



NEURODIVERSITY POWER

**Guidelines for achieving the
NeuroPower Quality Seal
for
Neurodiverse Inclusive Organization**

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**IO3: NeuroPower Quality Seal
Spain, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria**

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Introduction

These Guidelines compile all the necessary steps for an Organization to achieve the NeuroPower Quality Seal and therefore to get recognized as a Neurodiverse Inclusive Organization at EU level. In order to complete the certification process, the company will have to fulfill a matrix, which is a tool for assessment of the organizational policies and activities related to neurodiversity aspects.

The application will be open not only to companies who participated in the piloting of the NeuroPower project activities, but to any other organization who can demonstrate that they are committed to empowering neurodiversity culture in their teams. The companies which qualify for the Neurodiversity Power Quality Seal will be interviewed by the project partners' experts in order to develop their best practice videos.

I. Why to apply for the NeuroPower Quality Seal?

“We need to do more than diversity and equity and inclusion. We need to create real belonging in our culture.”, Brene Brown

People with neurodiversity are 15-20% of the world's population, and these numbers are continuing to grow. These employees can be a significant benefit for organizations to consider, as they excel in numerous areas but are often overlooked.

Neurodiversity is a term used to refer to a variety of learning and developmental variations that impact the cognitive functioning of the brain. These variations are related to areas of learning, processing, socializing, focusing, and other neurological factors that might not be easily observed. Since these are elements of the brain, it's not considered something that can or should be medically fixed but elements that need to be understood, accommodated, and adapted to.

There are many benefits from neurodiversity. **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** presents on a spectrum and therefore ranges broadly in individual abilities. They often excel in the world of technology and computers. Some can break down complex processes and coding. Mathematics seems to be a common strength among many workers with ASD, where music and innovation are more seen in individuals with Asperger's. **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** is associated with the ability to multitask and take on large amounts of data in small amounts of time. The mind is always producing multiple messages at one time. These individuals have been seen to work longer, harder and produce incredible outcomes. ADHD can be found in many professions across many different industries. These individuals are shown to be more creative and innovative with their mind working in unique and interesting ways, others might not have considered. With **dyslexia** impacting how workers process and interpret words, strengths have been seen in the ability to visualize and maximize creativity. Instead of seeing just the details, individuals with dyslexia are often able to see big picture concepts and tackle large complex innovative projects. These employees can have an above average visual spatial ability and can be

seen throughout the world of business as entrepreneurs and leaders. They tend to be more relational and are usually focused on interpersonal relationships.

Neurodiversity is of mutual benefit both for neurodivergent employees and the organizations!

If you are a company that wants to enhance or build your inclusive environment for neurodivergent workers, then you can apply for NeuroPower Quality Seal for Neurodiverse Inclusive Organization!

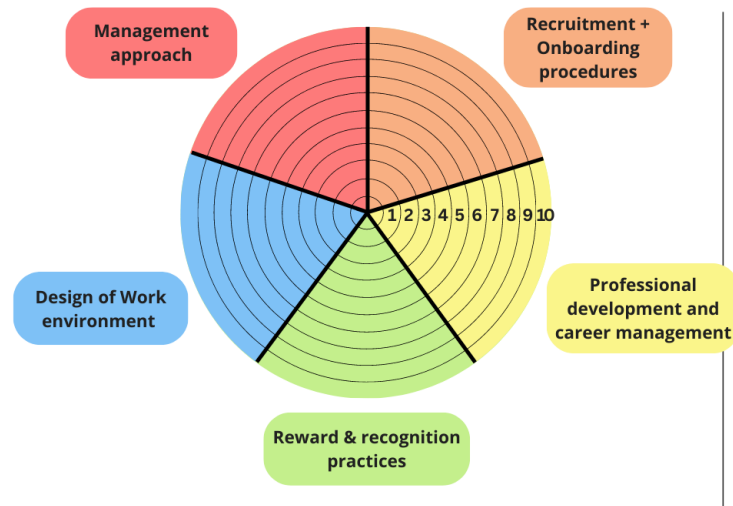
II. Methodology of the certification process

To create environments for individuals who are neurodiverse to succeed, organizations need inclusive environments that empower all employees, leading to greater levels of self-esteem, psychological safety, engagement, motivation, loyalty, satisfaction, performance, and an overall greater level of well-being. Inclusive environments actively tackle and address areas of harassment, biases, stereotypes and eliminate issues that lead workers to feeling undervalued or underutilized. Inclusive environments promote trust, open communication, empathy, and openly advocate and encourage self-disclosure.

Both questionnaires (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) are the foundation for the final estimation of the **index for Neurodiverse Inclusive Organization**. The methodology used for the creation of the both questionnaires examine every single aspect of an employee's life cycle in the organization, as follows:

- 1) Recruitment and onboarding challenges
- 2) Professional Development, Career management
- 3) Reward & Recognition challenges
- 4) Design of work environment
- 5) Management approach

Neurodiversity at Work Wheel



1. Recruitment and onboarding

The economy is in a labor shortage, with many organizations facing challenges filling positions, regardless of level, role, or industry. As the global marketplace changes, more emphasis is being placed on technology, innovation, and creativity. This shift can potentially benefit individuals who are neurodiverse, as many thrive in these types of environments. For organizations to be competitive, this is a strategic way to gain a competitive advantage in a pool of candidates that are not typically recruited.

What are the recruitment barriers?

It starts with a job description that outlines the expectations and requirements of a role. In writing these descriptions, it is imperative the hiring manager drills down to the top skills, experience required, and key drivers needed to be successful in the position. Many job descriptions have fillers and subjective requirements listed that might not be must requirements of the job and deter diverse candidates. For example, do you really need advanced communication skills for every type of position in your company? Ability to work 5 days a week in an open concept office?

During the interview process, consider the types of questions asked and the structure of the interview. Not everyone will be able to build relationships immediately. Things like eye contact or rapport building might be a challenge. Research indicates that most hiring decisions are made within the first few minutes of meeting a candidate and are dependent on building rapport before the interview technically starts. Casual conversations over the weather, sports, coffee, traffic, and local news, all have the potential to lead to undesired results. Best practice encourages these rapport building discussions to be kept at a bare minimum or removed completely. To ensure success for all candidates, questions should focus only on the job and the requirements.

Assessments can be challenging for neurodivergent individuals since they might read, interpret, and process information differently. It's recommended that organizations analyze their assessment to ensure inclusivity for all learners and ensure they're assessing skills equally. Some organizations are going beyond the typical online assessments and prefer more practical skills evaluation approach.

Disclosure as part of the interview

The first step is the employee making that choice to disclose. Part of disclosure is discussion around the aspects of the diagnosis that impacts the ability to perform the expectations of the job and accommodations that might be needed to be successful. Challenges occur when an organization does not have a strategy in place and lacks awareness and resources for disclosure. Without this, disclosure can often lead to negative outcomes in career growth, peer perceptions, and less opportunity available. Neurodiverse individuals might fear that informing their employer about limitations will lead to being stereotyped, less productive, and unable to take on more responsibility. This might limit the project work they are given, future promotional opportunities and their overall brand/status in the organisation. While disclosure can eliminate a high level of stress, increase well-being, performance, communication, and the opportunity to be successful, it can also be met with much resistance. As a result, many workers do not disclose, overcompensate, and work in unnatural ways that inevitably leads to negative impact.

To create a culture of trust for disclosure, you need to begin with the hiring process and training of the hiring managers and HR staff. Many candidates don't disclose, fearing it can lead to unfair evaluation of skills, relevant experience, and might result in not being offered the position. Inclusive work environments allow candidates to disclose during the interview process without repercussions, have clear processes in place, and transparency around fair evaluation of candidate's skills.

Good practices:

SAP, an IT leader, is creating and implementing inclusive hiring practices by removing the traditional interview and asking candidates to attend its workshops instead. At these workshops, SAP offers skills related activities that directly align with the position's requirements. They create a comfortable environment where trust is built, rapport with the candidates is established and then skills can be evaluated.

Microsoft has also seen success in targeting individuals with ASD for specific technology positions. The company started an "Autism at the Workplace" program which recruits individuals who specifically have Autism, builds in accommodations, and trains everyone in the organization on creating inclusivity for neurodiversity. Extra support structures are built in throughout the organization to facilitate the process of interviewing, accommodating, and modifying the workplace, along with ensuring performance, and career progression are available to support this group.

2. Professional Development and trainings

To launch the process of change and inclusivity, there is the need for a certain level of awareness, knowledge, and empathy within the organization. To create an inclusive culture, you need to start with training and education on neurodiversity and an emphasis on its importance for the culture and work outcomes. Neurodiversity awareness programs should include information on conscious and unconscious biases, stereotypes, and discrimination in the workplace. This form of training is shown to improve communication companywide, increase disclosure, and ultimately lead to higher performing, more trusting environments.

Establishing networks of employees who can learn from one another is a great way to understand, share, and create support systems. One of the best ways to do this is through mentorship programs. Partnering employees with coaches and mentors provides an advocate, counselor, and teacher in a format that focuses more on a counseling approach. This supports employees when they experience challenges personally and professionally. Mentors empower mentees to realize opportunities, which they might not have been aware of, and gives them valuable advice for career advancement. This leads to increased resilience both personally and professionally which can assist neurodiverse employees in tackling challenges with disclosure, harassment, bias, and inclusivity.

3. Reward and Recognition Practices & Career Management

Many neurodiverse individuals experience a lack of career progression. The stigma associated with being labeled, comes with the perception that these workers cannot take on more responsibility and are not appropriate for promotions. As with all employees, neurodiverse workers want to be successful in their careers. No matter what the accommodation, creating a performance management program that is conducive/encouraging to their progression is an integral part of inclusion.

The traditional performance management process for reward and recognition is heavily based on being able to effectively communicate and actively demonstrate one's strengths and abilities. It relies on the employees' ability to self-advocate and promote their accomplishments for the year. Employees assess and evaluate their performance through written expression. The manager reads their self-evaluation, analyzes the data, and provides a score. A review is written based on their work performance and delivered orally. All parts of this traditional approach can be a challenge for individuals who are neurodiverse.. Using online communicators like chats, discussion forums, pulse check-ins, and kudos, can create an effective more informal communication strategy for performance. Digital assistants can assist in the self-evaluation writing process. Online HR tools can provide more continuous feedback for assessment and reviews.

4. Design of Work Environment

Reasonable accommodations could be related to the physical work environment. Modifications of workspaces may be needed for these employees to have the opportunity to perform at their best. Such modifications might be sensory elements, where factors such as the temperature of

the building, noise levels, equipment, smells, and light sensitivity, can negatively or positively impact work productivity. There might be modifications needed to reduce distractions and increase focus. Rearranging office furniture, relaxing areas, calming colors, and noise canceling headphones can provide a more productive environment. Standing desks help creativity and productivity through movement. Schedule flexibility throughout the day helps workers feel more centered and more in control of their routines. Remote work has the potential to improve production, concentration and eliminate social stressors. These accommodations and modifications are practical and reasonable and can be implemented without undue hardship to the employer. With accommodations and modifications in place, environmental factors will be influential in achieving performance, inclusivity, and minimize underemployment.

5. Management approach

When employees disclose to their manager, it's important that this information is handled per policy, with confidentiality and respect. To create inclusive environments, it starts with the Senior Leadership to implement and model behavior, policies, programs, procedures, and practices for inclusivity. Clear communication and expectations from leadership reaffirms the organization's commitment to all areas of disclosure, accommodations, hiring, retaining, and growing team members with neurodiversity. Communicating the process of disclosure during new hire onboarding and benefit enrollment is a great way to educate and re-educate the process of disclosure and accommodations. A key element is ensuring that all cases of harassment towards individuals with neurodiversity are handled promptly and according to policy. When behaviors or actions violate this, employees need to see that corrective action is taken by leadership.

Understanding these elements and how to create an inclusive environment for this group of workers is critical to the future of work.

III. Process, criteria for certification and eligible organizations

1. Process for certification Neurodiverse Inclusive Organization

The application will be opened not only to companies who participated in the piloting of the NeuroPower project activities, but to any other organization who can demonstrate they are committed to empowering the neurodiversity culture in their teams. The assessment will be performed by the partner organizations' experts in each project country of the NeuroPower project. The companies which qualify for the Neurodiversity Power Quality Seal will be interviewed by the project partners in order to develop best practice videos.

2. Criteria for certification:

Certification encompasses two types of applicants:

1. Organizations that have already some practices and evidences/results about neurodiversity inclusion processes;
2. Organizations that show a high level of interest and willingness to start neurodiversity inclusion processes;

In the first case, the assessment will be based on concrete criteria in several aspects:

- Evidence of having experience in the recruitment of neurodiverse people and their integration through an appropriate onboarding procedure;
- Evidence of supporting and enabling neurodiverse people to become fully-fledged team members by presenting an appropriate work environment;
- Evidence of empowering neurodiverse people through suitable training offers, especially ones developed through this project in IO1;
- Evidence of new practices, products or procedures developed by or with the involvement of neurodiverse people
- Evidence of sensitising all employees on the needs and appropriate communication strategies for working with neurodiverse people;
- Evidence of creating an inclusive working climate which encourages diversity, involvement and empowerment of every team member.

In the second case, if the organizations that wish to be certified, have not yet recorded some concrete results in terms of implementing specific measures and programs for inclusion of neurodiverse candidates and employees, but have started some initiatives (e.g. awareness raising sessions for their employees), which show their willingness to invest some efforts in this direction, they can provide some evidence for high level of readiness and interest (employee survey which shows interest in the topic, attendance lists of the sensitising events etc.).

We will be directed at companies who really seek to enhance the unique skillset and competences of all their employees by finding the most suitable way to fulfil their potential, companies who really aspire to build an inclusive organisational culture which promotes equality and diversity as main corporate values.

3. Eligible organisations for certification

- Private and public companies;
- Start ups and enterprise;
- NGOs and associations, businesses associations;
- Health organizations (hospitals, associations);
- Chambers of commerce

IV. Assessment matrix tool for NeuroPower Quality Seal

The assessment methodology for the certification for NeuroPower Quality Seal is based on two assessment questionnaires

- 1) Check list for Inclusive Procedures and Culture ([Appendix 1](#))
- 2) Check list for Inclusive Physical Work Environment ([Appendix 2](#))

The assessment tools aimed at estimation of the total index for Neurodiversity Inclusive Organization.

There are three level of the rating score for the Neurodiversity Inclusive Organization:

- 1) Emerging Neurodiversity Inclusive Organization
- 2) Rising Inclusive Neurodiversity Organization
- 3) Highly Inclusive Neurodiversity Organization

To be eligible for the award **NeuroPower Quality Seal**, an organization must receive an index for Neurodiversity Inclusive Organization higher than 1.5.

A minimum of 5 organizations in each project partner country will be awarded, in the following priority:

- 1) Highly Inclusive Neurodiversity Organization: 2 awards
- 2) Emerging Inclusive Neurodiversity Organization: 2 awards
- 3) Nascent Neurodiversity Inclusive Organization: 1 award

In case, there are no applicants with a Highly Inclusive Neurodiversity Organization index score, awards will be distributed across the two other categories.

1. Instructions for assessment of the questionnaire for neurodiversity inclusive procedures and culture in the organization

The checklist for neurodiversity inclusive procedures and culture in the organization consists of 22 questions covering the entire life cycle of the workplace. Read the criteria in column 2. Column 3 provides explanations and examples of possible improvements for each criteria. The explanations are only illustrative and not exhaustive.

Evaluate each criteria in the column 4,5, and 6 according to the current state in your organization, regarding the 22 criteria.

E: Efforts: Have you already invested some efforts in this direction?

A: Attention: Do you intend to put more attention in this direction?

R: Results: Have you already recorded concrete results?

Please rate the status of each column using the scale from 1-5

1 – Not at all, 2 - Not much, 3 – Neutral, 4- Fairly, 5 – Significant

And provide some concrete examples in the table or as an additional document.

Every single criteria must be rated in all three columns 4, 5 and 6!

For example:

- If you implemented some efforts to make reasonable adjustments in the job description procedures regarding the needs of neurodivergent candidates, you might rate this criteria with the score of 3 in Column 4, and at the same time to indicate in column 5 that you are willing/intend to invest even more attention in this direction and give the score of 5, to improve this criteria. Column 6 might be still assessed with the score of 2 (you have improved your job descriptions, but you still haven't seen the impact of these adjustments, as you haven't hired a neurodiverse candidate yet)
- It is also possible that you answered with the score of 1 to all the criteria in column 4 and column 6, i.e. no efforts in reasonable accommodations are invested so far and accordingly there are no concrete results to be recorded, but in column 5 to rate your willingness to make these reasonable accommodations for some criteria, as you are a company at the very beginning of this process.
- It is possible that you answered more than with rate of 1 to some of the criteria in column 4, and you recorded some results in column 6, but you also rated the same criteria with the score of 1 or 2 in column 5 because you have no intention and willingness to pay more attention in this direction in the future.

Assessment of the index of inclusive procedures and culture:

After completing the questionnaire, sum up the points of all criteria. You will get a score where the minimum number of points is 22, the maximum is 110, for each of the columns 4, 5 and 6. Then start estimating your organization's index of inclusive procedures and culture by dividing the number of points by the number of questions 22, for each column 4, 5 and 6.

- Minimum index for inclusive procedures and culture - 1
- Maximum index for inclusive procedures and culture - 5.

Then calculate your final organization's index for inclusive procedures and culture using the following formula.

Multiply the index from column 6 by 100%, and the weight of the index from column 4 is 20% and for column 5 is 10%. Then sum the three results together. Below is an example:

No	Column	Average index	%	Final index of procedures and culture
1	Column 6	2,40	100%	2,4

2	Column 5	3	20%	0,6
3	Column 4	1,5	10%	0,15
4	Total index of inclusive procedures and culture			3,15

The minimum final index could be 1,3 and the maximum 6,5!

2. Instruction of assessment of the questionnaire for inclusive physical work environment

The checklist for an inclusive physical work environment consists of 18 criteria. Rate each one with a score from 1 to 5 (*1 – Not at all, 2 - Not much, 3 - Neutral, 4- Fairly, 5 – Very*).

After completing the questionnaire, sum adds up the points of all criteria. You will get a score where the minimum number of points is 18, the maximum is 90. Then estimate your organization's index of inclusive physical environment by dividing the number of points by the number of questions 18.

- Minimum index of inclusive physical environment: 1.
- Maximum index of inclusive physical environment: 5.

3. Estimation of the index for Neurodiverse Inclusive Organization

It is the sum of the two indexes that should be divided by the number of 2, using the following formula, presented in the example below:

No	Index for inclusive NeuroPower organisation	Fnal index rate
1	Index for inclusive procedures and culture	2,5
2	Index for inclusive physical environment	1,9
3	Total index for inclusive NeuroPower organisation (index 1+ index 2)/2	4,40

The minimum final index rate for Neurodiverse Inclusive Organization is 1,3 and the maximum index rate is 6,5!

V. Categories of Neurodiversity Inclusive Organization

Based on the scores result from the final estimation of the index for inclusive NeuroPower organisation, your organization can be classified in the following categories:

- 1) Emerging Neurodiversity Inclusive Organization (Rating Index: 1.3-2.9)

2) Rising Inclusive Neurodiversity Organization (Rating Index: 3.00-4.7)

3) Highly Inclusive Neurodiversity Organization (Rating Index: 4.8-6.5)

1. Emerging Neurodiversity Inclusive Organization (Rating Index: 1.3-2.9)

The nascent neurodiversity inclusive organization is in ***the early stages of developing a neurodiversity inclusive environment***. This type of organization typically demonstrates a foundational level of implementing small initiatives and activities to bring neurodiversity into the workplace. This stage is characterized by organizational processes and practices that ***begin to embrace the cultural change towards a neurodiversity-inclusive culture***. However, these practices ***may not be applied consistently throughout the organization***, indicating a potential area for development. The strategic goals of the nascent organization may recognize the importance of neurodiversity for the development of the organization as responsive and respectful of employee needs and different learning styles and job performance in work contexts, but these goals ***may not be fully integrated into the organization's strategic planning processes*** or be effectively communicated throughout the organization.

2. Rising Inclusive Neurodiversity Organization (Rating Index: 3.0-4.7):

The emerging neurodiversity inclusion movement is ***beginning to make significant efforts in concrete processes and activities*** to implement neurodiversity in the workplace. This profile is characterized by a foundational approach to resource allocation where ***resources are slowly and progressively directed towards integrating neurodiversity in the workplace***, albeit with room for more strategic flexibility and efficiency. These organizations show a ***growing acceptance of taking on the challenges of neurodiversity*** implementation and empowerment, cultivating an environment where new ideas and activities can be undertaken. Strategic alignment with inclusion policies, including neurodiversity, is evident, with ***evidence and efforts for incorporation of the neurodiversity into the organization's strategic framework***.

3. Highly Inclusive Neurodiversity Organization (Rating Index: 4.8-6.5)

These organizations demonstrate ***excellence in specific processes and long-term workplace neurodiversity programs that are integrated into strategic goals***. This indicates that investments in time, money and staff are maximized, ***fostering an environment that includes neurodiversity***. The organizational structure and culture fully integrates ***acceptance of neurodiversity as a business asset, fully embraces the challenges of neurodiversity*** implementation, and informs and empowers employees at all levels. This culture is characterized by open communication, flexibility and a ***shared vision that neurodiversity in the workplace benefits productivity, efficiency and employee engagement*** throughout the organization. Such

an organization constantly adapts its strategies and procedures to build mutual benefit, both for the neurodivergent employees and for the organization itself.

Conclusion

Achieving the "NeuroPower Quality Seal" goes beyond mere certification compliance; it embodies a commitment to creating more inclusive, diverse, and equitable work environments. This approach not only benefits neurodivergent employees but also strengthens organizations' ability to thrive in a changing and diverse work landscape.

The process of achieving the "NeuroPower Quality Seal" shows that organizations can benefit greatly from including neurodiverse employees. This certification process looks at every stage of an employee's journey, from hiring and onboarding to training and working conditions. It highlights the many advantages of neurodiversity for both individuals and organizations, creating a culture of inclusion and empowerment. By continuously improving and supporting employees, organizations demonstrate their commitment to creating fair and inclusive workplaces. Pursuing the "NeuroPower Quality Seal" is not just about meeting certification requirements; it means being dedicated to creating a work environment where all employees feel valued, understood, and supported, ultimately leading to a more resilient and successful organization in a diverse workforce.

NeuroPower Quality Seal certification process offers a comprehensive framework for organizations to foster a culture of inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment, ultimately leading to a more resilient and successful workforce.