations, employers, and colleagues.

Family support and mentoring play a crucial role starting from the school-to-work transition, helping to build the confidence and social networks that later prove indispensable in the workplace (Eseadi C Diale, 2023).

Within organizational contexts, external resources include employers' and colleagues' awareness of neurodivergence and their willingness to adapt. Recent studies highlight how managers recognize the importance of such accommodations and show a readiness to provide them (Wissell et al., 2022). From this perspective, neurodiversity is perceived as a resource that enriches the group. The creation of an inclusive organizational culture that values neurodiversity is also a primary enabling factor (Vargas-Salas et al., 2025). This translates into the provision of reasonable accommodation, which may include specific technological tools, flexibility in working hours or task execution, and the possibility of using alternative communication formats. The availability of an "inclusion office" or dedicated figures within organizations who can act as points of reference and mediators for neurodivergent workers represents an additional valuable external resource. Awareness that such accommodations are not "privileges" but tools to ensure equal opportunities is essential for their effectiveness.

Beyond accommodations, employers can derive direct benefits from hiring neurodivergent individuals. Literature highlights several advantages that go beyond mere regulatory compliance, actively contributing to organizational success. Among these, Kirby and Gibbon (2018) emphasize the economic benefits associated with potentially higher quality and performance of work, as well as high employee reliability in terms of job retention, attendance, and punctuality. Moreover, practices such as *job carving* (task adaptation) can increase overall team productivity. Equally important are the benefits for workforce cohesion, as the inclusion of neurodivergent individuals can foster a more empathetic and collaborative work environment. Finally, a commitment to inclusion can strengthen corporate reputation and positively influence customer perceptions, contributing to a stronger and more socially responsible brand image (Kirby C Gibbon, 2018).

Another (external) resource that is rapidly evolving is the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support neurodivergent individuals. Although much of the research has focused on educational settings, AI-based solutions also offer significant potential in the workplace (Panjwani-Charania C Zhai, 2025). These include advanced text-to-speech and speech-recognition tools, contextual correction and suggestion software, virtual assistants for task organization and planning, and adaptive learning platforms capable of personalizing training and professional development pathways. AI can function as a powerful "next-generation compensatory tool," providing real-time support and adapting to individual needs, reducing cognitive load in challenging tasks, and enabling neurodivergent workers to focus on their strengths and specific competencies.

The synergistic interaction between these internal and external resources is what enables neurodivergent individuals not only to overcome obstacles but to thrive professionally, contributing actively and uniquely to organizational success.

2.2.4. *Strategies for professional inclusion*

The analysis of the obstacles that continue to permeate the professional pathways of neurodivergent individuals, together with the recognition of individual potential and enabling factors, highlights the need to delineate concrete and multifaceted strategies. In order to translate normative recognition and the broad potential of available resources into effective and sustainable professional inclusion, it is essential to act on multiple levels: the individual, the organizational, and the institutional–social levels (de Beer et al., 2022). These strategies aim to create a supportive ecosystem that not only reduces barriers and overcomes stigma, but also celebrates and values neurodiversity, ensuring equal opportunities and a fair and productive work environment for all (Tomasello, 2025; Vargas-Salas et al., 2025).

2.2.5. Strategies at the individual level

For neurodivergent individuals, a central role is played by self-advocacy and awareness of one's own specificities. It is essential that people with neurodivergence develop a deep understanding of their cognitive strengths and areas of greater difficulty, learning how to communicate them effectively and to proactively request the reasonable accommodation they need. However, self-advocacy skills are not always innate and, as highlighted by Koca et al. (2023), young adults with neurodivergence often require specific support to fully develop these crucial competencies in the workplace. This process of self-knowledge represents the foundation for overcoming fears related to stigma and for presenting oneself with confidence in the labor market (Eseadi C Diale, 2023).

Developing strong self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy—also through counseling or mentoring pathways—can mitigate the impact of years of perceived challenges and strengthen resilience, enabling individuals to face recruitment processes and professional challenges with greater confidence. Targeted psychosocial interventions are recognized as effective in reinforcing the psychological resources of neurodivergent adults, contributing to positive self-esteem and enhanced self-efficacy (Costantini et al., 2020, cited in Tomasello, 2025).

Furthermore, continuous training and ongoing updating in assistive technologies and compensatory strategies are crucial. The evolution of advanced digital tools, including Artificial Intelligence, offers new opportunities to compensate for specific difficulties associated with neurodivergence and to improve organization, time management, and productivity. AI-based solutions can function as powerful “next-generation compensatory tools,” providing real-time support and adapting to individual needs (Panjwani-Charania C Zhai, 2025). Being proactive in learning about and adopting these resources allows neurodivergent workers to maximize their potential, fully express their competencies, and enter the labor market equipped with an up-to-date and specialized set of tools.

2.2.6. Strategies at the organizational level

Organizations play a central role, and their actions can significantly transform the work experience of neurodivergent individuals, shifting from an assistive approach to one focused on the recognition and valorization of human resources.

A fundamental first step is the implementation of accessible recruitment and hiring policies and procedures. This involves revising selection processes to remove barriers by adopting assessment methods that do not penalize disorder-specific difficulties, such as introducing additional time, allowing the use of assistive software, or evaluating competencies through alternative methods to traditional written tests. Training human resources staff and hiring managers on neurodivergence is essential to ensure unbiased interviews and fair, merit-

based evaluations of candidates, as well as to improve understanding and management of neurodivergent employees (Wissell et al., 2022).

Equally crucial is awareness-raising and training for staff at all levels, from managers to colleagues. Overcoming stigma and prejudice requires in-depth knowledge of neurodivergence that goes beyond a focus on difficulties, enabling recognition and appreciation of the strengths and innovative potential that neurodiversity can bring to teams (Doyle, 2020). An organizational culture that actively celebrates diversity as an enriching resource, promoting an environment of support and mutual understanding, serves as a powerful driver of inclusion and innovation (Doyle, 2020).

The provision of reasonable and personalized accommodation represents the most direct and concrete strategy for supporting neurodivergent workers. These accommodations are not privileges, but tools to ensure equal opportunities and to maximize productivity (Beetham C Okhai, 2017). They may be implemented through:

- **Technological support:** the adoption of text-to-speech and speech-recognition software, advanced grammar checkers, digital planning tools, and AI-based virtual assistants that reduce cognitive load in complex tasks.
- **Operational flexibility:** task adaptation (for example, through job carving) to maximize the use of individual strengths and minimize the impact of difficulties, as well as flexibility in working hours and task execution (e.g., additional time for reading complex documents, the possibility of working in less distracting environments).
- **Adaptive communication:** the use of alternative informational formats (visual, audio, concept maps), a preference for oral communication in specific contexts, or the provision of clear summaries and structured agendas for meetings, in order to facilitate comprehension and information processing.
- **Reference figures and mentoring:** the presence of an “inclusion office” or a dedicated internal contact person, as well as the establishment of mentoring and coaching programs, can provide ongoing support, act as mediators between the worker and the organization, and assist in managing everyday challenges (Syailendra et al., 2023).

Adopting these strategies is not only an ethical or regulatory obligation, but also a strategic investment for organizations. The inclusion of neurodivergent individuals, with their unique perspectives and non-conventional problem-solving abilities (Eide C Eide, 2023), can yield tangible benefits such as enhanced creativity, greater innovation capacity, high reliability, improved employee morale, and a strengthened corporate reputation—contributing to a stronger and more socially responsible brand image (Kirby C Gibbon, 2018).

2.2.7. Strategies at the institutional and social level

Finally, full and sustainable inclusion requires commitment at a broader level, actively involving institutions and society, and promoting an inclusive culture in all its dimensions (Tomasello, 2025; Vargas-Salas et al., 2025).

Institutions have the primary responsibility to strengthen the regulatory framework by transforming guiding principles into clearer, binding, and more specific implementing provisions for the world of work, in line with the international standards set out by the CRPD. This includes the definition of precise guidelines for reasonable accommodation, the introduction of fiscal or economic incentives for companies that adopt inclusive policies, and

the promotion of targeted training pathways for employment service professionals and career counselors, so that they can effectively support neurodivergent individuals in job seeking and job retention processes (Eseadi C Diale, 2023).

Organizations and associations dedicated to neurodivergent individuals continue to play an irreplaceable role. They provide guidance, training, and direct support to individuals and families, and are also crucial in promoting nationwide awareness-raising campaigns aimed at dismantling stigma, educating the public about the real potential of neurodivergent people, and disseminating a culture of inclusion. Their advocacy role is essential in driving public and institutional debate toward increasingly inclusive and implementable solutions (Tomasello, 2025).

Synergistic and structured collaboration among the various stakeholders—schools, universities, employment services, companies, associations, and families—is key to creating an integrated support ecosystem (Pallisera et al., 2016). Building networks that facilitate the transition of neurodivergent students from education to the labor market through personalized career guidance programs, inclusive internships, and job-matching pathways based on actual competencies can make a substantial difference (Eseadi C Diale, 2023; Omotara et al., 2023). Only through joint commitment and a shared awareness that the inclusion of neurodiversity represents an advantage for society as a whole will it be possible to overcome remaining barriers and enable neurodivergent individuals to contribute fully and uniquely to the economic and social fabric.

2.3. Global Human Resource Management and the Inclusion of Neurodivergent Workers^[9]

Human resource management in international contexts represents one of the most complex challenges for modern multinational corporations, which are now required not only to coordinate activities distributed across the globe but also to ensure inclusive work environments that are sensitive to individual diversity, including neurodivergence. In this scenario, classical theories of International Business (IB), Multinational Companies (MNCs), and Society System Dominance (SSD) offer an initial interpretative framework: they portray global firms as rational actors oriented toward efficiency and performance maximization.

These approaches help explain phenomena such as international expansion, the transfer of managerial technologies, and the need for coordination between headquarters and subsidiaries. However, precisely because of their objectifying nature, they risk marginalizing more subjective aspects of the work experience, such as individual perceptions, organizational climate, and the heterogeneity of needs among employees with different cognitive profiles.

To overcome these limitations, convention theories introduce a fundamental element: the idea that each cultural context constructs its own understanding of what is considered appropriate, effective, or just. Organizations do not operate in a neutral space, but within systems of conventions that vary across countries and shape relationships between headquarters and subsidiaries. Differences in “orders of worth”—systems of justification based variously on market logic, industrial efficiency, or the value of relationships—help explain why practices perceived as self-evident in one context may be considered inappropriate in another. With regard to the inclusion of neurodivergent workers, this implies that diversity and inclusion policies cannot simply be exported globally, but must be reinterpreted in light of the social, educational, and cultural norms of the host country. Local adaptation, therefore, does not

represent a threat to organizational coherence, but rather a necessary condition for ensuring equity and accessibility.

An even more nuanced perspective is offered by critical realism, which distinguishes between the dimensions of the “real” (everything that could potentially occur), the “actual” (what actually happens), and the “empirical” (what people perceive). This approach helps to clarify that the work experience is never the same for everyone: neurodivergent individuals may perceive the workplace very differently from their neurotypical colleagues, especially when operating in new and complex cultural contexts. A change of country inevitably alters cultural reference points, work expectations, and modes of communication, potentially amplifying difficulties related to interpreting organizational practices or implicit social cues.

This complexity becomes particularly evident during international assignments.

The deployment of personnel abroad—whether to address local skill shortages, develop talent, or strengthen internal cohesion—requires employees to confront the cycle of cultural adjustment, which typically moves from an initial phase of enthusiasm to culture shock, followed by adjustment and eventual mastery. For neurodivergent workers, these stages may be especially sensitive: variations in cognitive load, linguistic differences, new social codes, and ambiguous communication styles can increase the risk of stress, disorientation, or demotivation. For this reason, personalized support policies, clear communication tools, targeted pre-departure training, and mentoring systems are particularly important.

The inclusion of neurodivergent individuals also intersects with the organizational structure of multinational corporations, which employ different categories of staff: Parent Country Nationals (PCNs), Host Country Nationals (HCNs), and Third Country Nationals (TCNs). Each group brings specific advantages and challenges related to contextual knowledge, costs, communication with headquarters, and the degree of control exercised by HQ. Within this mosaic of identities and backgrounds, the presence of neurodivergent workers introduces additional variables that require sensitivity in role design, balance in the distribution of responsibilities, and careful attention to leadership styles. In conclusion, understanding international human resource management requires the integration of multiple theoretical perspectives and close attention to individual experiences. The inclusion of workers with neurodivergences cannot be reduced to a mere regulatory adjustment; rather, it must become an integral part of global organizational culture through negotiation, intercultural sensitivity, and the ability to interpret diversity as a resource rather than a limitation. Only in this way can multinational corporations build work environments that are truly equitable, innovative, and sustainable.

2.4. Inclusive Methodologies in Multinational Corporations

The inclusion of neurodivergent workers within Multinational Corporations (MNCs) requires a coordinated set of methodologies and practices involving training, job design, technology, and organizational culture. Because MNCs operate in countries with very different values, norms, and educational systems, the challenge lies not only in defining global policies but, above all, in adapting them to local specificities while maintaining coherence of purpose. For this reason, global companies are increasingly adopting inclusive models that combine global integration and local responsiveness, developing tools capable of supporting cognitive diversity regardless of geographical context.

One of the main inclusive methodologies is Universal Design for Work, which aims to create accessible environments for everyone from the outset. This approach includes the simplification of information flows, the adoption of clear and readable documents, process digitalization, and the use of digital tools with text-to-speech functions, summarization, highlighting, and visual structuring. For neurodivergent workers, these solutions reduce cognitive load and facilitate autonomous participation in daily activities. At the same time, many MNCs invest in specific managerial training programs aimed at local leaders and supervisors, helping them recognize different forms of neurodivergence and adopt clearer, more direct, and more consistent communication styles, thereby avoiding misunderstandings typical of multicultural contexts.

Another essential inclusive practice is the adoption of flexible reasonable accommodation, a concept that varies significantly across countries. In a global context, MNCs develop transnational guidelines that specify which tools, adaptations, and supports are available everywhere (e.g., compensatory software, technological devices, flexible working hours), while allowing host countries to adapt their implementation. Inclusion also requires inclusive recruitment and onboarding processes that consider not only technical skills but also different ways of learning and communicating. Structured interviews, advance provision of information, written questions, and less stressful assessment environments are fundamental elements for ensuring fairness and equity.

In a world characterized by foreign direct investment, international mobility, and the rapid expansion of special economic zones, companies have both the opportunity and the responsibility to build truly inclusive work environments. The adoption of inclusive practices is not merely an ethical concern but also a strategic one: valuing employees with different cognitive profiles enriches organizations with new perspectives, divergent creativity, and alternative problem-solving capabilities—key assets in a complex and highly competitive global market. The real challenge lies in recognizing that inclusion policies must be embedded within strategies of global integration and local responsiveness, adapting to local contexts without losing global coherence.

Finally, many MNCs adopt approaches based on cultural negotiation, consistent with convention theories. Since perceptions of “justice” and “merit” vary from country to country, the implementation of programs for neurodivergent employees is often discussed with local teams, regional HR, and territorial stakeholders, in order to align the “orders of worth” within the organization. In this sense, building an inclusive environment is not solely the result of formal rules, but also of everyday practices, micro-interactions, and informal networks that develop over time. A multinational's ability to integrate these practices into its global culture represents one of the key indicators of its organizational maturity in the field of inclusion.

2.5. Cases of Global Companies and Best Inclusive Practices ^[5]

Several international examples demonstrate how the inclusion of neurodivergent workers can become a strategic element for innovation, competitiveness, and internal cohesion within multinational corporations.

A notable case is Microsoft, which has developed dedicated neurodiversity programs, including alternative recruitment pathways, less stressful work environments, and digital tools designed to support individuals with dyslexia, dyscalculia, or ADHD. The company has

implemented specialized training for managers and created dedicated Accessibility teams, ensuring that its global policies can be adapted to diverse cultural contexts. Through these initiatives, Microsoft illustrates how cognitive inclusion can be integrated into both corporate strategy and product design.

SAP, the German multinational software company, has implemented the “Autism at Work” program, one of the first global examples of neurodivergence inclusion. Originally designed for individuals on the autism spectrum, the program has encouraged methodologies applicable to other neurodivergent workers: structured onboarding, dedicated mentors, competency-based evaluations, and work environments adapted to sensory and cognitive needs. SAP’s approach is particularly noteworthy because it demonstrates the importance of strong collaboration between headquarters and subsidiaries: practices are tailored to the cultural specifics of host countries, underscoring the significance of local responsiveness.

In the retail sector, IKEA represents another significant example. Operating in over 50 countries, the Swedish company has integrated strong attention to accessibility—both physical and cognitive—into its global processes. IKEA invests in intercultural training for managers, adopts simplified communication procedures, and uses clear visual tools, making internal processes more accessible to neurodivergent employees. The company also promotes partnerships with local organizations to facilitate the inclusion of neurodivergent individuals, demonstrating how building an inclusive environment requires local collaborations capable of interpreting cultural conventions.

Finally, IBM shows how inclusion can become a core part of corporate identity. Among the first to promote global diversity and inclusion policies, IBM has developed accessible digital platforms, mentoring programs, and internal employee resource groups. The company applies an approach consistent with critical realism, recognizing that work experiences differ for each individual and therefore investing in personalized solutions rather than rigid standardized models. IBM’s initiatives illustrate how a multinational can effectively manage the heterogeneity of individual and cultural perceptions, creating a fairer and more reflective work environment.

These cases highlight that large multinationals do not merely implement formal inclusion programs; they invest in culture, organizational innovation, and intercultural awareness. Inclusive practices thus become tools to improve workplace quality, enhance talent retention, and boost global competitiveness. In a world characterized by cultural complexity, international mobility, and rapid technological changes, companies that successfully integrate neurodiversity are also those best equipped to face future challenges.

CHAPTER 3

Analysis of Organizational Structures and Work Environments

3.1. Organizational structures and work environments ^[16]

The organizational structure of companies, as well as of educational institutions and community organizations, represents one of the main instruments through which organizations coordinate work, allocate resources, and regulate individual behaviours. It defines roles, responsibilities, communication flows, and control systems, contributing to the creation of a context within which individuals interpret organizational expectations and construct their relationship with work. From this perspective, structure cannot be considered a purely technical element but assumes the function of a social and cognitive mechanism that deeply impacts the work experience, well-being, and modes of participation of individuals within the organization (Mintzberg, 1979).

This aspect is particularly relevant when analysing the theme of neurodiversity. Recent literature highlights how organizations have been historically designed based on an implicit model of a "neurotypical" worker, characterized by specific modes of attention, communication, and uncertainty management. Such an approach risks producing exclusion effects when applied to contexts characterized by growing "cognitive heterogeneity" (Chapman, 2021; Doyle & McDowall, 2022). Consequently, organizational structure becomes one of the main factors that can either facilitate or hinder the inclusion of neurodivergent people.

As highlighted in organizational theory notes, there is no *one best way* in the design of organizational structures. The effectiveness of a structural model depends on the degree of *fit* between the characteristics of the people, the nature of the tasks, and the environmental context. In this perspective, neurodiversity can be interpreted as a relevant organizational variable, on par with technology, size, or the competitive environment. Ignoring this variable means designing structures that function for only a part of the organizational population, generating misalignment, stress, and inefficiencies.

Contingency theory offers a particularly useful theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between organizational structure and neurodiversity (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). According to this approach, "organizational structure represents a response to specific conditions of environmental, technological, and human uncertainty". While attention has traditionally focused on external contingencies, more recent studies suggest considering the cognitive composition of the workforce as an internal contingency, which requires differentiated and adaptable structural solutions (Boudreau et al., 2022; de Vries et al., 2023).

A central element of the analysis concerns the distinction between the mechanistic approach and the organic approach. Mechanistic structures are characterized by high formalization, process standardization, strong role specialization, and hierarchical control. These elements allow for the reduction of uncertainty and increased predictability, but they limit individual autonomy and operational discretion. In highly standardized environments, some neurodivergent workers—particularly people with ADHD—may experience difficulties linked

to the rigidity of procedures, the repetitiveness of tasks, and the scarcity of cognitive stimuli, with negative consequences in terms of motivation, engagement, and performance (Sedgwick et al., 2021).

Conversely, organic structures are based on flexibility, autonomy, horizontal communication, and informal coordination. These characteristics are particularly functional in contexts characterized by high *task uncertainty*, where tasks are not easily programmable and require continuous adaptation. For many neurodivergent workers, such contexts can favour the expression of individual potential, allowing for greater personalization of operating modes and better valorisation of distinctive skills (Doyle & McDowall, 2022).

However, the impact of organizational structures on neurodiversity is not univocal. People on the autism spectrum, for example, may benefit from contexts characterized by role clarity, predictable routines, and explicit expectations. In these cases, some elements typical of mechanistic structures can perform a protective function, reducing cognitive ambiguity and the emotional load associated with uncertainty and unstructured social interactions (Botha et al., 2024). This confirms that neurodivergent inclusion does not imply the adoption of a single structural model but requires hybrid solutions capable of combining clarity and flexibility.

In this perspective, the concept of *person–organization fit* represents a further fundamental theoretical reference. According to this perspective, the well-being and performance of individuals depend on the degree of compatibility between their personal characteristics and the organizational environment. In the context of neurodiversity, the *fit* assumes a predominantly cognitive dimension: different neurocognitive profiles imply different ways of processing information, managing attention, and responding to uncertainty. Structures designed for a single "type" of worker therefore risk generating alienation, reduced effectiveness, and increased turnover (Chapman, 2021).

In summary, organizational structure represents a fundamental lever for the inclusion of neurodiversity. Considering cognitive diversity as an internal contingency allows for overcoming standardized approaches and designing more adaptive work contexts, capable of simultaneously improving individual well-being and organizational effectiveness. Neurodiversity does not require "special" structures, but structures intentionally designed to accommodate human complexity.

3.2. Company policies and practices for neurodiversity inclusion ^[10]

If the organizational structure defines the overall architecture of the organization, Human Resource Management (HRM) policies and practices represent its daily functioning. Organizational literature highlights how HRM constitutes a fundamental lever through which organizations influence behaviours, expectations, work relationships, and perceptions of equity. From this perspective, HR policies play a crucial role in making the inclusion of neurodiversity structural rather than episodic (Boxall et al., 2021).

In the most recent studies on neurodiversity, it emerges that many traditional HR practices are implicitly built around a model of a neurotypical worker, producing invisible barriers for neurodivergent candidates and employees (Doyle & McDowall, 2022). Inclusion, therefore, cannot be limited to compensatory interventions but requires a systematic revision of the main

HR policies. According to the literature on HRM and neurodiversity (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Chapman, 2021; Doyle & McDowall, 2022), three areas are particularly relevant:

Recruitment and selection: Recruitment and selection processes represent the first point of contact between the individual and the organization and play a crucial role in defining the *person–job fit*. Traditional job descriptions often emphasize generic social skills, multitasking capabilities, and informal adaptation, reflecting a stereotyped image of the "ideal candidate". This approach can create significant barriers for neurodivergent candidates, who may possess high technical skills but different communicative styles (Chapman, 2021). Inclusive recruitment requires clear job descriptions focused on essential skills, as well as structured selection processes with explicit evaluation criteria and reduced ambiguity. Structured interviews, realistic work trials, and the possibility of reasonable adjustments during the selection process contribute to improving the person–role fit and reducing the risk of early exclusion (Doyle & McDowall, 2022).

Performance management: Performance management constitutes a second fundamental pillar. Evaluation systems based on implicit criteria, informal feedback, or expectations not clearly explicitly stated can generate high cognitive uncertainty and a sense of alienation, particularly for neurodivergent workers. The literature highlights how clear objectives, transparent criteria, and frequent feedback contribute to strengthening engagement and the perception of equity (Boxall et al., 2021). In the context of neurodiversity, performance management should prioritize a logic of development rather than control, valuing results and skills rather than conformity to standardized behavioural styles. This approach allows for the reduction of misalignment between organizational expectations and individual working methods.

Work–life balance and flexibility: *Work–life balance* and flexibility policies represent a further key instrument for the inclusion of neurodiversity. Flexible hours, remote work, workload adaptation, and the possibility to personalize operational modes allow organizations to respond to different cognitive needs, reducing the risk of stress and alienation (de Vries et al., 2023). As highlighted in organizational theory notes, flexibility does not constitute a cost, but an organizational lever capable of improving the person–organization fit.

HR practices also influence the inclusion of neurodiversity through their impact on the psychological contract. Excessively informal or inconsistent policies can generate perceptions of injustice and insecurity, while transparent and consistent practices strengthen trust and psychological safety. In the context of neurodiversity, a structural tension emerges between standardization and managerial discretion: the former reduces ambiguity and promotes equity, while the latter allows for individual adaptations. Effective HR policies balance these two elements, making inclusion a structural characteristic of the organization and not the result of isolated initiatives.

3.3. Managerial and organizational implications ^[18]

The analysis of organizational structures, HR policies, and operational tools shows how the inclusion of neurodiversity requires a systemic approach, capable of integrating the structural dimension, management practices, and organizational culture. Neurodiversity cannot be addressed as an individual issue, or one exclusively linked to well-being but must be

recognized as an organizational variable that impacts performance, innovation, and long-term sustainability (Doyle & McDowall, 2022).

In this framework, managers play a key role in mediating between formal structure and informal practices. They represent the intersection point between organizational rules, HR policies, and the daily lived experience of workers. The literature highlights how managerial behaviour directly influences the degree of inclusion perceived by neurodivergent employees, impacting engagement, retention, and performance (Botha et al., 2024).

From an organizational point of view, the need emerges to overcome uniform approaches to work design. The growing complexity of contemporary organizations requires integration mechanisms that take cognitive differences into account, avoiding transferring the entire burden of adaptation onto individuals. Hybrid structures, consistent HR policies, and adequate support tools allow for the distribution of adaptation at a systemic level, reducing the risk of alienation.

For managers, this implies the development of specific skills linked to the management of cognitive diversity: the ability to clarify expectations, provide structured feedback, negotiate reasonable adjustments, and promote a climate of psychological safety. In this perspective, neurodiversity becomes an opportunity to rethink the managerial role not only as a function of control but as an activity of *sensemaking* and coordination.

In conclusion, neurodiversity represents not only an organizational challenge but also an opportunity to rethink organizational design models in a more adaptive and sustainable key. Organizations that succeed in integrating structure, HR policies, and managerial practices in a consistent manner are better able to valorise cognitive diversity as a source of competitive advantage and innovation.

CHAPTER 4

Example of Auticon ^[32]

The chapter adopts an example approach, focusing on the organizational model of Auticon, an international technology consulting company that employs exclusively people on the autism spectrum. The choice of Auticon as an example is motivated by a structured and consolidated example of performance-oriented neuroinclusion, capable of overcoming assistentialist logics and demonstrating the economic sustainability of inclusion.

This chapter is focused on the Italian experience of Auticon, to understand the dynamics of adaptation of the model to an economic, cultural, and regulatory system characterized by specific features, including a lower diffusion of structured diversity management practices and a still partial regulatory framework regarding support for neurodivergent people in the workplace.

4.1.1. Neuro inclusion in the world of work

This chapter aimed to understand models of neuroinclusion in the world of work through comparison with personal experiences, with reference to the inclusion and valorisation of people on the autism spectrum in highly specialized technological organizational contexts. This approach responds to the need to explore complex, contextual phenomena strongly influenced by relational, cultural, and organizational dynamics, which are difficult to reduce to variables measurable in a standardized way.

Neuroinclusion, in fact, cannot be understood exclusively through quantitative indicators of employment or performance, but requires a perspective that considers perceptions, operational practices, adaptive strategies, and symbolic representations that characterize the work experience of neurodivergent people and the organizational actors involved.

4.1.2. CEO - Alberto Balestrazzi and JOB COACH - Giuseppe Betti

The chapter construction was carried out through an interview conducted with Alberto Balestrazzi (CEO of Auticon) and Giuseppe Betti (Job Coach in Auticon). The interview was chosen because it allows the combination of a predefined thematic outline with a high degree of exploratory flexibility, enabling the interviewee to freely deepen aspects deemed relevant based on his professional experience.

The thematic areas addressed in the interview include:

- the motivations and start-up path of Auticon in Italy.
- the inclusion practices adopted and the main obstacles encountered.
- the role of the job coach and mediation figures.
- the relationship with client companies.
- the performance of neurodivergent consultants.
- growth perspectives and future challenges of the model.

The interviewee was selected as a privileged witness, endowed with a strategic and operational vision of the Auticon model, as well as a direct role in the decision-making and implementation processes of the project in the Italian context.

4.2. The interview ^[33]

4.2.2. Introduction

We have seen how the inclusion of neurodivergent people in the world of work is one of the most complex challenges of contemporary human resource management. Despite a growing interest in diversity & inclusion, neurodivergent people continue to encounter structural obstacles related to organizational processes, corporate culture, and the lack of dedicated tools.

The literature highlights how neurodivergent people possess distinctive cognitive abilities, including attention to detail, pattern recognition, visual memory, and prolonged concentration capacity (Hendrickx, 2010; Austin & Pisano, 2017). These skills are particularly valuable in technological and analytical contexts such as IT, cybersecurity, and business intelligence.

Auticon, founded in Germany in 2011, represents a pioneering model of performance-oriented neuroinclusion: it employs exclusively consultants diagnosed with autism and adapts client companies' business processes to the needs of neurodivergent people, creating an ecosystem in which inclusion and productivity are closely linked.

The Italian experience of Auticon was documented through an interview with Alberto, strategic consultant and partner of the company, who offers a direct perspective on the practical implementation and challenges of this model.

4.2.3. Alberto's and Giuseppe's experience and motivations with Auticon

The involvement of Alberto Balestrazzi, CEO of Auticon Italy, began in 2018 when Accenture requested an assessment of the feasibility of introducing the Auticon model—already successful in Germany and the United Kingdom—to the Italian market. Although he did not initially possess specialized expertise in autism, Balestrazzi was intrigued by the competitive potential that individuals on the spectrum could offer the technology sector. This led to a period of intensive research, involving interviews with psychologists and consultations with experts to develop a business plan demonstrating the project's sustainability within the Italian context. Despite an initial setback in securing financing, Balestrazzi eventually received direct support from Auticon's global CEO to launch the Italian start-up. For Balestrazzi, this venture represented a significant personal and professional journey, driven by a desire to challenge conventional paradigms and to better understand the diverse abilities and unique characteristics inherent in the neurodivergent community. The experience highlights that entrepreneurial initiative and scientific knowledge are fundamental for the implementation of neuroinclusion models. Moreover, it reflects the need to adapt companies to people, rather than forcing people to adapt to corporate contexts (Austin & Pisano, 2017).

According to the experience shared by Alberto Balestrazzi, CEO of Auticon Italy, the successful integration of autistic professionals does not rely on a single intervention but on a holistic set of integrated practices embedded into daily operations. Balestrazzi identifies four primary pillars that facilitate an optimal work environment for neurodivergent consultants: sensory adjustments, job coaching, preliminary stakeholder engagement, and the recognition of identity.

Firstly, sensory adjustments play a critical role in mitigating environmental stressors. By modifying physical factors such as lighting, noise levels, and workspace layout, organizations can significantly reduce the cognitive load on employees, thereby enabling higher levels of concentration and productivity.

Secondly, the role of job coaching is emphasized as a vital support mechanism. Beyond task organization, job coaches facilitate the management of interpersonal communication and the alignment of mutual expectations between the consultant and the organization. This personalized support ensures that potential friction points are addressed proactively. This area was fully covered by Giuseppe Betti.

Thirdly, Balestrazzi highlights the necessity of preliminary meetings with client companies. These sessions serve to prepare the receiving teams, providing them with the necessary tools to understand the consultants' specific working styles and requirements. This preparatory phase is essential for preventing systemic misunderstandings and fostering a truly welcoming organizational culture.

Finally, the recognition of identity is viewed as a fundamental psychological lever. When the individual chooses to share their diagnosis openly, it fosters an environment of transparency that enhances self-esteem and strengthens professional relationships. This approach aligns with the evidence that individualized accommodations are indispensable for professional success (Burgess & Cimera, 2020), moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward a model where neurodivergence is recognized and supported as a structural element of the workforce.

Table 1 – Main neuroinclusion practices

Practice	Description	Expected effect
Sensory adjustments	Regulation of light, noise, spaces	Stress reduction, greater concentration
Job coaching	Daily support	Greater autonomy and performance
Preliminary meetings	Team training	Better understanding of needs
Recognition of identity	Discussion of diagnosis	Greater self-esteem and awareness

The evidence confirms that individualized accommodations are essential for the work success of autistic people (Burgess & Cimera, 2020). Auticon implements these practices as an integral part of its service, avoiding assistentialist or symbolic approaches.

A significant indicator of the effectiveness of the Auticon model, as noted by Giuseppe Betti, is the absence of any collaborations interrupted due to a lack of inclusion. This success is not attributed to the inherent "simplicity" of the work environments, but rather to a structured and proactive system of mediation and prevention.

Betti explains that this stability is maintained through a "mediation network" consisting of three integrated phases:

1. Preliminary Training: Client company teams undergo specific training before the placement of consultants. This ensures the environment is culturally and operationally prepared to welcome neurodivergent talent.
2. Daily Monitoring: Once the project begins, work is followed on a daily basis by job coaches.
3. Cross-Functional Collaboration: Job coaches work in direct synergy with project managers to oversee the progress of the collaboration.

This structural framework allows the organization to intervene promptly at the first sign of critical issues. By addressing minor difficulties in real-time, Auticon prevents them from escalating into structural problems or causing a breakdown in the relationship between the consultant and the client. Consequently, inclusion is framed not as a unilateral effort required of the neurodivergent individual, but as a shared organizational responsibility managed through constant monitoring and strategic mediation.

The absence of collaboration interruptions due to lack of inclusion represents a significant indicator of the effectiveness of Auticon's organizational model. This result does not appear attributable to an assumed "ease" of the work context, but rather to a structured system of mediation and prevention of critical issues based on a proactive approach to inclusion. In particular, the role of preliminary training of corporate teams and continuous monitoring by job coaches and project managers highlights how inclusion is not conceived as a unilateral adaptation required of the neurodivergent person, but as a shared responsibility of the organizational context. This approach clearly differs from traditional models of job placement, which often intervene only reactively, when difficulties have already emerged in structural form.

Cultural Paradigms and Structural Barriers to Inclusion

According to the insights gathered from interviews with both Alberto Balestrazzi and Giuseppe Betti, the most urgent challenge for the integration of autistic workers into the labour market is primarily cultural. Both interviewees emphasize that inclusion is still frequently misinterpreted as a process of unilateral adaptation, where the burden of change rests solely on the neurodivergent individual, rather than being conceived as a collective responsibility of the organizational context.

Balestrazzi and Betti highlight two main categories of barriers that fuel this cultural gap:

Organizational Barriers: Traditional recruitment processes and excessively rigid Human Resource (HR) management policies represent significant structural obstacles. These systems, often designed around neurotypical standards of communication and social interaction, end up excluding highly qualified neurodivergent candidates even before their technical potential can be properly assessed.

Regulatory and Institutional Barriers: A further limitation identified concerns the lack of formal and regulatory recognition for key figures such as the job coach. The absence of a defined professional status for those who facilitate workplace integration makes it difficult for companies to access the systemic resources and support necessary to implement long-term sustainable inclusion strategies.

In line with the reflections of Balestrazzi and Betti, there is a clear need for a paradigm shift: moving from a logic of individual "deficit compensation" to one of structural organizational transformation. This approach suggests that "disability" in the workplace is often the product of a misalignment between an individual's functioning and the rigidity of the surrounding environment, thus requiring reforms in both corporate culture and public policy.

Cultural Paradigms and Structural Inadequacies

The responses provided by the interviewees clearly identify one of the main structural criticalities of neuroinclusion in the world of work: the persistence of a cultural paradigm that conceives inclusion as a process of individual adaptation rather than as a transformation of the organizational context. This approach reflects a deficit-based model, in which

neurodivergence is implicitly interpreted as a deviation from the norm to be compensated through individual effort, rather than as a form of cognitive diversity to be valued.

This perspective is supported by critical literature on neurodiversity, which emphasizes that many failures in employment inclusion pathways are not attributable to the skills of autistic people, but to the inadequacy of organizational systems and human resource management processes (Hendrickx, 2010; Nicolaidis, 2012). Traditional recruiting processes based on unstructured interviews, implicit evaluations of social skills, and a strong emphasis on informal communication represent systemic barriers that exclude many neurodivergent candidates a priori, regardless of their professional potential.

Sectoral Demand and High-Analytical-Intensity Fields

According to the observations of Alberto Balestrazzi, CEO of Auticon Italy, the demand for neurodivergent talent is not uniformly distributed across the labour market but is concentrated in sectors characterized by high analytical complexity. Balestrazzi identifies the most significant demand in areas such as data analytics, business intelligence, and artificial intelligence. Furthermore, he notes a substantial growth in the cybersecurity sector in recent years.

Conversely, more traditional IT roles—such as system migration or software testing—are often perceived as limited, as they may not fully valorise the specialized skills of neurodivergent consultants. This sectoral distribution highlights a significant correlation between the cognitive strengths frequently associated with the autism spectrum—such as pattern recognition, high-precision data processing, and prolonged concentration—and the requirements of advanced technological fields (Hendrickx, 2010; Austin & Pisano, 2017).

From an organizational perspective, this trend suggests that the inclusion of neurodivergent professionals is most effective when there is a high degree of person-job fit. In these high-intensity analytical sectors, cognitive differences are not merely accommodated but are transformed into a concrete competitive advantage, allowing organizations to tackle complex technical challenges that require non-standard thinking and extreme attention to detail.

The sectoral distribution of demand described by the interviewee highlights a significant correlation between the cognitive characteristics of people on the autism spectrum and the requirements of specific high-analytical-intensity technological fields. Sectors such as analytics, business intelligence, and artificial intelligence require skills related to the processing of large amounts of data, recognition of complex patterns, and a high capacity for prolonged concentration, abilities frequently associated with autistic cognitive profiles (Hendrickx, 2010; Austin & Pisano, 2017).

Identity Value of Work and Performance Quality

In his professional experience, Giuseppe Betti observes that one of the most significant aspects of working with neurodivergent professionals is their profound dedication to their roles. He notes that for many consultants, work transcends its function as a mere source of income, evolving into a primary tool for self-affirmation, personal growth, and social recognition.

Betti highlights a consistent drive toward continuous improvement and an exceptional focus on the quality of performance. This commitment often leads to results that exceed the initial expectations of client companies, which may have previously held more limited views of neurodivergent capabilities.

From an analytical perspective, this dedication challenges entrenched prejudices regarding the motivation or professional involvement of autistic individuals. The literature supports this view, suggesting that when neurodivergent people operate in environments aligned with their specific interests and characterized by clear, predictable methods, their intrinsic motivation and engagement are significantly enhanced (Hendrickx, 2010).

Thus, the high quality of performance observed by Betti is not merely an individual trait but the result of a virtuous interaction between the cognitive profile of the worker and an appropriately designed organizational context. In this sense, the valorisation of work as a space for identity construction contributes to the development of social citizenship and adult identity for neurodivergent individuals.

The surprise expressed by the interviewee regarding the dedication to work of neurodivergent people challenges one of the most entrenched prejudices about autism in the occupational field, namely the idea of limited motivation or reduced professional involvement. On the contrary, the empirical evidence suggests that, in adequately structured organizational contexts, work assumes a central identity value for many people on the autism spectrum, configuring itself as a space for self-affirmation, self-construction, and social recognition.

This interpretation is supported by the literature on neurodiversity, which emphasizes how intrinsic motivation and work engagement of autistic people are strongly influenced by the possibility of operating in environments consistent with their specific interests and with clear and predictable working methods. From this perspective, the observed dedication does not appear as an isolated individual characteristic, but as the result of a virtuous interaction between cognitive profiles and organizational design.

The strong attention to performance quality and continuous improvement highlighted by the interviewee can also be interpreted as an indicator of high person–job fit, namely a good alignment between individual skills and role requirements. This element helps explain the surpassing of initial expectations of client companies, which often start from stereotyped representations of neurodivergence. In this sense, Auticon's experience shows how the valorisation of cognitive differences can translate into a concrete competitive advantage rather than a mere ethical objective.

Finally, the value attributed to work as a tool of social recognition highlights a dimension often overlooked in inclusion policies, namely the role of work in the construction of social citizenship and adult identity of neurodivergent people. This finding reinforces the idea that neuroinclusion should not be limited to guaranteeing access to employment but should aim at creating contexts in which people can fully express skills, aspirations, and a sense of belonging.

Scalability and Strategic Growth in the Italian Context

According to Alberto Balestrazzi, CEO of Auticon Italy, the growth prospects for the organization are currently focused on territorial expansion, with the evaluation of new offices in strategic locations such as Rome and Bologna. However, Balestrazzi emphasizes that this expansion must follow a logic of organizational and economic sustainability rather than rapid, unchecked growth.

Balestrazzi identifies two fundamental pillars for the sustainable scalability of the Auticon model:

Market Stability: The presence of stable, long-term clients is essential. Unlike welfare-based or purely subsidized models, Auticon's growth is predicated on its ability to compete in the market by offering high-quality services and measurable added value.

Specialized Human Capital: The development of the model requires the recruitment of specific professional figures, particularly psychologists and sales staff. These roles are critical for maintaining the necessary balance between technical performance and the clinical-relational support required for effective neuroinclusion.

From a managerial perspective, Balestrazzi's approach suggests that the scalability of neuroinclusion models is constrained not only by market demand but also by the internal capacity to maintain high standards of mediation and support. This reinforces the idea that effective neuroinclusion is an interdisciplinary process that requires a careful integration of technical, commercial, and psychological competencies to ensure that territorial expansion does not compromise the quality of the organizational service.

The growth prospects outlined by the interviewee highlight how the scalability of a neuroinclusion model such as Auticon's cannot be interpreted exclusively in terms of territorial expansion but must be read considering broader organizational and economic sustainability. The evaluation of opening new offices in strategic cities such as Rome and Bologna signals development potential, but at the same time highlights the need for a prudent and structured approach to growth.

The centrality attributed to client stability underscores how performance-oriented neuroinclusion requires solid and continuous market demand. Unlike assistentialist models or those heavily dependent on public funding, Auticon's experience shows that sustainable inclusion is based on the ability to compete in terms of service quality and added value, confirming what is highlighted in the literature on the link between diversity management and competitive advantage (Austin & Pisano, 2017).

Another critical element concerns the availability of adequate professional figures, particularly psychologists and sales staff. This highlights the intrinsically interdisciplinary nature of the Auticon model, which integrates technical, relational, and clinical skills. Organizational growth is therefore constrained not only by the increase in the number of consultants, but also by the ability to maintain high standards of support and mediation, avoiding the risk of diluting service quality.

From this perspective, attention to growth sustainability can be interpreted as an element of organizational maturity. Rather than pursuing rapid expansion, Auticon appears oriented toward preserving the balance between inclusion and performance, recognizing that model replicability depends on the ability to adapt it to local contexts without compromising its founding principles. This reinforces the idea that effective neuroinclusion is not a standardizable process, but requires constant adaptation, investment in skills, and organizational governance.

Scalability and Strategic Growth in the Italian Context

Alberto Balestrazzi outlines a clear strategic intention to broaden the scope of inclusion by evaluating the integration of other forms of neurodivergence, such as dyslexia and ADHD. Nevertheless, he underscores that this expansion must be approached with extreme care, as each neurodivergent condition presents a unique set of cognitive profiles.

The analysis provided by the CEO highlights several critical considerations regarding this transition:

1. **Differentiated Needs:** It is noted that inclusive practices are not "one-size-fits-all," as needs associated with ADHD or dyslexia differ significantly from those associated with the autism spectrum.
2. **Role Compatibility:** In high-precision sectors, Balestrazzi emphasizes the necessity of rigorously assessing the compatibility between specific cognitive functioning and role requirements.

From an organizational standpoint, this vision aligns with the idea that neuroinclusion is a dynamic and evolving process. The evidence suggests that moving beyond a single category of neurodivergence increases managerial complexity. For Balestrazzi, the objective remains the valorisation of cognitive differences without compromising the fundamental integration of inclusion and professional performance.

The intention to extend the Auticon model to include other forms of neurodivergence, such as dyslexia and ADHD, highlights a significant evolution of the project toward a broader and more articulated conception of neuroinclusion. This perspective aligns with the neurodiversity approach as a heterogeneous spectrum of cognitive functioning rather than a homogeneous category, requiring continuous rethinking of organizational practices and role assignment criteria.

The caution expressed by the interviewee nonetheless highlights a fundamental critical element: the non-overlapping nature of needs associated with different neurodivergences. Dyslexia and ADHD present profiles of strengths and difficulties different from autism and require specific accommodations, particularly in work contexts characterized by high precision, prolonged attention, and low tolerance for error, such as many IT roles. This aspect warns against the risk of indiscriminately applying the same inclusive practices to different neurodivergent conditions, which could prove ineffective or even counterproductive.

From an organizational perspective, openness to other neurodivergences implies increased managerial complexity and a greater need for personalization of onboarding and support pathways. This reinforces the idea that neuroinclusion cannot be conceived as a standardized model, but as a dynamic process requiring interdisciplinary skills, continuous training, and adaptability of roles and productive processes.

Furthermore, attention to compatibility between cognitive profiles and professional roles recalls the concept of person–job fit, already emerged in previous sections, and underscores how the effectiveness of inclusion depends on the ability to valorise differences without forcing them into rigid organizational schemes. In this sense, Auticon’s experience suggests that extending the model to other neurodivergences represents not only an opportunity to broaden social impact, but also a critical challenge to maintaining the founding principle of integration between inclusion and performance.

Authenticity of the Model and the "Greenwashing" Debate

Regarding the potential perception of "greenwashing"—the instrumental use of inclusion for marketing or image purposes—Alberto Balestrazzi rejects this interpretation, asserting that Auticon’s legitimacy is rooted in technical excellence rather than symbolic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). He explains that client companies engage Auticon primarily due to the specialized technical skills and high-quality performance of the consultants, rather than for a mere reputational boost.

The perspective shared by the CEO underscores a fundamental principle of sustainable neuroinclusion:

1. Performance-Driven Inclusion: Balestrazzi maintains that for an inclusion model to be viable in the long term, it must be intrinsically linked to professional results. The service offered must be excellent, ensuring that the consultant's presence provides measurable value to the client.
2. Strategic vs. Symbolic Value: By shifting the focus from "charity" to "competence," the model avoids the pitfalls of superficial diversity management. As Balestrazzi suggests, the sustainability of the project depends on this synergy between social impact and economic performance.

The evidence provided in this example confirms a central theme in neurodiversity literature: inclusion is most authentic and effective when integrated into the organization's core strategy. Balestrazzi's statements highlight that the valorisation of cognitive differences should not be treated as a separate ethical objective, but as a strategic driver of competitive advantage (Austin & Pisano, 2017). This commitment to high standards of training and support prevents the model from being perceived as opportunistic, consolidating its legitimacy through concrete organizational results.

The interviewee's response directly addresses one of the possible objections to organizational inclusion models oriented toward neurodiversity: the perception of greenwashing or instrumental use of inclusion for marketing purposes. Alberto's statement emphasizes how, in Auticon's case, client companies' choice is driven primarily by consultants' technical competence and performance quality rather than by social responsibility or image-related reasons. This highlights how the Auticon model differs from symbolic diversity management models, in which inclusion assumes a more formal than substantive value.

The empirical evidence confirms a central principle of the neurodiversity literature: sustainable inclusion cannot be a purely ethical or symbolic objective but must be integrated with performance and the added value that neurodivergent people bring to the organization (Austin & Pisano, 2017). In other words, the sustainability of the model derives from the ability to combine inclusion and productivity, transforming cognitive differences into real competitive advantage. This approach challenges the traditional dichotomy between social responsibility and business objectives, demonstrating that neurodiversity can constitute a strategic driver.

Furthermore, the statement highlights how the perception of authenticity of the model depends on the coherence between operational practices and concrete results. Unlike purely symbolic initiatives, Auticon requires constant commitment in terms of training, support, and adaptation of business processes, indispensable elements to ensure effective inclusion. This approach reinforces the message that neurodiversity, if properly managed, is not only an ethical value but also a strategic tool, contributing to consolidating the legitimacy of the model and preventing criticisms of superficiality or opportunism.

The example of the Auticon highlights how effective neuroinclusion cannot be limited to individual or symbolic interventions but requires structural changes and personalized support. Sensory adjustments, job coaching, team training, and recognition of neurodivergent people's identity represent indispensable practices to ensure both well-being and consultant performance, highlighting the need for a flexible organizational approach attentive to individual cognitive characteristics.

The role of the job coach emerges as central in mediating between consultant and work context: daily supervision and management of communications between corporate team and consultant help prevent critical issues, ensuring continuity and sustainability of projects. This

confirms that neuroinclusion is not only a moral responsibility of the company, but a strategic investment capable of transforming cognitive differences into competitive advantage.

Neurodivergent people demonstrate technical competence, dedication, and attention to work quality, confirming what has been observed in the neurodiversity literature (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Hendrickx, 2010). Work becomes not only a source of income, but also a tool for self-affirmation and social recognition, underscoring the importance of designing work contexts that valorise individual capabilities and foster intrinsic motivation.

Future challenges of the model mainly concern two areas: territorial scalability, which requires adequate resources and careful process management, and the inclusion of other forms of neurodivergence, such as dyslexia and ADHD, which entail specific needs and accommodations. These challenges highlight the complexity of extending the model and the need for a dynamic, interdisciplinary, and sustainable approach.

Overall, Auticon represents a replicable and sustainable best practice model in which inclusion and performance mutually reinforce each other. The coherence between technical excellence and inclusive support distinguishes the Auticon case from greenwashing initiatives, demonstrating that valorising neurodiversity can simultaneously be an ethical objective and a strategic driver for organizations.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with the observation that the contemporary labor market, despite being characterized by growing attention to diversity & inclusion, continues to exhibit profound inefficiencies in identifying, valuing, and retaining neurodivergent human capital. In particular, the study sets out to analyze whether and to what extent neurodivergent individuals can be effectively integrated into organizational contexts, not only from an ethical and social perspective, but in terms of economic sustainability, productivity, and competitive advantage for companies. The central objective was to move beyond an assistentialist view of inclusion, demonstrating how neurodiversity can constitute a strategic resource within appropriately designed organizational models.

The research path highlighted how the difficulties neurodivergent individuals face in entering the workforce are not attributable to a lack of skills or professional potential, but rather to rigid organizational processes, standardized recruiting systems, and performance evaluation models that reflect a homogeneous and norm-centric conception of the worker. In this sense, exclusion from the labor market represents not only a social problem but also an economic loss, as it entails a waste of human capital and a reduction in the overall efficiency of the productive system. The theoretical analysis showed how numerous studies recognize distinctive cognitive abilities in neurodivergent individuals—such as attention to detail, analytical skills, recognition of complex patterns, high levels of concentration, and intrinsic motivation—particularly relevant in knowledge-intensive sectors such as IT, business intelligence, data analysis, and cybersecurity. However, these competencies emerge only in the presence of flexible work environments capable of adapting processes, tools, and communication methods to individuals' cognitive specificities. It follows that workplace inclusion cannot be understood as a unilateral adaptation required of the individual, but rather as a transformation of organizational models.

From a regulatory standpoint, the thesis highlighted how recognition of neurodivergence in the workplace remains incomplete and uneven, especially in the Italian context. Despite some recent legislative progress, a significant gap persists between formal principles and practical implementation, particularly with regard to active labor market policies, recognition of support roles such as job coaches, and the dissemination of operational tools for companies. This regulatory fragmentation contributes to making inclusion episodic and dependent on the sensitivity of individual actors, rather than structural and systemic. Within this framework, the empirical analysis of the Auticon case represented a central element of the work, making it possible to observe how a performance-oriented neuro inclusion model can function concretely in the market. Auticon's experience demonstrates that the inclusion of individuals on the autism spectrum can be economically sustainable and competitive, provided it is integrated into corporate strategy and supported by structured organizational practices. Sensory adaptations, continuous job coaching, training of corporate teams, and attention to person–job fit emerge as key factors in ensuring both employee well-being and important levels of productivity.

From a business and economic perspective, the case analyzed shows how neuro inclusion can generate significant benefits for companies, including improved performance, reduced turnover, greater retention of human capital, and strengthened organizational reputation. In this sense, neurodiversity is not configured as a cost, but as a strategic investment capable of producing value in the medium and in long term. Auticon's experience also shows how authentic inclusion differs clearly from practices of greenwashing or symbolic diversity, since the sustainability of the model is linked to service quality and achieved economic results.

The future perspectives emerging from the research nevertheless highlight several crucial challenges. The scalability of neuro inclusion models requires careful resource management, investment in interdisciplinary skills, and solid organizational governance. Furthermore, extending inclusion to other forms of neurodivergence, such as dyslexia and ADHD, implies increased managerial complexity and the need for increasingly personalized solutions, confirming that neuro inclusion cannot be addressed through standardized approaches.

In conclusion, the thesis confirms that the inclusion of neurodivergent individuals in the world of work is not only possible, but desirable from an economic, organizational, and social standpoint. Rethinking human resource management models through an inclusive lens means increasing the allocative efficiency of the labor market, reducing waste of human capital, and promoting more sustainable forms of competitiveness. Neurodiversity, if properly valued, can become a key factor of innovation and resilience for companies, contributing to the construction of a more equitable, dynamic economic system capable of addressing the challenges of contemporary global context.

From this perspective, the inclusive practices analyzed throughout the thesis cannot be interpreted as ancillary or merely compensatory interventions but rather assume the role of true instruments of organizational governance. They in fact contribute to improving the overall quality of the work environment, fostering talent retention, and strengthening companies' competitive capacity in the medium and long term. The empirical evidence emerging from the analysis of the Auticon case and from the conducted interview confirms how adapting work environments to the cognitive characteristics of neurodivergent workers produces positive effects not only on individual well-being, but also on the efficiency of production processes and on performance quality.

In an economic context characterized by increasing cultural complexity, international labor mobility, and rapid technological change, companies' ability to leverage cognitive diversity becomes a strategic factor of resilience and innovation. Organizations that succeed in effectively integrating neurodiversity, including workers with specific learning disorders—demonstrate a greater aptitude for facing future challenges, as they develop more flexible, adaptive organizational models oriented toward the enhancement of human capital. Within this framework, neuro inclusion emerges not only as a response to demands for social equity, but as a concrete lever for economic development and global competitiveness.

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