



Leading Neurodiverse Teams

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Leading Neurodiverse Teams

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The scope of this thesis was to create a training program for leaders that helps them better understand and manage neurodiverse employees. The program was developed by addressing key research questions focused on identifying the talent management approaches that are the most effective, leadership qualities that contribute to inclusivity, the challenges and opportunities arising from managing neurodiverse employees, and best practices in training program development. This objective was achieved in collaboration with Company X through a comprehensive literature review, analysis of social media presence and trends, and interviews with leaders from Company X.

For the development task, service design tools and expert interviews were used to help gain a deeper understanding of the stakeholder needs and develop the final training program. The resulting training plan includes modules on developing empathy and creating a psychologically safe work environment, supported by practical exercises and interactive sessions to reinforce learning. The purpose of these modules is to equip leaders with the skills necessary to create a workplace that is inclusive and supportive for neurodiverse employees.

The main findings and results highlight the importance of organizations adapting to the needs of their diverse employees, rather than expecting employees to conform to a standard organizational culture. This approach highlights the need for a humane perspective in talent management, keeping in mind that human resources are, first and foremost, human. The thesis calls for a continued commitment to inclusivity and the adaptation of organizational practices to support the unique strengths and needs of neurodiverse individuals.

Keywords: Talent Management, Diversity and Inclusion, Neurodiversity, Training Program Development, Design Thinking

Contents

1	Introduction	6
1.1	Background and context	6
1.2	Development task and research questions	7
1.3	Significance of the study	7
2	Knowledge basis	8
2.1	Talent management in diverse workplaces.....	9
2.1.1	Defining talent management strategies	9
2.1.2	Diversity, equity, and inclusion in talent acquisition	11
2.1.3	Development and retention of diverse talent	13
2.2	Inclusive Leadership	14
2.2.1	Characteristics of inclusive leaders.....	15
2.2.2	Strategies for fostering inclusivity in teams (DE&I).....	16
2.2.3	Promoting psychological safety and trust	18
2.3	Understanding neurodiversity in the workplace	20
2.3.1	Definition of neurodiversity and common neurodivergent conditions	20
2.3.2	Benefits of neurodiversity in organizations	21
2.3.3	Bias related to neurodivergence	22
3	Development setting.....	27
3.1	Purpose, objectives, development task, and issues.....	27
3.1.1	Defining the purpose and objective of the training program.....	27
3.1.2	Identifying development tasks and challenges	28
3.2	Methodological solutions	29
3.2.1	Description of the development method.....	29
3.2.2	Application of the methods in the thesis.....	30
3.2.3	Data collection for program development	33
3.2.4	Ethical and privacy issues (informed consent and participant confidentiality).....	49
3.3	Limitations	49
4	Results	50
4.1	Training program design and methodology	50
4.1.1	Curriculum development	50
4.1.2	Delivery methods (workshops, e-learning).....	51
4.1.3	Evaluation and feedback mechanisms	52
4.2	Training plan.....	53
5	Discussion, conclusions, and reflection	56
5.1	Comparison with knowledge basis	56

5.2 Areas for further development.....	58
References.....	60
Figures	64
Tables	64
Appendices	65

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and context

The modern working environment has become more diverse due to global mobility, advances in technology, and a greater focus on making sure everybody feels included. In today's world talent management, which only used to focus on finding the right people for the job, developing their skills, and retaining them as employees, now faces both challenges and opportunities when it comes to considering the various skills and different viewpoints that employees might bring into a company's operations. This implies that the new strategies for managing talent need to be fair, inclusive, and ensure that all employees achieve their maximum potential.

When it comes to modern talent management practices, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) play a very important role, as organizations are noticing that creating an environment where every employee feels included and appreciated leads to better performance and innovation (McKinsey & Company 2020). To support this new approach, organizations have to change the way they attract, develop, and retain employees to make sure that they offer support and also benefit from a diverse workforce.

At the same time, inclusive leadership has become an important factor in creating and maintaining an inclusive workplace, as they are those who actively try to create an atmosphere of respect, trust, and psychological safety, allowing all employees to do their best work. These leaders use strategies to promote inclusivity within teams and address biases that might affect the contribution of these diverse employees (Bourke & Titus 2019).

As more people become aware of neurodiversity in the workplace, talent management is also growing more complex than ever before. Neurodiversity states that neurological differences like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia bring unique strengths and perspectives that can greatly benefit organizations. On the other hand, they also require tailored support and inclusive practices so that neurodivergent individuals perform better in their roles (Austin & Pisano 2017).

This thesis takes a better look at these aspects of talent management within diverse workplaces, with the goal of offering insights and practical solutions for supporting inclusive organizational practices. By looking into talent management strategies, inclusive leadership, and neurodiversity, this study aims to bring a contribution to the larger conversation on how organizations can create environments where all employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

1.2 Development task and research questions

This thesis's development task is to establish a training program for leaders to improve talent management in a diverse workplace. This program aims to give organizational leaders and HR professionals the tools and knowledge they require to employ a diverse employee, develop them, and keep them. This thesis poses several essential research questions as part of its preparation for a training program:

1. What talent management approaches are successful in promoting workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion?
2. What leadership qualities and abilities contribute to inclusivity, and how can they be integrated into the working environment?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities for talent managers when it comes to managing neurodivergent employees?
4. What are the best practices for developing a training program that promotes an inclusive talent management style?

By answering these research questions, this dissertation expects to have a clearer understanding of what can be done to improve how talent is managed while fostering inclusivity in diverse and inclusive organization cultures. The reason of this research is to design a training program whose insights can be used to improve how an organization treats and manages its talent, making workspaces more innovative, transformative, and peaceful.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study would have a great contribution to the fields of human resource management, organizational development, and leadership as findings would lead to recommendations and a series of solutions to managing diverse talent. As organizations in the whole world struggle with the challenges of globalization, technological progress and demographic changes, research that aims to find solutions on how to manage diverse employees and utilize their potential to a maximum extent is becoming more relevant. This research would give the organization a basis for analyzing and implementing new strategies on how to effectively manage diverse employees and would sketch out a framework to attract, develop, and retain members of the diverse workforce, all of which contributes to creating a more inclusive workplace and makes the organization more competitive in the business world.

The study also emphasizes how important DE&I strategies are when it comes to talent management and provides insights into how organizations can use and integrate these

principles into their practices. Any organization wishing to give its employees opportunities for success must have an atmosphere that is diverse, equitable, and non-exclusive.

By outlining the essential traits of inclusive leaders, their abilities, and conduct, the research provides an outline for any preparation and training program aimed at promoting inclusivity. Inclusive leadership should be prioritized while striving to build a culture where each member is fully integrated, appreciated, and empowered. Additionally, neurodiverse employees present both unique skills and challenges that may be developed or resolved through appropriate measures and ensuring that they have the requisite support frameworks in place also fosters an inclusive and innovative culture.

The main output of this research is the development of a training plan that is tailored to the specific needs of leaders in diverse workplaces, and designed to be a useful and practical tool that can be used by both HR professionals and leaders to effectively implement talent management practices within the organization.

Finally, the study touches upon the issues of bias and psychological safety, which are relevant to any workplace and suggests certain strategies to resolve these issues and make all the employees, regardless of their personal characteristics and experiences, feel safe and motivated. Since it incorporates strategies and tools that can assist organizations in building diverse, inclusive, and high-performing teams, this study is meant to facilitate the shrinking of the theoretical-practical gap in diverse talent management.

The findings of this research will not only be useful for HR professionals and leaders of organizations but will also help develop a comprehensive approach to diversity and inclusion to improve the situation in many related spheres.

In this thesis, ChatGPT has been used for phrasing suggestions, to make the text smoother, and the suggested phrases were rephrased as needed.

2 Knowledge basis

In this chapter, the main components of creation diversity, promoting inclusion, and cultivating talent in the workplace are discussed. The need for organizations to assist their workers in their professional development through training and other educational facilitation, as well as the significance of diversity while locating the right employees and maintaining their engagement, is analyzed. Moreover, the importance of providing a secure and trusted work environment for everyone is accentuated, as are the most critical features of a Great Leader who will encourage the team to create such an environment.

It also defines and discusses neurodiversity, with a focus on understanding and appreciating the different ways in which people think, learn, or work. It addresses the most common neurodiverse conditions: autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, and explores the importance of overcoming these biases at organizational and individual level, to make sure everyone has equal opportunities to succeed.

2.1 Talent management in diverse workplaces

The purpose of this section is to examine more closely the interactions related to the field of talent management in modern organizations: definition of talent management strategies, support of diversity and inclusion in the recruitment of employees, and methodologies to develop and retain diverse talent. The knowledge provided here can serve as a point of application to manage talent effectively in diverse conditions.

2.1.1 Defining talent management strategies

Talent management is a process that involves “a systematic series of various HR processes and practices to ensure that the organization has the right people in the right jobs with the right skill sets at the right time”, or, in other words, the integration of the best people and the best organizations. Talent management goes beyond the traditional HR functions and promotes a proactive and long-term perspective in managing the organization’s employees (Berger & Berger 2011; Silzer & Dowell 2010).

There are essential elements in managing talent that together play a significant role in enhancing an organization’s human resources strategy. One crucial aspect is talent recruitment, which focuses on attracting and hiring individuals whose skills and qualities match the requirements of the organization (Berger & Berger 2011).

The process of talent recruitment typically consists of phases beginning with workforce planning and prediction followed by sourcing, hiring, selection orientation and ultimately retaining and developing talent (Silzer & Dowell 2010).

In the stage of workforce planning and prediction organizations evaluate their current and future needs, identify skill shortages, and align their talent recruitment tactics with broader business objectives. Subsequently during the sourcing phase organizations search for potential candidates through various means such as job portals, social media platforms, professional networks, and collaborations. Employers need to source effectively to create a diverse and well-qualified candidate pool. During the recruitment stage, employers interact with potential candidates, evaluate their qualifications, and provide information about their firm and their open roles. Interviews, evaluations, and other procedures can be used by firms to assess qualifications. Subsequent is the selection phase, where employers seek to select the

most qualified applicants in terms of their skill, diversity, values, and general fit with the company. This stage can contain extensive interviewing, reference checking, and sometimes ability testing (Cappelli 2008). The next step in the employer-employee engagement process is the onboarding of newly selected candidates by incorporating them as part of the organization. This process is meant to introduce new employees to different aspects of the company, including policies, culture, and their role as employees to facilitate their stay and maximal possible work output.

Once they become part of the organization, employees need to be developed, focusing on programs specifically designed to provide training and other forms of development to employees geared to increase their expertise and experience (Rothwell 2010). Succession planning is also vital to the process, as identifying and grooming high potential employees for leadership roles allows an easy transition whenever changes take place in the organization (Rothwell 2010). Performance management is critical to talent management, including setting expectations, supplying constructive feedback, and rewarding high performers to keep them motivated and engaged (Silzer & Dowell 2010). Finally, measures to retain the acquired talent are crucial and include competitive compensations, development opportunities, and creating an excellent, positive working atmosphere. (Berger & Berger 2011).

Talent management thus embodies a series of purposeful and cohesive efforts to recruit, develop, inspire, and retain a high-performing and committed workforce. These efforts are intended to realign the knowledge base, proficiencies, and inspirations of members to the goals and visions of the organization. It is a method that involves the entire employee lifecycle, from hiring to education and retention efforts.

Strategies aimed at talent management play a pivotal role in driving organizational success across various dimensions. Effective talent management ensures that the right individuals are placed in the right roles, thereby contributing to improved overall organizational performance (Berger & Berger 2011). Moreover, a strategic approach to talent management helps increase employee engagement as people who feel valued and perceive opportunities for growth are more likely to be engaged and committed to their work (Silzer & Dowell 2010). The positive impact of talent management extends to the realm of innovation and creativity, as a diverse and skilled workforce brings varied perspectives and ideas, thereby fostering creative problem-solving within the organization (Berger & Berger 2011).

In a business environment that's continuously changing, the organization's ability to adapt has an important role in the organization's success. A well-managed talent pool enhances the organization's ability to navigate and respond effectively to shifts in the business landscape (Silzer & Dowell 2010). Importantly, strategic talent management contributes to cost savings by reducing turnover costs and minimizing the need for frequent recruitment, saving both

time and resources (Berger & Berger 2011). Beyond the internal impact, talent management strategies also influence an organization's external perception. Effective talent management practices make the organization more attractive in the job market and create a positive employer brand (Silzer & Dowell 2010). Similarly, talent management strategies such as thorough succession planning, mitigate the risks associated with a deficit in leadership personnel and guarantees the continuous availability of the needed number of leaders in the future. (Rothwell 2010).

2.1.2 Diversity, equity, and inclusion in talent acquisition

Mor Barak (2014, 136) states that “Workforce diversity refers to the division of the workforce into distinction categories that (a) have a perceived commonality within a given cultural or national context and that (b) impact potentially harmful or beneficial employment outcomes such as job opportunities, treatment in the workplace, and promotion prospects—irrespective of job-related skills and qualifications.”

There is a broad distinction between diversity and inclusion. Diversity is concerned with the building of an inclusive organizational culture in which people of all identities and styles can be fully and critically themselves while also contributing to the corporation as equivalent, full members. That is, inclusive organizations prioritize fairness, collaboration, flexibility, and leveraging diversity to give all participants equal chances to contribute and improve the ultimate realization of their aspirations, regardless of background or social identity. (Ferdman 2017).

Equity can be defined as “acknowledging the multiple ways in which some people face barriers (both visible and invisible) to their success and working to dismantle these barriers” (Hangman 2021).

Diversity is characterized as the mere presence of differences within a workforce, while inclusion is distinguished by the creation of a culture in which those differences are meaningful, valued, and inherent in organizational practice. Consequently, whereas diversity management has been mostly devoted to increasing the existence of underrepresented individuals in organizational positions, equity and inclusion have been concerned with increasing the representation of underrepresented individuals in the decision-making, resource, and promotion process (Roberson 2006). In other words, diversity is representation, and inclusion is collaboration and participation. A “culturally diverse” organization may have workers from many underrepresented categories who nonetheless think and feel included in the company. An “inclusive” organization, on the other hand, is one in which such workers actively add to innovation, productivity, and organizational success. (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez 2018).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) have significantly influenced the talent acquisition strategy and reflect the commitment to ensure that workplaces are inclusive and that individual differences are accepted. For this purpose, more organizations have realized the benefits of having people with different perspectives and backgrounds. Therefore, talent acquisition now promotes inclusion at every stage of the process.

The talent acquisition process is the most important step because it helps ensure that an organization is adequately staffed. Additionally, it helps ensure that each employee's skills align with the desired outcomes, thereby enhancing overall performance (Silzer & Dowell 2010). Talent acquisition is also crucial for promoting diversity and inclusivity within the workforce, thereby fostering creativity and novelty (Cappelli 2008). Moreover, talent acquisition is critical in enhancing organizational development as it helps identify people capable of steering success in the organization in the long run.

In the sourcing phase, organizations have gone above and beyond to source applicants using all possible channels, including targeted outreach through professional networks, partnerships with organizations that focus on diversity, and using platforms that cater to underrepresented groups (Cox & Blake 1991). This sourcing focus helps organizations increase the talent pool and makes sure it includes a variety of perspectives.

Creating an inclusive talent acquisition process largely depends on recruitment efforts. Job postings and promotional materials that include information about an organization's commitment to diversity can help set the tone for inclusivity throughout the entire workplace culture. Additionally, using diverse interview panels can minimize possible biases and ensure fair evaluation to promote inclusive selection processes (Chamberlain 2016).

Onboarding is another crucial point of reinforcing the message and commitment to diversity and inclusion. Including diversity training in the onboarding process would allow new hires to familiarize themselves with the organization's values and expectations, promoting an inclusive culture from the very beginning. Moreover, employee resource groups or mentorship programs could be used to further ensure that diverse candidates are fully integrated into the organizational culture (Cox & Blake 1991).

However, the significance of diversity and inclusion in recruitment efforts goes beyond compliance and ethical perspectives. Studies show that diverse teams are more creative, innovative, and capable of better problem-solving, which fosters organizational performance. Therefore, organizations should aim to acquire and retain diverse talents to achieve competitiveness in innovation and performance (Cox & Blake 1991; Ely & Thomas 2001).

2.1.3 Development and retention of diverse talent

In today's global business landscape where everything is connected, it is necessary to have a great management of diverse talent in order to be successful as an organization. Diverse talent management in diverse workplaces implies the development of inclusive processes and structures that acknowledge and enhance the talents and strengths of people with diverse backgrounds. Embracing diversity is both a moral commitment and a strategic advantage as diversification promotes creativity, innovation, and problem-solving, ensuring a competitive edge (Cox & Blake 1991; Ely & Thomas 2001).

The most effective strategy for recruiting diverse talent is to actively seek candidates from underrepresented groups, and make sure to have leadership development programs in place so that everyone gets equal opportunities in career advancement (Olson & Jackson 2009; Thomas & Ely 1996). Beyond that, organizations need to build a culture where employees feel valued, respected, and encouraged to bring their unique perspectives to the table. As a result, by integrating diversity into talent management practices, organizations achieve two things: they mirror the diversity of their client base and build a diversified and adaptive workforce that has great chances to succeed in an environment that's constantly changing.

When it comes to talent development, organizations can create targeted training programs and initiatives for the specific needs of underrepresented groups. For example, group mentoring, which aligns experienced members of the racial or gender minority with new hires, is likely to help women and African Americans build successful careers in the organization (Ragins & Cotton 1999). Accessible and unique development programs also facilitate diversity since different learners need different stimuli to absorb information and learn (Cox & Blake 1991).

Without doubt, workplace training has a lot of benefits for employees and organizations in general, as they help employees develop and succeed by increasing their skill and knowledge, helping them better and more effectively cope with their job duties (Noe 2017). Achieving higher levels of individual competence leads to increased productivity and work quality. Furthermore, such concepts and programs motivate employees and bring them satisfaction, becoming a vital tool for decreasing turnover (Noe 2017; Saks & Haccoun 2016).

In the competitive modern business world, it is necessary to be able to upskill, reskill and adapt to the market demands in technology, industrial standards, and organizational processes to remain competitive (Noe 2017). Training also plays an important role in creating and maintaining a positive and inclusive organizational culture, as it promotes a sense of belonging and shared values among employees (Saks & Haccoun 2016). This, in turn, improves teamwork and collaboration and increases overall employee engagement and job satisfaction. Plus, training can lead to cost savings, as employees that are well-trained make less mistakes,

thus reducing the need for rework and the costs that are connected to it, so it is also a great strategic investment for the organization (Noe 2017).

Organizations need to implement inclusive practices that recognize and effectively leverage the strengths individuals from various backgrounds and perspectives bring, as fostering a culture of diverse talent management is not only a social responsibility, but also a strategic approach for long-term success (Thomas & Ely 1996).

The leadership pipeline is another important area of focus while developing diverse talent. For example, organizations that are committed to diversity should identify high-potential underrepresented candidates and expose them to opportunities for leadership development such as participation in leadership training programs, challenging assignments, networking opportunities, and, importantly, mentoring by senior leaders (Olson & Jackson 2009). By intentionally cultivating a diverse leadership pipeline, organizations can ensure that future leadership roles reflect the broader demographics of the workforce.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) are another important component of talent development. A platform allowing employees with shared characteristics (such as minority status or gender) and interests, can contribute to talent development by promoting a sense of belonging, networking opportunities, supported by inclusive policies (Olson & Jackson 2009).

Diverse talent development should be integrated into the organization's overall strategy. Specifically, this involves increasing the alignment between diversity and business goals, regularly evaluating diversity efforts' effectiveness, creating a system that values and rewards all employees' contributions. (Thomas & Ely 1996).

In conclusion, to manage talent in diverse workplaces effectively, organizations need to develop comprehensive systems ranging from recruitment and training, to culture and learning. Diverse talent may be nurtured by recruiting for diversity and aptitude, creating a culture of inclusivity and equity in hiring from the start, and offering diversity and inclusion training in workplace learning. Organizations must also focus on developing and retaining diverse employees by offering equitable opportunities for career progression. Prioritizing diversity and inclusion in administrative processes can help organizations extract the most from their existing workforce by fostering a culture of innovation and success.

2.2 Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership is a dynamic and vital approach that is not limited to recognizing the existence of diversity. Inclusive leadership creates an atmosphere in which every individual feels welcome, heard, and motivated. Its principles are leaders' awareness of their

unconscious biases, their openness to various perspectives, and their commitment to providing equal possibilities for all employees (Kuknor & Bhattacharya 2022).

Inclusive leaders create an environment that promotes collaboration, innovation, and a sense of belonging to the workplace. Cox & Blake (1991) state that these leaders generally improve an employee's total engagement, satisfaction, and organizational performance. Despite that, this style is not universally applicable for everyone, so it requires flexibility and the constant desire to develop and strive for the better. It was proven that the organization headed by an inclusive manager can easily find, retain, and realize the potential of its employees.

2.2.1 Characteristics of inclusive leaders

Inclusive leaders possess a distinctive set of characteristics that promote an organizational culture where diversity, equity, and inclusion are encouraged. Self-awareness is among the first characteristics, as inclusive leadership begins with the leader's understanding. When leaders recognize their own biases and strive to understand how they influence their decision-making, an environment of inclusion is created (Bourke & Titus 2019). Empathy also plays a vital role, as inclusive leaders demonstrate a genuine understanding and appreciation of the diverse experiences and perspectives of their team members (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan 2004).

In addition, inclusive leaders advocate for equity and fairness and address systemic inequalities, ensuring such problems are identified and rectified through organizational policies and approaches (Bourke & Titus 2019). They demonstrate cultural intelligence and humility in developing and maintaining diverse and inclusive social systems, including working with individuals from different backgrounds. Moreover, they fully engage and learn how to communicate openly, creating an environment where all viewpoints are expressed. They also promote collaborative working where people with diverse perspectives have a recognized contribution (Rock & Grant 2016).

Another characteristic of inclusive leadership is effective communication. When leaders communicate openly and recommend an assertive exchange of ideas, they are likely to foster an inclusive workplace in which diverse opinions are heard and valued (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa 2012). Moreover, inclusive leaders encourage unity and teamwork while acknowledging the advantages of different perspectives when solving problems and innovating (Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman 1998).

Finally, adaptability is another significant attribute of inclusive leadership. Leaders who are adaptable in meeting the unique needs and preferences of other groups and individuals achieve the long-term success of inclusion efforts within organizations (Mor Barak et al. 1998).

The above discussion explains inclusive leadership, including seven characteristics such as self-awareness, empathy, equity commitment, cultural intelligence, communication, unity, and adaptability. Such attributes jointly create an inclusive organizational culture that not only values diversity but also assists every individual to realize their full potential.

2.2.2 Strategies for fostering inclusivity in teams (DE&I)

The foundational principles of a thriving and equitable workplace can be encapsulated by the principles of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion or DE&I. Diversity is defined as the full spectrum of human experience and identity that makes each individual unique. This includes race, ethnic ancestry, gender, age, sexual orientation, and ability, among other attributes. Equity is understood as creating the conditions for full participation and access to opportunities for all people. This implies the absence of barriers for one group based on another's historical privilege. Inclusion, according to Shore et al. (2018), is "a right for each individual to participate fully in the organization's activities without fear of idiosyncratic harm" or, in other words, the intentional effort to create an environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and included in decision-making processes and organizational culture.

Organizations that focus on DE&I enjoy a broader range of views and experiences, which in turn makes their problem-solving more creative. Innovation flourishes in such an environment, one where the many different voices combine to create beauty (Bourke & Titus 2019; Cox & Blake 1991). Also, an inclusive workplace environment leads to increased employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Overall, it has a positive effect on company performance as well. (Rock & Grant 2016). In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the need for DE&I in the corporate world. Organizations are now incorporating DE&I into their overall strategies, from having different hiring practices all the way to setting clear calls for inclusive policies and training programs. This shift is symptomatic not only of a real appetite for change but also of companies recognizing the positive contribution diverse and inclusive workplaces have on employee well-being, organizational culture, and ultimately business success.

When it comes to creating and fostering inclusivity in teams, a critical factor is the role of the leaders. Indeed, they are in a position from which they can actively champion diversity and inclusion and model inclusive behavior and ensure that all members of a team have equal opportunity to contribute and advance (Bourke & Titus 2019). Leadership commitment is foundational to the success of any DE&I initiative. Creating a culture of open communication is also essential for inclusivity. Teams should encourage honest, transparent conversations where all people feel comfortable expressing their opinions and any concerns; all these build trust and fortify the team (Gardner et al. 2012). Establishing ERGs (Employee Resource Groups) focused on various aspects of diversity can also be a great tool when it comes to

promoting and fostering inclusivity, as it provides a platform for team members to connect, share experiences, and contribute to organizational initiatives.

Another effective way of ensuring inclusivity and promoting it is the establishment of ERG's, Employee Resource Groups. They can focus on various demographic aspects of diversity and are an excellent forum for team members to connect, share their experiences, and participate in organizational initiatives. Additionally, treating people with respect and acknowledging and respecting everyone's rights and dignity is instrumental to an inclusion policy (Bourke & Titus 2019).

The implementation of effective diverse recruitment and retention strategies is essential in the development and maintenance of an inclusive team culture. The journey begins with the recruitment of new employees, which facilitates the selection of human resources from diverse backgrounds. For example, organizations can adopt blind recruitment approaches, which minimize subconscious biases, utilize diverse sourcing channels, and apply inclusive language in job descriptions (Cox & Blake 1991). In addition, the human resource department can also utilize employee recommendations, build collaborations with different professional associations, and attend job fairs targeting underrepresented populations to access a broader pool of potential candidates (Bourke & Titus 2019).

The regular examination of diverse recruitment and retention strategies is essential in ensuring continuous improvement. Organizations can collect feedback from employees, frequently consider diversity metrics, and adjust their performance approaches to meet the changing demands of a distinct personnel pool. By integrating these strategies in the recruitment and retention procedures, organizations can not only establish a workforce that mirrors that of society, but they can also convert the strengths of the unique abilities and perspectives of every worker in a society of inclusivity.

Creating a workplace culture that values diversity and inclusion is essential for retaining diverse talent. This can be achieved by promoting inclusive leadership, whereby a leader actively champions diversity, models inclusive behaviors, and creates an offering where each team member feels heard and respected (Bourke & Titus 2019). Once diverse talent is recruited, companies also need to create and implement retention strategies that foster inclusivity and support the professional growth of all employees. Mentorship programs can provide guidance and support, particularly for individuals from underrepresented groups, helping them better understand organizational dynamics and figure out what role and career path are best suited for them (Ragins & Cotton 1999). Organizations could also provide development opportunities; for instance, the company presently has need-based training and management programs to guarantee that team members are equipped with the necessary resources to carry on their professions and keep them up-to-date (Bourke & Titus 2019).

Diversity and inclusion training represent one of the most important tools for creating an inclusive team working environment by increasing awareness, knowledge, and skills regarding diversity-related issues. These programs are designed to teach team members about the importance of differences, the need to eliminate biases, and how to create a workplace that sees and recognizes diversity in all its fashions. Specifically, organizations implement D&I training to reduce unconscious biases, enhance cultural competence, and promote an inclusive working environment where everyone feels respected and equal. Effective D&I training involves a combination of interactive workshops, educational seminars, and experiential learning requirements that are designed to introduce diversity training as more than a mandatory compliance and legal framework but rather than a mindset and behavior-change approach. For example, training on how to reduce and mitigate biases in the process of making decisions, how to speak and communicate inclusively, and the impact of microaggressions on team behavior could be part of such training (Gardner et al. 2012).

At the same time, any D&I training should be adapted to the specific needs and challenges of the organization and each of its teams. To make the training more relevant and engaging, interactive discussions of case studies and real-life scenarios will also be included. In addition, the provision of sitting education opportunities will keep team members informed about emerging issues and help them develop and improve a diversity awareness to create a more inclusive team environment (Bourke & Titus 2019).

Research suggests that, if well-designed, D&I training can have a positive impact, including leading to an increased awareness of diversity issues, improved team dynamics, and better performance company-wide (Gardner et al. 2012; Bourke & Titus 2019). However, it's important to keep in mind that D&I training is most effective when it's part of an organizational commitment to diversity and inclusion, and it's also supported by inclusive leadership and inclusive policies (Bourke & Titus 2019).

To conclude, D&I training is a useful strategy for creating a more inclusive team by empowering employees to become more aware of the diversity around them and giving them the skills and knowledge they need to create a more respectful and collaborative workplace.

2.2.3 Promoting psychological safety and trust

Creating an atmosphere of psychological safety and trust is necessary for ensuring communication openness, collaboration, and innovativeness. Psychological safety entails a climate that allows team members to take interpersonal risks, such as sharing ideas, expressing concerns, or admitting mistakes without fear or unfavorable consequences (Edmondson 1999). Trust, on the other hand, underpins a strong team dynamic and is expressed through mutual respect, reliability, and belief in the intent and competence of others (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman 1995).

One of the primary ways to promote psychological safety is to encourage open dialogue. Team leaders are exemplary showcases for open conversation, and their ability to communicate is crucial in maintaining a conducive environment for idea generation and implementation. Open dialogue entails active listening, thinking, diverse opinions and fair critique (Edmondson 1999). Maintaining the norm that all team members' views and opinions are respected creates an enabling culture for all to feel included, heard, and understood (Edmondson 2018). Consistent and transparent communication, reliability and integrity are all needed when trying to build trust (Mayer et al. 1995). Leaders can foster trust by showing consistency in their actions, following through on commitments, and being transparent when making decisions (Mayer et al. 1995). Additionally, creating opportunities for team members to discuss and understand each other's strengths and weaknesses will guide closer collaboration. (Edmondson 2018).

If combined with the efforts designed to enhance vulnerability reactions and personal revelations, team-building activities may help create psychological safety and trust. If people feel safe to behave authentically and vulnerably, share their challenges with colleagues, and seek help and understanding from their peers, they may develop camaraderie and rapport among themselves (Edmondson 2018). Psychologically safe teams are considered more prone to collaborative problem-solving, knowledge sharing and innovation, and heightened overall performance (Edmondson 1999; Mayer et al. 1995). Psychological safety characterizes an inclusive environment in which people embrace their authentic selves and hence feel a sense of belonging and are willing to be open. Authenticity and exposure, in their turn, constitute essential principles of the DE&I concept. When people feel safe to share their stories, it contributes to the establishment of a diverse team culture (Edmondson 1999; Bourke & Titus 2019).

Therefore, it is crucial to note that psychological safety and trust are critical components of successful DE&I strategies. For instance, when team members trust each other and feel psychologically safe, dialogue and collaboration are more likely, both vital for identifying one's unconscious biases and disassembling systemic inequalities (Edmondson 1999; Mayer et al. 1995). Given that people are more likely to trust their leaders in a psychologically safe environment as they feel more secure in their own skin from constant judgment, trust is of utmost importance to achieve organizational goals of diversity and inclusion (Bourke & Titus 2019; Mayer et al. 1995).

Lastly, the connection between psychological safety and trust and the objectives of DE&I in terms of talent attraction and retention should be highlighted. Organizations with high psychological safety and trust levels are more likely to attract talent and maintain it long term, which is essential for any organization wanting to nurture diverse teams (Edmondson 2018; Bourke & Titus 2019).

2.3 Understanding neurodiversity in the workplace

Neurodiversity is a concept that is rapidly gaining relevance in today's changing workplace. More than just a variation on traditional diversity and inclusion, neurodiversity is a complete transformation of the way in which we define neurological conditions. It is perceived that neurodiverse conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia are normal neurological dissimilarities rather than a deficit. As a result, the neurodiversity model does not only imply creating a work environment where cognitive diversity is acknowledged but also developing a culture where what neurodiverse employees lack in one area they make up for in several others. In the working community, a diverse tapestry of cognitive perspectives improves innovation, creativity, and problem-solving (Austin & Pisano 2017). Indeed, one of the most significant advantages of a neurodiverse employee is that their skills are complementary and reinforcing. Fittingly, accommodations for a neurodiversity-friendly setting are not a one-size fits all solution. By providing flexible accommodations and a sensory-friendly atmosphere, workplaces can help their workers leverage their diverse strengths to meet the business objectives and contribute to the collective success.

2.3.1 Definition of neurodiversity and common neurodivergent conditions

Neurodiversity is a concept and paradigm that aims to redefine neurological differences as diversity rather than pathology. Neurodiversity refers to the idea that certain neurological differences are natural and evolutionarily grounded variances in the human genome rather than disorders, and contribute to our diversity of thought, perception, or experience (Singer 1999). The concept of neurodiversity was developed in the late 1990s by Australian sociologist Judy Singer. The perspective has since rapidly evolved in the areas of inclusive education, equal opportunity employment, and other social areas.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by challenges in social communication and interaction, as well as restricted and repetitive behaviors. Individuals with ASD may have difficulty understanding non-verbal cues, maintaining eye contact, and engaging in reciprocal social interactions. Moreover, they may exhibit intense focus on specific interests and display repetitive movements or adherence to routines. ASD is a spectrum, meaning that individuals can vary widely in their strengths and challenges (American Psychiatric Association 2013).

ADHD is another neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Individuals with ADHD may struggle with sustained attention on tasks, have difficulty organizing activities, and be prone to impulsive decision-making (American Psychiatric Association 2013). ADHD often manifests in childhood and can persist into adulthood, impacting various aspects of daily life, including academic and occupational performance.

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that primarily affects reading and writing skills. Individuals with dyslexia may experience challenges in decoding words, recognizing sight words, and understanding the phonological structure of language. Despite these difficulties, individuals with dyslexia often demonstrate strengths in areas such as problem-solving, creative thinking, and visual processing (Shaywitz & Shaywitz 2008). Dyslexia does not reflect a lack of intelligence but rather a difference in processing written information.

At the heart of the neurodiversity concept lies the belief that neurological diversity is exactly that - a form of diversity that should be recognized and valued by society just as diversity in gender, ethnicity, and physical abilities, or other spheres. Advocates of the movement reject the discourse of the medical model which pathologizes neurodivergent conditions and defines them strictly in terms of deficits. Neurodiversity-based approaches value the strengths and idiosyncrasies that ND individuals bring to different spheres of life, including work.

With that, the workplace is becoming an increasingly important locus for the implementation of neurodiversity-based ideas and values. As companies strive to be innovative and realize the benefits of a diversified team, the strategic need for accommodating and encouraging neurodiversity grows. Furthermore, various sources suggest ND individuals often exhibit unique skills and ways of thinking, such as pattern recognition, work ethic, an eye for detail, and creativity. Some researchers point out to several relevant meta-analyses on creativity's enhanced overall effects (Austin & Pisano 2017).

Overall, while the movement has already achieved success in raising widespread awareness of ND-related topics and issues, enforcing its ideas and principles in the workplace remains an important social goal. By creating an environment where these individuals no longer only have to work with the unique challenges neurodivergence often brings on its own, many companies and organizations are in a perfect position to follow the lead in changing their corporate culture and civilization.

2.3.2 Benefits of neurodiversity in organizations

Embracing neurodiversity in the workplace yields a multitude of advantages, significantly contributing to organizational success and fostering innovation. The inclusion of neurodivergent individuals cultivates a diverse and dynamic work environment, positively influencing various facets of organizational functioning. Neurodivergent individuals often bring unique perspectives and cognitive strengths, leading to innovative problem-solving approaches. This diversity of thought translates into creative solutions for complex challenges, providing organizations with a competitive edge in an ever-evolving business landscape (Austin & Pisano 2017).

Moreover, neurodiversity promotes a culture of inclusion and respect for differences, enhancing team dynamics by fostering collaboration and mutual understanding among team members (Hagner & Cooney 2005). This inclusive environment contributes to higher levels of job satisfaction and team cohesion. Accommodating neurodivergent individuals often involves tailoring work processes to align with their strengths, resulting in more efficient workflows and increased productivity. Leveraging the specific skills of neurodivergent individuals positively impacts overall team performance (Hagner & Cooney 2005).

By embracing neurodiversity, organizations widen their talent pool, recognizing the strengths of neurodivergent individuals and tapping into a valuable and often underutilized segment of the workforce. This not only contributes to a more diverse workplace but also helps organizations attract and retain top talent (Austin & Pisano 2017). Furthermore, prioritizing neurodiversity sends a powerful message about an organization's commitment to inclusivity and diversity. This commitment fosters a positive organizational culture where all employees feel valued and appreciated for their unique contributions, attracting a diverse workforce, and promoting employee engagement and loyalty (Hagner & Cooney 2005).

In conclusion, embracing neurodiversity is not merely a social responsibility; it is a strategic advantage for organizations. The cognitive diversity brought by neurodivergent individuals enriches organizational culture, fuels innovation, and positions organizations to thrive in a global and competitive marketplace.

2.3.3 Bias related to neurodivergence

Neurodivergent individuals often face biases rooted in misconceptions and stereotypes, and these biases translate into many barriers in various areas of life, including education and employment. The negative stereotypes surrounding neurodivergence create misconceptions about an individual's ability and inabilities creating an unwarranted view and making the integration of such people in the community much more difficult. Researchers continue to work on providing evidence that proves the pervasiveness of bias against neurodivergent people in hiring decisions and career advancements (Brosnan & Mills 2016). Common biases include the assumption that neurodivergent individuals may lack social skills or struggle with teamwork, overlooking the unique strengths and perspectives they bring to the workplace (Baldwin & Costley 2016). Becoming aware of them and addressing these biases is the first step in creating inclusive environments in which neurodivergent individuals can bring their valuable skills and thrive professionally.

2.3.3.1 Stereotypes and misconceptions

In the professional field, people with neurodivergent conditions, for example, autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, encounter some of the most widespread stereotypes and misconceptions that can adversely affect their professional situation.

When it comes to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), stereotypes often revolve around communication and socialization problems. This frequently leads to the incorrect conclusion that people with autism cannot work in teams, do not have or show no empathy, and have limited problem solving skills. In fact, people with ASD have many cognitive advantages, such as attention to the smallest details, precision, and ways of thinking that often help create innovations (Hagner & Cooney 2005).

ADHD, characterized by traits like distractibility and impulsivity, is often subject to stereotypes depicting individuals as unreliable or disorganized. The truth is that, in real life, people with ADHD are very creative, able to think outside the box, enjoy multitasking, and think on their feet. Dispelling these stereotypes is vital for recognizing the unique cognitive strengths that individuals with ADHD contribute to the workplace (Nigg 2013).

Stereotypes about dyslexia generally focus on reading and writing hardships, which make it seem like they have lower IQs or that they are careless when it comes to details. Nonetheless, many dyslexics are creative thinkers adept at solving problems and may even be able paint a picture in their mind just by glancing at the scene. The misconceptions of these abilities need to be corrected if we are to make full use of all talents available in modern life (Shaywitz & Shaywitz 2008).

Addressing these stereotypes and misconceptions necessitates cultivating a workplace culture that values neurodiversity and promotes understanding of the distinctive contributions that individuals with neurodivergent conditions can make to organizational success.

2.3.3.2 Impact on hiring and career progression

The hiring process commonly suffers from biases, stereotypes, and misconceptions that serve as barriers for neurodivergent individuals. These stereotypes influence virtually all stages of hiring processes, from resume screening to body language during interviews, and shape the neurodivergent candidates' experience. In the case of Autism Spectrum Disorder, stereotypes concerning social difficulties and apparent problem-solving limitations introduce bias into hiring. If a hiring manager assumes that the person with ASD is incapable of solving a complicated issue and prioritizes social skills, they hinder the neurodivergent person's chance

to employment. A biased professional may then hire a less suitable ASD-affected person, which can negatively influence job chances for an individual (Hagner & Cooney 2005).

Similarly, Biases against individuals with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder plague the hiring process as well. A hiring manager who regards individuals with ADHD as unreliable or disoriented may cause them to overlook the creativity and adaptability that individuals with this condition often bring to their roles, leading to missed opportunities for both the candidate and the organization (Nigg 2013).

In the case of dyslexia, biases related to reading difficulties can result in misconceptions about the person's ability to tackle complex concepts and pay attention to details. Hiring managers influenced by these biases may fail to recognize the strong problem-solving and creative thinking abilities of individuals with dyslexia, potentially excluding them from consideration for certain roles (Shaywitz & Shaywitz 2008).

The detrimental effect of biases, stereotypes, and misconceptions on the hiring of neurodivergent individuals ultimately damages both people looking for work and organizations seeking a diverse pool of talents. Addressing these biases requires a concerted effort towards awareness, education, and the establishment of inclusive hiring practices. Only by changing the established prejudices, one can notice the special knowledge that neurodivergent people possess and their universal advantages. This approach allows organizations to develop diversity and use the opportunities that a neurodiverse staff opens up.

Further, these biases continue to manifest themselves in the career growth of neurodivergent persons. Thus, for people with ASD, ADHD, or dyslexia, stereotyping can become an obstacle for further skills development, lack of mentorship opportunities, and leadership positions, thus hindering one's professional development in the future life (Hagner & Cooney 2005; Nigg 2013; Shaywitz & Shaywitz 2008). It means that it is necessary to work with biases at every step of one's career path. Educational and informative programs, mentorship plans, and special adjustments can be considered a potential tool to eliminate such hurdles and enable a neurodiverse person to fulfill their career goals fairly.

2.3.3.3 Strategies for bias mitigation

Mitigating the effect of bias is one of the steps that need to be taken in promoting diversity and creating equal opportunities for all candidates. There are several strategies that reduce bias and contribute to a more inclusive environment during the hiring process, and they consist of the following:

- a. Awareness and educational campaigns: an important step to mitigate the effect of unconscious bias is to start awareness and educational programs that focus on the different forms of biases that can influence decision-making during the hiring process, as they can help stakeholders identify and overcome it (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox 2012).
- b. Using structured interview: personal opinions regarding a specific candidate can influence the decision-making when using unstructured interview. Having a predetermined structure and evaluation criteria increases the fairness and consistency in the evaluation process (Rivera 2012).
- c. Diverse interview panels: another way to fight individual biases and have a more thorough and objective evaluation of the candidates is by including diverse perspectives in the interview process, as they assess the qualifications and potential from a wider angle (Cox & Blake 1991). The relevant professional development training should instill the importance of assembling interview panels from experts with different backgrounds and experiences.
- d. Blind recruitment practices: a practice of removing personally identifiable information from the applicants' materials in the first round of application review, as this kind of screening is meant to prevent gender, ethnicity, or other biases (Riach & Rich 2002). Anonymizing the materials and always practicing blind recruitment can be a powerful element against biases.
- e. Regular bias training refresher courses: just as with any other type of training, training on bias is not a one-time event. Companies and institutions can benefit from regularly scheduled refresher courses that would reinforce the importance of fair hiring practices. These should include updates on new biases as well as examples of successful cases and conversations between decision-makers to ensure a learning culture (Carter, Onyeador, & Lewis 2020).
- f. Data monitoring and analysis: institutions and organizations should be encouraged to monitor and analyze their hiring data. By regularly looking at who gets to work and who gets promoted, an organization can identify the areas where bias persists and make more informed decisions (Dobbin & Kalev 2016).
- g. Inclusive leadership development: training programs should include topics not only related to understanding biases, but also with focus on developing inclusive leadership. As shown by Mor Barak et al. (1998), inclusive leadership does influence the outcomes of the organization in a positive way. Managers should be equipped with skills to create inclusive work environments that celebrate diversity and all their employees.

Developing a comprehensive training program that aims to raise awareness about neurodivergent conditions for organizational leaders has the potential to counteract biases

and promote an inclusive work environment. This type of program will increase knowledge, challenge stereotypes, and provide for fair hiring and personal development practices. The program can begin with foundational knowledge of neurodivergent conditions, including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and dyslexia. It is important for leaders to understand that all individuals who fall under the wide span of the neurodiversity umbrella are brought to the workplace with unique characteristics and strengths (Hendricks 2010).

Training can correct core misconceptions and stereotypes to ensure fair and just practices during the hiring and managerial processes. Leaders are often unable to challenge stereotypes when they have them. For example, they may believe that individuals with ASD lack social ability or that an individual with ADHD is untrustworthy. This type of training can help leaders consider the unique capabilities and aspirations of each individual based on understanding and not preconception (Hendricks 2010). Leaders should also direct this knowledge to form inclusive hiring practices. As previously researched, inclusive hiring practices result in a beneficial business climate (Austin & Pisano 2017). For this purpose, it is advisable that the leaders be trained to be able to offer accommodations during the hiring process. This will ensure a valid evaluation based on the individual's ability. Leadership training should also help to develop inclusive leadership style. Inclusive leadership has been linked to positive organizational outcomes, including increased employee engagement and innovation (Samašonok, Kamienas, Gegužienė, Valentukevičiūtė, & Šimkienė 2023).

In summary, it is important to consider neurodiversity awareness training for leaders as a continuous process. Leaders should be supported and inspired to keep learning and acquire knowledge of the novelties in the understanding of neurodivergent conditions. Such an approach enables a leader to be proactive in developing an integrated corporate culture (Samašonok et al. 2023). Overall, by educating leaders and enabling them to embrace neurodivergent diversity, organizations become more aware of the personal unique qualities that can be enhanced, valued, and integrated into the team work.

While DE&I initiatives are crucial to creating more equitable and supportive workplaces, acknowledging what organizations and neurodiversity employees face when awareness is low is equally important. Specifically, organizations that ignore and do not create conditions for neurodiverse workers contribute to even more exclusion and reduced opportunities for their active engagement in all spaces. To put it simply, if neurodiverse workers are left out of the broader DE&I conversation, and only including them for visibility and no real participation in creating an inclusive environment, organizations' work in the DE&I sphere can hardly be seen as effective. Instead, such practices often lead to what Ahmed (2012) calls "toxic positivity," focusing on visual participation and surface-level engagement with diversity while ignoring systemic issues and barriers that still prevent true diversity, equity, and inclusion. Therefore,

the only way to create a supportive environment for all employees, including those who identify as neurodiverse, is to stop performing and acting inclusively and meaningfully engaging in creating culture that welcomes everyone. Only by questioning and challenging the DE&I conversation from within can we achieve true change, a change that is transformative and inclusive to all employees.

3 Development setting

3.1 Purpose, objectives, development task, and issues

3.1.1 Defining the purpose and objective of the training program

The primary reason which served as the basis for the development task of the present thesis is the development of a training program that can help reinforce the organization's abilities to appropriately address and utilize the benefits of a diversified workforce. The overall goal of the program is to prepare leaders and HR managers with the knowledge and skills to create an inclusive workplace in which all employees are respected, appreciated, and have an equal chance to prosper. Consequently, the training course is concerned with specific aspects of diversification - the inclusion of neurodiverse workforce and strives to promote the practices of equity in such talent management areas as recruiting or performance evaluation process.

The training program will seek to meet the following objectives:

- increase awareness and understanding of DE&I principles by educating participants about the significance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in a work setting
- develop skills for inclusive leadership through familiarizing the participants with the ideal traits and behaviors of an inclusive leader such as empathy, active listening, and cultural competence, among others
- promote understanding and support of neurodiversity and providing the participants with useful strategies to accommodate neurodivergent employees to ensure they receive the required assistance to be productive in the organization
- foster an environment of psychological safety through helping the participants appreciate the vitality of creating an atmosphere in which people feel safe to share their ideas, take risks, and admit mistakes to learn
- implement effective bias mitigation mechanisms by ensuring the participants are exposed to the prominent biases that could affect their decision-making process in the talent management process. This involves employing appraised interviews, blind recruitment, and consistent bias training, among others to enable all employees to receive fair treatment.

Upon the completion of the above objectives, the training program will facilitate a productive and equitable work environment that will enable the employees to actualize their full potential and thus drive the organization towards its mission. This will be in line with the core goals of the dissertation to offer practical solutions to resolving diversity management inefficacy in the talent management processes.

3.1.2 Identifying development tasks and challenges

Developing a comprehensive training program that effectively addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) in talent management requires a systematic approach to identifying specific development tasks and recognizing potential challenges. This subchapter outlines the critical tasks involved in the development of the training program and examines the challenges that may arise during this process.

3.1.2.1 Development Tasks

The first step in developing the training program is to conduct a thorough needs assessment. This involves gathering data on the current state of DE&I within the organization, identifying possible gaps in knowledge and skills among leaders and HR professionals, and understanding the specific needs and expectations of the workforce.

Based on the needs assessment, the next task is to design a curriculum that covers essential topics in talent management, inclusive leadership, and neurodiversity. The curriculum should be structured to provide a mix of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, using various instructional methods to cater to different learning styles.

Creating comprehensive training materials, including presentations, handouts, and interactive exercises, is crucial. These materials should be engaging, informative, and reflective of the latest research and best practices in DE&I.

3.1.2.2 Challenges

Resistance to change is one of the most serious challenges that can be faced when implementing a DE&I training program. Some workers and even leaders may doubt the relevance of such training or be unwilling to reveal practices and ways they are familiar with regarding the fields related to diversity and inclusivity. Ensuring high levels of engagement and participation among the participants may also be a challenge due to differences in interest and existing knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to follow a diverse set of instruction methods to ensure that everyone is engaged. Finally, unconscious biases can

decrease the effectiveness of the plan if individuals are unable to recognize and address them. It is a difficult challenge because it is not easy to determine your own biases, understand that they exist, and change the approach based on this realization. Another potential challenge is that creating a strong training plan and implementing it would be quite costly in terms of resources.

Through identifying these development tasks and the possible challenges associated with them, the dissertation seeks to present an achievable and pragmatic way of developing an efficient DE&I training program. This ensures that the program is not only well-designed and impactful but also sustainable and adaptable to the evolving needs of diverse workplaces.

3.2 Methodological solutions

This sub-chapter dwells on methodological solutions that were necessary for the development and implementation of the training program to promote talent management in diverse and inclusive workplaces. The focus is on describing the actual methods and approaches used to create an effective training program from scratch that meets the needs of the organization accurately. In this way, it offers a framework on how and under what conditions the training program was created based on the goals outlined in the previous sections. Discussions will include a description of the method of development and how it was applied in the thesis, data collection methods, and considerations of good and bad practices that both protect confidentiality and obtain an agreement in full compliance with privacy regulations.

3.2.1 Description of the development method

This section describes the structured process of program design, which, however, still involves theory, design and learning models, and actual practical activities. This section explains the developmental method to lay the ground for comprehending how the created training program was organized, and why and how the development methods were used.

3.2.1.1 Design thinking approach

Design thinking is a human-centered methodology that prioritizes empathy, creativity, and iterative problem-solving (Brown 2019). This approach was chosen for its effectiveness in addressing complex, multifaceted challenges such as enhancing talent management practices in diverse and inclusive workplaces. Design thinking's focus on understanding the user experience and creating innovative solutions made it an ideal framework for developing a training program that meets the nuanced needs of diverse organizations.

Design thinking begins with a deep understanding of the users' needs and experiences. In the context of this training program, the users include organizational leaders, HR professionals, and employees from diverse backgrounds. By prioritizing empathy, the design thinking approach ensures that the training program is tailored to address their specific challenges and requirements. The iterative nature of design thinking allows for continuous refinement and improvement of the training program. This adaptability is essential for creating a program that remains relevant and effective in the face of evolving organizational needs and diversity challenges.

3.2.1.2 Co-creation and stakeholder involvement

By involving stakeholders throughout the development process, the training program is grounded in real-world experiences and challenges, ensuring its relevance and practicality. Active participation of stakeholders fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the program, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation and sustainability, and also ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to a more comprehensive and inclusive training program. (Kujala, Sachs, Leinonen, Heikkinen, & Laude 2022).

3.2.2 Application of the methods in the thesis

The design thinking framework was applied using the Double Diamond method (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider 2018), as follows:

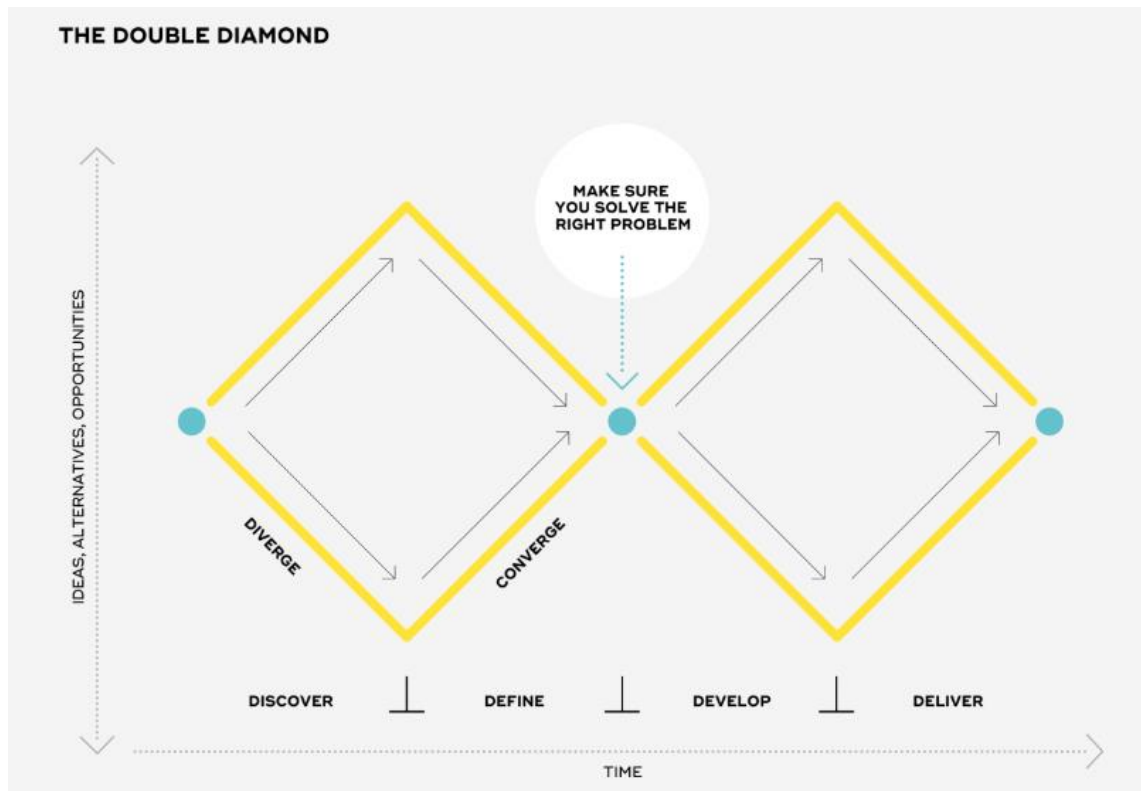


Figure 1: The Double Diamond (Stickdorn et al. 2018)

Discover

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current trends and challenges in diversity and inclusion, data was analyzed from various online sources, including social media mentions, Instagram hashtags, and Google search trends. This provided a general overview of public discourse and highlighted prevalent issues and emerging trends in the field. Additionally, online articles discussing the difficulties faced by neurodiverse individuals at work were also reviewed, which informed the development of content addressing neurodiversity in the workplace. A collaboration with Company X, the study commissioner, also allowed gathering insights into the current status of diversity and inclusion within the organization, as well as the challenges faced by its leaders, and the strategies they have found to be effective in this direction.

Define

Gathered data from the discovery phase was synthesized in order to define the core problems and opportunities. This stage involved identifying key pain points related to managing diverse teams, common biases, and the gaps in current talent management practices. The gained input also allowed for a broad range of perspectives to be considered while generating possible solutions for the identified challenges.

Develop

Using the ideas generated, the preliminary version of the training program components was developed. The prototype includes modules on inclusive leadership, strategies for fostering psychological safety, and techniques for supporting neurodivergent employees.

Deliver

Even though this phase was not yet completed due to time constraints, the prototype should be further tested through pilot sessions within Company X. Feedback will be collected from participants to assess the effectiveness and relevance of the training content. This iterative testing phase allows for adjustments and improvements based on real-world application and participant feedback.

Thanks to the design thinking approach that was used in the process of creating the training program, it was thoroughly guided by the framework of actual experiences and needs of the intended beneficiaries. In this way, the program is not only based on theoretical assumptions, but it is also grounded on the practical implications of the daily functioning of the organization. Hence, it offers substantial assistance and direction to the company that is interested in improving its diversity and inclusion-related activities. The co-creation approach and the active involvement of key stakeholders allowed the development of a practically relevant training program.

The initial phase of the development process involved analyzing current trends in the online environment. This included a general overview of social media mentions, Instagram hashtags, and recent Google search trends. This analysis provided a broad understanding of public discourse around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) issues, highlighting prevalent topics and emerging trends that informed the content and focus of the training program.

Online articles discussing the difficulties that neurodiverse adults face at their workplace were also reviewed to ensure that the training program addressed these unique challenges. This helped identify key areas of focus and informed the development of modules specifically tailored to support neurodivergent employees.

A critical component of the co-creation process involved collaboration with Company X. This partnership allowed for the organization of interviews with company leaders, providing valuable insights into the current status of diversity and inclusion within the organization. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. These interviews revealed the main challenges leaders face when managing diverse teams and the strategies that have proven effective in addressing these challenges. Key stakeholders, including senior leadership, HR

professionals, and managers, were actively involved in the development process, as this created a sense of ownership and commitment to the program's success.

In conclusion, the use of methodological solutions in the development of the training program has proven essential for its success as they have laid a solid foundation for it that promotes effective talent management and supports the development of an inclusive workplace culture.

3.2.3 Data collection for program development

This subchapter covers the methods and sources used to collect the data necessary for the training program's development. The approach was comprehensive, aiming at the program's sustainability and relevance. Firstly, the data on the social media's mentions, the search trends in Google, and online non-scientific articles were analyzed to define the frame of the public discourse and the emerging topics relevant to neurodivergence and diversity. This helped with outlining the issues that have recently been actively discussed and should be addressed. Secondly, in-depth interviews with eight leaders from Company X were conducted, making it possible to obtain first-hand information on the organization's current practices, challenges, and examples of the best practices in dealing with diversity and inclusion. The combination of diverse data sources allowed developing a well-grounded training program.

3.2.3.1 Needs assessment

Firstly, a general overview of social media mentions for the term "neurodiversity" was obtained through analyzing a report created by using a BrandMentions.com trial account (Appendix 3 - BrandMentions Report). As it was just a trial account, the report could only be generated for one term (the term "neurodiversity" was chosen for this analysis, as it is an umbrella term) and only a 30-days period can be observed in the graphs. The Google search trends for "neurodivergent" in the last 5 years were obtained using Google Trends.

It is worth noting that the analysis of latest social media data indicates substantial engagement with the topic of neurodiversity, reaching a total of 6,063 mentions during the last month. Particularly remarkable is the fact that 5,408 of them were made on social media platforms, with Instagram and Reddit as top domains. The importance of these sources is that it shows where discussions revolving around neurodiversity are most active. Instagram's visual content and Reddit's in-depth discussions offer different insights into the experiences and needs of neurodiverse individuals.

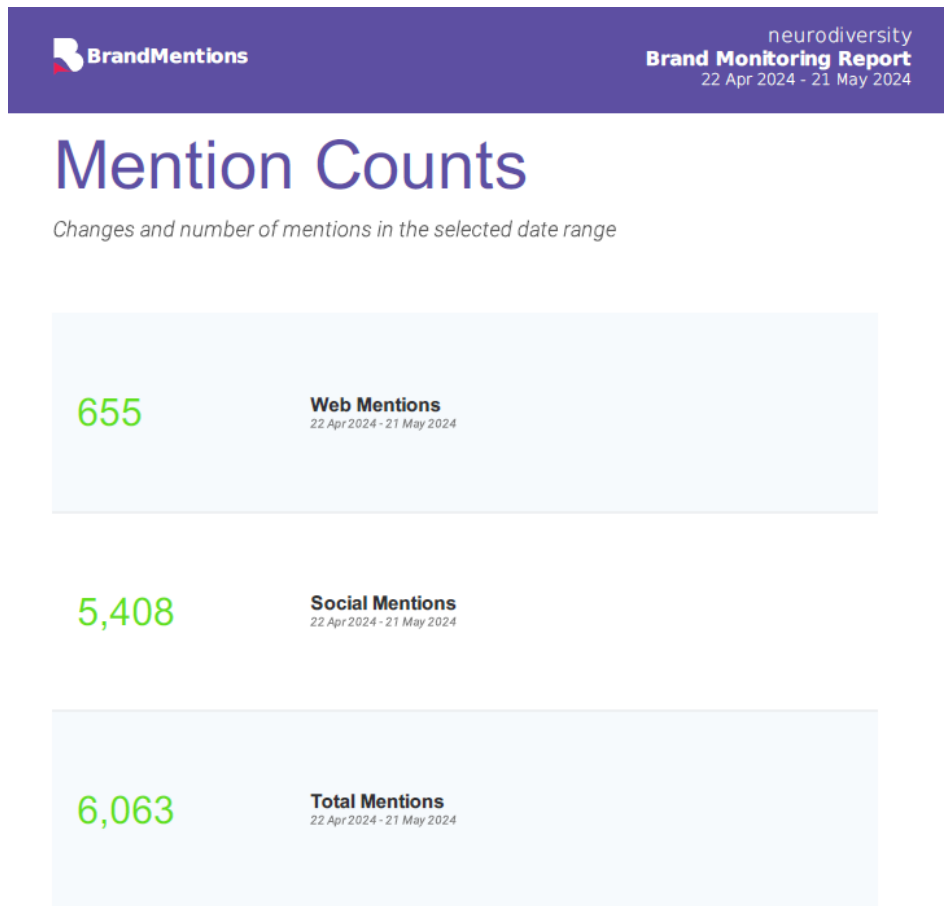


Figure 2: Mention Counts (BrandMentions)

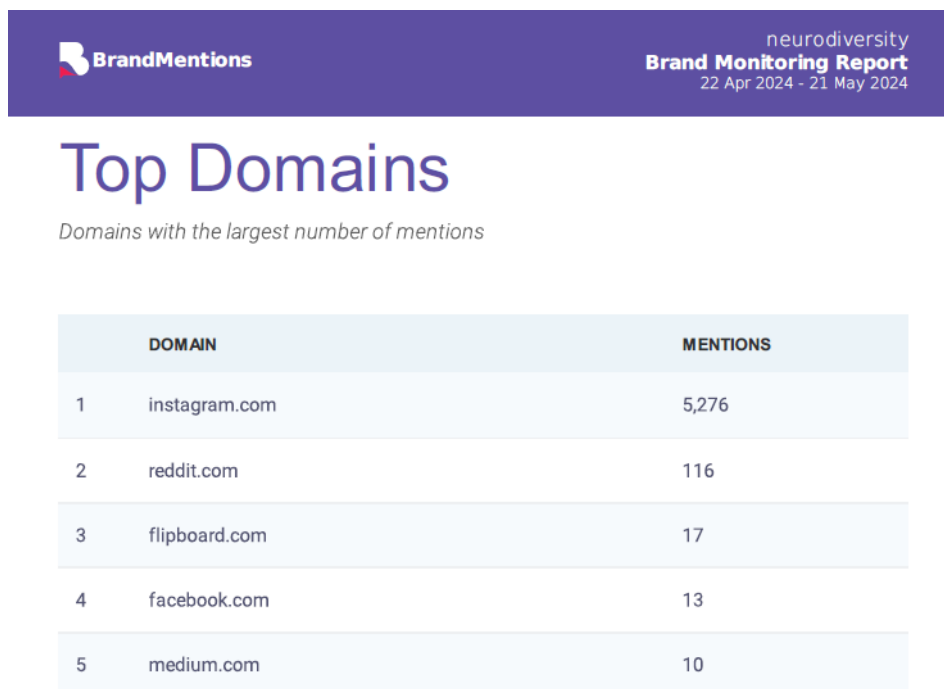


Figure 3: Top Domains (BrandMentions)

Related Hashtags

Hashtags

	HASHTAG	MENTIONS
1	adhd	1,153
2	autism	1,130
3	autismawareness	738
4	mentalhealth	503
5	adhdawareness	438
6	autismacceptance	433
7	autistic	401
8	asd	388
9	actuallyautistic	324
10	neurodiverse	318

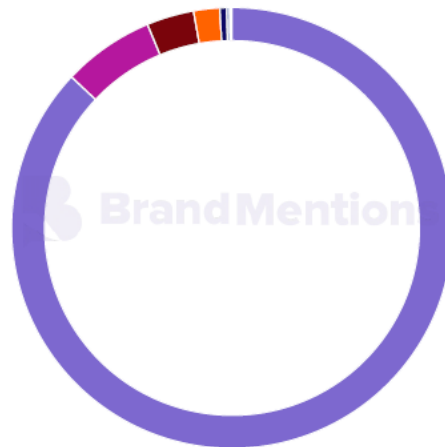
Figure 4: Related Hashtags (BrandMentions)

The hashtag frequency confirms that #adhd and #autism are key areas of concern and conversation within the neurodiverse community. There's also a lack of connection with dyslexia noticed. Covering these conditions in training can ensure that leaders have a better understanding of all the specific difficulties and strengths associated with ADHD, autism, and dyslexia. The hashtags most likely to link with attitudes, such as #autismawareness, #adhdawareness and #autismacceptance can be included in coaching modules.

This can extend to understanding the recognition and valuation of neurodiversity and provide help with perhaps the most important aspect: developing a workplace environment focused on respect and honesty. It also reveals that neurodiversity is closely connected to mental health, with 503 mentions of #mentalhealth, so providing the leaders with tool to help them support the well-being of neurodiverse employees is also needed. Understanding the use and context of hashtags like #actuallyautistic and #neurodiverse can help create environments that accommodate, respect, and empower neurodiverse employees.

Sources

Mention sources



SOURCE	% - MENTIONS
Instagram	87.02% - 5276
Site	6.71% - 407
News	3.48% - 211
Reddit	1.91% - 116
Blog	0.49% - 30
Facebook	0.21% - 13
Forum	0.12% - 7

Figure 5: Sources (BrandMentions)

Social media data analysis can be used for identifying emerging issues and priorities in the neurodiverse community. Consequently, training plans can be modified to address these issues and priorities, ensuring they are actually timely and relevant.

Social media has produced a significant impact in recent years raising awareness and understanding about neurodivergence and granting neurodivergent people a voice to share their experiences, making their struggles not just familiar but creating a sense of community. People that didn't know about these conditions were also able to learn about them thanks to

ample educational creations from organizations, activists, and neurodiverse people. This allowed for many myths and misconceptions to be debunked, and inclusivity became popular. There are also meaningful conversations about neurodivergence on various platforms such as TikTok, LinkedIn, and Twitter. The public is more involved and supportive after seeing more information on the topic.

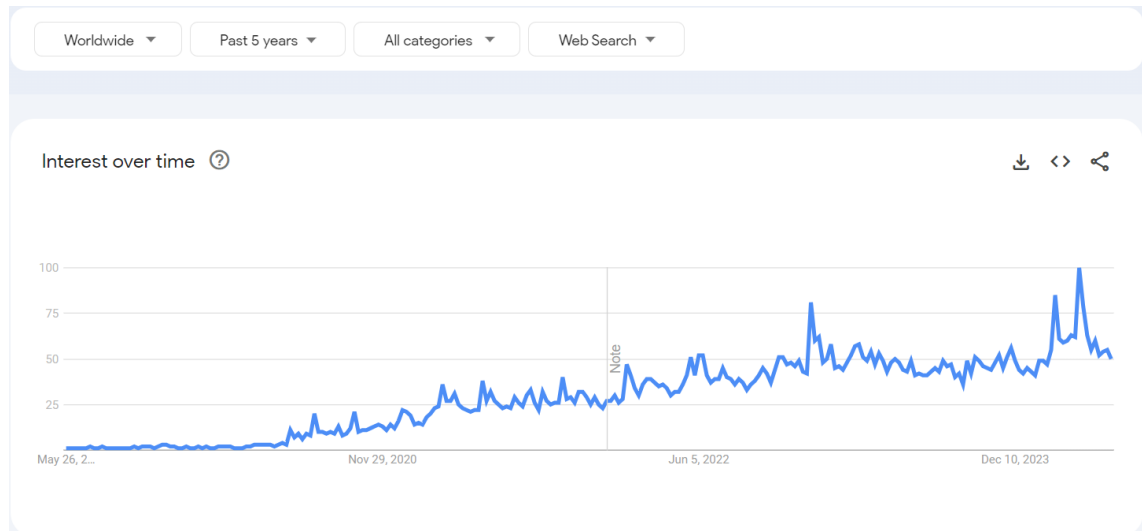


Figure 6: Google Search Trends (GoogleTrends)

The Google search trends also demonstrate a growing interest in this subject in the past 5 years and a significant need for getting companies and leaders trained to manage neurodiverse employees. More specifically, the analyses of the query patterns indicate a rise in interest in the topics of neurodiversity, following the growing awareness and demand for information in this field. This reflects the need for complex training programs that could allow business leaders to develop the competencies to support neurodiverse employees more effectively. By responding to this need, organizations contribute to improving the quality of the workplace and the workforce, which in turn contributes to better performance.

Neurodiversity is a very trendy concept at work and gaining popularity in the business press after famous companies such as SAP, Virgin and Microsoft have been promoting targeted inclusion programs (Austin & Pisano 2017), as well as after the release of the incredibly famous docuseries 'Employable Me'/'The Employables'. However, neurodiversity is not very well captured from an academic standpoint as it has poor, unclear definitions and there is nearly any guidance on practical support at work.

Workers with ADHD experience challenges in initiating tasks, keeping track of time, and organizing their activities. Such challenges are easily interpreted as laziness and incompetency by employers and colleagues, which can further affect job security and career progression. This can in turn lead individuals into self-judgement and emotional distress. The

social stigma surrounding ADHD makes it difficult for those with the condition to disclose their diagnosis, so many people with ADHD mask their symptoms trying to appear normal, getting exhausted in the process, as that is an unsustainable solution (Brooks-Olsen & Turits 2022). Being open about the diagnosis and seeking workplace adjustments for ADHD can be risky because it can make one seem difficult or less capable (Willingham 2023). However, ADHD awareness is on a constant rise also due to the emergence of pandemic-induced flexible work cultures, so implementing neurodiversity training for leaders and organizations can promote and create more inclusive workplaces for ADHD employees.

People with autism also face a lot of challenges in their jobs, or when searching for one, leading to high unemployment rates, as traditional workplaces rarely adapt to their needs, making challenges such as atypical communication styles, time management issues, sensory issues, anxiety, and a need for consistency even worse. Developing social skills and integrating into a team can be particularly challenging, leaving them feeling lonely and isolated, especially during job searches, leading to severe depression and low self-esteem (Maxwell 2022). However, autistic employees can become valuable team members with patience and the right adjustments, as requiring specific accommodations does not make them fundamentally different from other employees. A supportive and understanding work environment can help them build confidence, improve social interactions, and make great contributions within the organization (Occupational Health Assessment 2021).

Several challenges are faced by people with dyslexia, and they differ in severity, the nature of the task and help received. Most notably, all of them are related to oral and written communication - understanding spoken language, expressing oneself verbally, and following written instructions. They find it difficult to organize, impacting their way of managing thoughts, time, or personal belongings. In addition to the other symptoms, dyslexia depletes energy and self-esteem, making it difficult for people to want to take up other tasks or be more engaged. In addition, it makes individuals with this disability emotionally isolated, embarrassed, and discouraged, especially if it's not identified in early childhood. Other challenges include mixing up similar words, unpredictable spelling, inability to read quickly, and difficulty in staying focused. This leads to impacts on work such as slower information processing, which can be mitigated with reasonable adjustments (MindTools n.d.). Anxiety and fear, especially when deadlines are imposed, can lead to a cycle of procrastination and mental health challenges. It is a company's responsibility to provide the necessary adjustments and support for dyslexic employees and prevent discrimination (Inclusive Employers n.d.).

This section focused on gaining a better understanding of the challenges faced by neurodivergent employees by analyzing social media trends, Google search trends, and a review of non-scientific articles that cover the subject. The findings have showed a

significant online engagement with the term “neurodiversity”, pointing to a growing awareness and interest in this topic. A general curiosity and concern when it comes to neurodiversity-related issues was also confirmed by the analysis of Google search trends. A closer look at non-scientific articles highlighted the need for targeted training programs on this topic for organizations and their leaders, as this can help address and mitigate the challenges that neurodivergent employees face and improve the understanding and accommodation of neurodiversity in the workplace.

3.2.3.2 Expert Interviews

Expert interviews (Trinczek 2009) were used to gain more insights into the current level of diversity and inclusion within the commissioner’s organization, Company X. The company focuses on offering software solutions to its clients, was established in 1984 and currently has over 9000 employees in over 40 offices worldwide. Based on their organizational culture’s description, the company has a casual, collaborative culture, which has diverse people, cultural practices, and life backgrounds. They also say that they aspire to have a more diverse workforce, hoping to create an inclusive workplace where everyone feels a sense of belonging. The company believes that by embracing such diversity among their employees, clients, and communities a space that enables people to grow and develop is created. As a global minority-owned company, Company X acknowledges that we need to appreciate the difference and uniqueness of the people that make up our community, to connect with one another and achieve sustained success.

To support this effort, the company has agreed to collaborate in developing the training program, by allowing its leaders to have an open conversation about their unique experiences with diversity in the workplace, what they have learned so far and what are challenges they continue to face.

Participants

A heterogenous group of 8 leaders having various degrees of management experience, titles, responsibilities, and leadership styles has agreed to participate in these discussions. Their title distribution was as follows: 2 directors, 1 manager, 3 senior team leaders, 1 team leader, and 1 process leader. The sampling method focused on ensuring a diversity of management experience, roles, work styles, and responsibilities. Data saturation was reached after conducting 8 interviews, due to the strong and consistent organizational culture shared among the leaders, which meant that the insights and experiences reported began to repeat, indicating that no new themes or significant information would be uncovered through additional interviews. The leaders’ aligned perspectives on handling neurodiversity within the

organization further demonstrated that the critical elements and effective strategies had already been captured. As a result, continuing the interviews beyond the eighth session would have yielded redundant data rather than novel insights, affirming that the sample size was sufficient to fully inform the development of the training plan.

Their combined management experience was 70 years, and they're responsible for overseeing and coordinating a large number of employees (399). Their rich experience not only allowed obtaining critical lessons and experience gathered by overcoming various challenges but also enabled an extensive inquiry into successful and suitable strategies. A valuable body of practical examples and evidence-based methods applicable for inclusion in a training plan were gathered. These leaders' insights regarding the trends for cultivating an inclusive corporate culture must be taken into account while structuring training modules, addressing the most common myths and misunderstandings, and developing templates for efficient communication with neurodiverse employees. In addition, the experience of these leaders ensures that our training plan will be based on achievable and realistic recommendations that have been tested and polished in real, dynamic workplace environments, and therefore, they can be adapted for other leaders' use.

Procedure

The data was gathered using semi-structured interviews (Adams 2015) that followed a predetermined set of 14 questions, out of which 3 were introductory, 10 were focused on their overall experience with diversity in their groups, and 1 conclusive question (Appendix 1 - Discussion Guide). The interviews were held both online (via Teams) and face-to-face, lasted around 30-40 minutes each, and were recorded for further analysis. The interviews were initially held using the Romanian language so that the participants can better express themselves and describe their experiences. Whenever needed, the interviewer encouraged the participants to expand on their initial responses and followed up on ideas that the participants came up with themselves. In order to have a strong analysis process and make sure that the gathered information is relevant, the first two recordings were reviewed to reflect on the procedures used, the conversation flow, the openness of the questions, and the data that was produced. No changes were made to the procedure following the review.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2012) was employed as a qualitative research data analysis method to better understand the data produced by the interviews.

The data collected from all the interviews was transcribed, translated into English, and the initial observations were noted down, as this is an important step in the analysis (Riessman 1993). The transcripts were read several times, as the process of "repeated reading" (Braun

& Clarke 2006) allowed for data immersion and gained familiarity with the data. Following these two steps, the transcripts were then coded using a qualitative research software tool (ATLAS.ti) resulting in a total of 103 codes, that focused on various aspects of communication, giving and receiving feedback, talent management, diversity management, inclusion, and equity. These codes denoted characteristics of the data that were considered relevant to the research questions. Additionally, as part of the methodology, the data set received equal attention to ensure that recurring trends in the data could be fully considered.

Examples of the most prevalent codes (each was identified in the data at least 15 times): Employee support, Communication skills, Leadership approach, Employee development, Open working environment, Verbal communication, Tailored solutions, Adaptation, Group dynamics, Diverse employees, Performance management, Supportive environment, Diversity management, Inclusion efforts, Collaboration, Objectivity, Leadership development, Equal treatment, Consulting with colleagues, Coaching strategy, Written communication.

Given the constraints in time, budget, and availability of qualified coders, only one coder was used. Despite these constraints, this approach ensured a consistent application of codes across the transcripts, avoiding the variability that can exist when multiple coders are used. The software that was used, ATLAS.ti also has a functionality of AI code suggestions, so this technology also offered a different perspective and helped cross-verify the manual coding, increasing the reliability. The coder consistently worked on recognizing and mitigating any personal biases, including the influence of being employed by Company X, maintaining objectivity during interviews, and reviewing the data multiple times.

The next step was looking for and identifying themes, which combined many codes that were quite similar or were related to the same aspect within the data.

Results

The thematic analysis allowed the emergence of 4 themes, and 27 insights into the shared perspectives and experiences that the organization's leaders have had with diverse teams and diverse team members. The main insights (grouped on the four themes) followed by a corresponding quote from the interviews will be described below.



Figure 7: Theme Map

1 Leadership and management strategies

Collaboration between different departments and open discussions between colleagues enhance problem-solving and help identify common issues, making training more practical and effective by addressing real-world scenarios.

“Discussions with senior people or leaders from other departments. It can also help to see that even though you have certain issues with certain people, other teams have the same issues, even if you don’t expect them to. If you see this, it probably helps you to realize that there might be other causes, not necessarily the ones you assume.” [NC03].

Effective leadership involves balancing individual preferences and team needs through regular check-ins and strategic intervention, optimizing team effectiveness and managing diversity.

“Yes, there are differences at the individual level, some are more effective when working alone, others when working with a team. As a leader you are constantly trying to give everyone the opportunity to do what is best for them.” [AN08].

“It’s important to check their work, attitude, responsibilities, etc.” [I103].

Personalized and practical leadership development, through one-on-one meetings, mentoring, shadowing, and continuous learning, is crucial for addressing leadership challenges and enhancing skills.

“Through some recurrent sessions we address these issues and have the chance to offer them my knowledge and guidance in solving those issues (such as process setting, peer relationships, leadership styles, reporting, and so on). It also helps to have one-on-one meetings with leaders.” [AMS01].

Seeking multiple perspectives and incorporating adaptability, soft skills, and strategic thinking are essential for effective decision-making and leadership in diverse teams.

“It’s multiple people taking counsel and approaching different perspectives before deciding, so that they’re all moving in the same direction. Obviously, we take care of the business, but we take care of the people first.” [MP02].

Comprehensive HR resources and a blend of learning tools, including case studies and continuous learning, are necessary for leaders to handle complex team situations and deepen their leadership knowledge.

“There is no one training, one book, or one course that holds the absolute truth, they are all linked and through all of them you can discover or deepen your knowledge of specific or general aspects.” [CN06].

Soft skills, attitude, common sense, mindfulness, and open-minded communication are as crucial as operational knowledge for effective leadership.

“I see the leader’s role from much the same perspective that I apply to the HR role, in that it seems to me that soft skills and attitude should be on par with operational knowledge.” [AMS01].

“I think that common sense part is a rare commodity lately. Common sense, mindfulness, and yes, communication (but you have to be open-minded), flexibility, understanding, empathy (being able to understand the context of others, where they are coming from and what limitations you suspect up until that point).” [MP02].

Reading and studying leadership books are effective methods for leaders to gain insights into communication and team dynamics, helping them apply leadership concepts personally.

“Attending trainings is useful, but I don't think it's as effective as reading, because reading gives you the opportunity to identify ways in which what you read applies to you, and how you can use those ideas for yourself and your team.” [CN06].

By combining these insights, the training plan can be structured to emphasize collaboration, balance between individual and team needs, personalized development, multi-perspective decision-making, comprehensive resources, the importance of soft skills, and effective learning methods. This holistic approach will equip leaders with the necessary tools to manage neurodiverse teams effectively.

2 Diversity and inclusion

Commitment to incorporating departmental feedback and using tailored approaches over standardized ones is essential for effectively managing diverse teams, emphasizing personalized management strategies.

“I think these face-to-face discussions are very important and welcomed because we can't really have a uniform, standardized application. The situations that everyone faces are varied at the individual team level, and so I prefer a tailored approach based on the needs of each team and each leader.” [AMS01].

Encouraging autonomy in team members through a hands-off management style, while maintaining an open and honest environment, supports the development of a more self-sufficient and empowered team.

“Generally, I am quite hands-off, giving the necessary indications and then observing, identifying problems, unclear issues, or concerns, letting people provide their feedback and having an exchange of ideas afterwards, but not necessarily at every step. I try to encourage them to take responsibility for their work (...)” [NC03].

Direct communication and a deep understanding of individual needs, including emotional contexts, are crucial for supporting and engaging diverse teams, highlighting a holistic management approach.

“I think it is very important to know the context in which people are in, as they may also come with emotional baggage from home that can influence their performance at work. The human context is very important.” [NC03].

Interactive platforms and discussions are essential for promoting diversity and inclusion, ensuring that both new and existing leaders are aligned with the company's stance and strategies on these issues.

“Psychotherapy, mindfulness, being chill and open, being exposed as much as possible to situations or people who are different from them, so that they can get used to and learn to manage situations like this more effectively. But through exposure and discussion with others who are also exposed we can learn a lot.” [KL05].

Navigating sensitive communication and maintaining accountability, especially in dynamic work environments, accelerates professional development and prevents misunderstandings in diverse teams.

“With some you feel like you are walking on eggshells, i.e. you have to be careful how you ask the question or how you argue, because everything can go wrong. People have this tendency, especially if things go wrong, or discussions get a bit more serious (...) and so I learned to document everything very well.” [AN08].

Empathy, patience, adaptability, and the ability to multitask are essential qualities for effectively leading and managing diverse teams.

“Mainly to be open-minded and expose yourself to different situations and different people, exercise empathy and fair play. Although you can't really put your emotions aside, we should always try to see the other person's point of view. We may not always understand each other, but instead of arguing we should try to find a middle ground through communication and collaboration.” [KL05].

Recognizing the benefits of diversity for business growth, supported by practical examples, highlights the need for flexibility when integrating employees from different departments with varying work paradigms.

“I argue, based on practice, that diversity works and works well in teams, and it is as beneficial as possible for the business, for growth, and sometimes I even give examples (i.e. in trainings) of how mixed teams work, maybe with different age groups, or whatever.” [AMS01].

In conclusion, the leadership training approach should focus on personalized management strategies, effective communication, and promoting diversity and inclusion, while also developing essential qualities like empathy and adaptability. By incorporating tailored feedback, fostering collaboration, and encouraging continuous learning, the training plan equips leaders to support neurodiverse teams effectively. This comprehensive approach

addresses the challenges of managing diverse teams, enhancing team cohesion, and driving business growth.

3 Communication and team dynamics

Clear, direct, and frequent communication, combined with a familiar and open dialogue approach, are crucial for resolving team issues and ensuring mutual understanding and learning. Face-to-face discussions are usually preferred over written communication methods.

“Mainly the connection, the open discussion with that person, the clear communication of the expectations and the situation, and what we want to achieve were the factors that helped to resolve some of the issues.” [CN06].

Encouraging problem-solving and open communication about personal issues fosters engagement, harnesses diverse perspectives, and enhances team dynamics by addressing individual struggles.

“It’s very important that they are also asked from time to time what do you think, what solutions they would propose to certain problems? Then I would emphasize patience again, I think that is necessary.” [LG07].

“As a rule, I have them ask for and send feedback, making sure they know that they can ask anything at any time, and from there we take it one problem at a time, no matter how long it takes, and try to solve it together.” [KL05].

Tailored feedback and coaching that considers individual learning paces and avoids professional jargon are crucial for effective team member development, with targeted opportunities for experienced members.

“In these 8 years I have met all kinds of people, some who can learn in a faster pace, some slower, some who have had previous experience in working with computers, some who may have had a longer break and found it harder to adapt to a faster working style.” [LG07].

Recognizing diverse learning styles and leveraging small group interactions are essential for effective training, which should be tailored rather than uniform, addressing specific needs more effectively.

“In terms of trainings, each member has a different learning style, and this is a more difficult challenge than daily interaction or coaching, where you can work face-to-face with one person and adapt to each other.” [I104].

Effective leadership requires managing diverse skill sets and leveraging visible, exemplary leadership, while considering individual differences in experience and involvement to maintain team cohesion and organization.

“My role entails collaborating with diverse teams, each with unique activities, requirements, and member profiles. This includes interactions with individuals possessing varied skill sets, essential for executing tasks within the company.” [CN06].

“Good examples and models, and I mean from the top down inside the company. Fortunately, we had mostly good models, even if there are other models, but the good ones are visible, and you can easily learn from them.” [MP02].

Encouraging peer support and collaboration through chat groups fosters a supportive and collaborative team environment.

“Yes, we encourage them to talk to each other, they also communicate quite a lot on chat groups, they ask each other for opinions or if they have any questions or problems and they help each other, so we encourage communication. Yes, if they can find solutions by talking to each other that’s great for us.” [LG07].

This structured approach ensures the training plan covers crucial areas such as communication, problem-solving, tailored development, and fostering a collaborative environment. By addressing these key areas, the training plan prepares leaders to handle the complexities of managing diverse teams, providing them with the tools and strategies they need to create an inclusive, supportive, and high-performing team culture.

4 Challenges and solutions in managing diversity

Leaders need to actively discourage stereotypes and generalizations, promoting inclusivity and maintaining professional standards to address misconceptions effectively.

“In 7 years, I have most likely encountered them, but given that nothing specific comes to mind I don’t think it was anything serious, and I don’t think I needed to intervene. There are still various comments or generalizations, but we try to discourage them.” [AN08].

Tailored interventions are crucial for addressing team misalignment and misunderstood dynamics, while finding a balance between diverse working styles and maintaining task efficiency.

“(…) there have been challenges in the sense that there have been frustrations with the way things are handled, or the way things are handled, or the dynamics, or how the dynamics

have been understood, and here through ad hoc interventions I have usually managed to balance out things and guide the person to adapt to the new role.” [CN06].

Mentoring and shadowing, combined with strategies to push team members out of their comfort zones, are effective for addressing performance issues and promoting continuous growth, though they require careful management to avoid resistance.

“When problems are identified we encourage the employee to ask for help when they need it, and when there are bigger problems, we offer mentoring, or shadowing sessions, where they can see how other colleagues work, or we observe the way they work and try to guide them towards a more efficient working style.” [LG07].

“In general, I know my colleagues well and try to approach them at their pace, but I also try to get them out of their comfort zone as much as possible to avoid plateauing, which becomes more difficult to manage later.” [NC03].

Effective communication, such as regular newsletters and assertive team meetings, must be complemented with actionable insights to correct negative behaviors and maintain team alignment and standards.

“When I notice that things tend to deviate or a certain negative behavior is generalized, I also send newsletters, in which I address those topics and try to correct the situation. Then we also have team meetings, where I try to be as assertive as possible, followed by follow-up e-mails.” [NC03].

While offering new perspectives can stimulate innovation, leaders must also strike a balance by granting team autonomy to ensure the most effective solutions and prevent excessive reliance.

“If problems or obstacles arise, I step in and suggest other perspectives they may not have thought of. My suggestions may not always be the best, but it doesn't hurt to try something new.” [NC03].

Apart from the differences in leadership style and approach, there weren't any contradicting views regarding diversity, equity or inclusion noticed during the discussions. According to these insights, the training plan should include a range of measures aiming to support inclusivity and overcome stereotypes, implement personalized interventions to control team effectiveness, use mentoring and shadowing approaches to encourage performance and development, and reinforce communication strategies with practical feedback and recommendations. Simultaneously, the training effort should be accompanied by both promoting innovation through new perception and granting teams with autonomy to derive the most successful outcomes. Only this integrated approach will provide leaders with the

skills required to maintain the diversity of performance in balance with comprehensive diversity.

3.2.4 Ethical and privacy issues (informed consent and participant confidentiality)

Ensuring ethical conduct and maintaining privacy were a priority throughout the discussions with leadership representatives of Company X, discussions that helped in the development of the training program. All participants involved in the interviews provided informed consent (Appendix 2 - Informed Consent Form), agreeing on their participation, audio-video recording, and transcription of the conversations. This consent ensured that they were fully aware of the purpose, process, and use of the information gathered. Importantly, no sensitive data or information that could identify the participants was collected during the interviews. The identities of the interviewees are known only to the researcher and have been kept confidential to protect their privacy. Measures were taken to anonymize the data, ensuring that all findings and insights derived from the interviews do not disclose the identities of the participants. This approach upheld the ethical standards of the research and ensured that participant confidentiality was rigorously maintained throughout the study.

3.3 Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. First, the interviews were organized in collaboration with the participants' employer, which may have influenced the responses. Participants might have felt pressured to provide answers that they believed were expected or favorable in the eyes of their employer, rather than being completely honest. This potential bias could affect the authenticity and reliability of the data collected, possibly skewing the results and the subsequent training program design.

Second, the training program that was developed based on the insights gathered from these interviews was not implemented due to time constraints, and, as a result, no feedback was gathered from the intended beneficiaries of the training. This feedback would have been important in evaluating the effectiveness of the training materials and identifying areas for improvement. Without this implementation and evaluation phase, the program's real-world applicability cannot yet be completely determined.

These limitations show the need for further research and practical trials to validate and refine the training program, ensuring it effectively meets the leaders' needs in managing neurodiverse employees.

4 Results

4.1 Training program design and methodology

The training program for leading neurodiverse teams was carefully created to be in adherence with the best practices of talent management, inclusive leadership, and neurodiversity. This subchapter describes the design and methodological structure that was followed to create a back, effective training.

4.1.1 Curriculum development

4.1.1.1 Objective and goals

The main objective of this training plan is to offer leaders the knowledge, tools, and skills they need to better, and more effectively, manage and support neurodiverse employees. The more specific goals are:

- Improve leaders' knowledge of ADHD, autism, dyslexia, and their characteristics and better understand how they can contribute to workplace diversity.
- Develop inclusive leadership qualities that can help create an environment that is safe and supportive for diverse employees.
- Equip leaders with inclusive strategies they can use for recruiting, developing, and retaining neurodiverse talent.
- Highlight the potential of AI to reduce the biases that are present in hiring and in the career development of neurodiverse employees.

4.1.1.2 Core modules and general content

Module	Content
Introduction to neurodiversity	Definitions and common neurodivergent conditions Benefits of neurodiversity in the workplace
Inclusive leadership	Essential qualities of inclusive leaders Strategies for fostering inclusivity in teams
Talent management strategies	Best practices for recruiting, developing, and retaining neurodiverse talent Equitable access to career growth opportunities

Module	Content
A psychologically safe workplace	Techniques for promoting psychological safety Building trust and ensuring all team members feel valued
Bias awareness and mitigation	Identifying and addressing biases related to neurodiversity Strategies for creating a more equitable workspace
Technology and AI in talent management	Utilizing AI to support neurodiverse employees

Table 1: Modules and general content

4.1.1.3 Learning activities

To make sure that the concepts are practically applicable, the training includes various interactive and engaging activities:

- Interactive workshops, where participants engage in group discussions and scenario-based exercises where they can practice various inclusive leadership and talent management skills.
- Case-studies of real-life examples of successful teams that are neurodiverse, in order to observe best practices and lessons learned.
- Interactive videos (showing potential scenarios and outcomes based on the choices selected by the user) which provide hands-on experience in handling various challenges associated with neurodiversity.

4.1.1.4 Resources and materials

- Reading materials, such as curated articles, book excerpts, and research papers on neurodiversity, inclusive leadership, and DE&I
- Multimedia content, like videos and podcasts featuring experts and neurodiverse individuals sharing their experiences.
- Practical tools and guides for leaders that they can further use to aid them in implementing inclusive practices in their teams.

4.1.2 Delivery methods (workshops, e-learning)

The training program is developed to be adaptable and flexible, and it is suitable for different organizational and cultural contexts. The modules in the program can be adapted and

changed according to the requirements and needs of different organizations, so that they reflect specific challenges, industry specificities, and cultural nuances of the participants. While a technology company may spend more time integrating AI tools for talent management and development needs, another might place greater emphasis on building inclusive leadership capabilities to grow an increasingly diverse group of volunteers. Tailoring the content in this way means that the program is always relevant and directly applicable to the participants' everyday work environments.

Depending on an organization's logistical constraints or learning preferences, in-person and online training are both valid ways of deploying the program. While in-person training creates the opportunity for hands-on activities, direct interaction with other participants, and immediate feedback, allowing for a more engaging and personal learning experience, the online offers flexibility for participants that may be located in a different city/area, or who prefer learning on their own. To achieve the same goals as the in-person one, the online training includes interactive videos, virtual workshops and discussion forums to make sure participants stay engaged and learn effectively. Through such flexible delivery methods, the training program can address varied schedules and resource availability, meeting the needs of participants from a wide range of organizations in an effective manner.

4.1.3 Evaluation and feedback mechanisms

Before the first full-scale implementation, it is important to pilot the training program with a small group of participants, as this allows for testing the effectiveness of the curriculum, gathering initial feedback, and making necessary adjustments to improve the overall quality of the program.

Regular assessments will also be done during the training program, after each major learning point, to ensure a more efficient learning process. Another necessary assessment is measuring how much of the information the participants remained with after the training, which will be done using a quiz on the main learning points and modules. Keeping the curriculum updated with the latest research and best practices in neurodiversity and inclusive leadership is also a key aspect of ensuring relevance over time.

Evaluating the impact of DE&I training is complex, since it is difficult to measure changes in attitudes, behaviors, and organizational culture, and to attribute these changes directly to the training program. Observing team dynamics, employee satisfaction, and retention rates of neurodiverse employees might offer some insights into the training's level of impact.

4.2 Training plan

Learning Objective	Activity	Description	Resources and Materials
-	Icebreaker and introduction 00:30h	Participants introduce themselves and share their expectations for the training. An overview of the training objectives and agenda is provided.	Training schedule
Bias awareness and mitigation Talent management strategies Inclusive Leadership	Experience sharing circle - Sharing experiences 01:00h	<p>Participants are split into groups of 4-5 members, each discussing their experiences and challenges related to managing diverse teams (builds empathy and understanding between participants).</p> <p>Each group must write down the main challenges they managed to identify and discuss</p>	<p>Pen & paper or other interfaces that allow note taking (tablets)</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Discussion forum</p>
	How would you react? - Interactive case studies Or Interactive videos 01:00h	<p>Each group received a case study to analyze and discuss how they would respond to specific situations.</p> <p>For example: an employee struggling with task organization, one experiencing sensory overload or reading difficulties, a candidate mentioning during the interview that they are diagnosed with ADHD, etc.</p>	<p>Case-cards, each describing a different scenario related to managing neurodiverse employees</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Interactive videos that move forward based on the scenario selected by the participant + Discussion forum</p>

Learning Objective	Activity	Description	Resources and Materials
	Inclusive skills - Key learning points aggregation 00:30	Participants are asked to highlight any specific characteristics/skills or adjectives that result out of the previous discussion (patience, annoyance, lack of commitment, empathy, neutrality, etc.) Using a word cloud generator, all these are gathered into the cloud, and the result is saved for later	Word cloud generator (either a free online tool, or the Microsoft Excel add-in can be used)
	Implicit bias awareness - Self-reflection exercise 00:30h	Participants complete an implicit bias test and reflect on their results. They then write down steps they can take to mitigate these biases in their leadership practice. This is followed by a group discussion on strategies to recognize and overcome biases in the workplace.	Laptop, computer, tablet, or mobile phone with internet connection, for taking the IAT (Harvard 2011)
Introduction to neurodiversity A psychologically safe workplace	Neurodiversity overview - Concepts, definitions, and presentation 00:30h	Overview of common neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD, autism, and dyslexia, their main characteristics, and other relevant sources that can help better understand these conditions	Presentation - What is neurodiversity? Reading materials

Learning Objective	Activity	Description	Resources and Materials
Inclusive leadership	Challenges faced by neurodiverse employees - Interactive presentation and discussion. 01:00h	Presentation on the specific challenges faced by employees with ADHD, autism, and dyslexia. Participants discuss real-life examples and share insights on potential solutions.	Presentation - To be neurodiverse. Videos or podcasts featuring neurodiverse individuals sharing their experiences.
	Addressing challenges - Problem-solving workshop 01:00h	Participants work in small groups to brainstorm and develop strategies for addressing the challenges discussed earlier (at least one per group). Each group presents their solutions, followed by a group reflection and discussion on these solutions and on the previously created word-map.	The previously created word-map is used as reference
	Neurodiverse strengths - Presentation 01:00h	Presentation on specific the strengths brought by each neurominority. Group discussion on the importance of diversity in the workplace	Presentation - The strengths that come with diversity

Learning Objective	Activity	Description	Resources and Materials
Technology Integration Workshop	Leveraging AI in talent management - Technology integration workshop 00:30h	Open discussion on how AI can be used to support neurodiverse employees. Group (or individual) exploration of currently existing AI tools addressing these challenges	Laptop, computer, tablet, or mobile phone with internet connection
-	Q&A session, closing remarks, reflection, and feedback 00:45	Participants reflect on their learning experiences and provide feedback on the training program. Facilitators summarize key takeaways and provide final remarks. Facilitators hand out post-training quizzes that need to be completed by the participants.	Post-training quizzes for each participant Neurodiversity guide to be handed out to each participant

Table 2: Training Plan

5 Discussion, conclusions, and reflection

5.1 Comparison with knowledge basis

The thesis was closely aligned with the principles reflected in the knowledge basis section and managed to produce a training plan addressed to leaders coordinating diverse teams by answering the research questions that were posed in the beginning of the thesis.

The study has been able to successfully identify and implement talent management approaches that focus on the importance of DE&I in the workplace. The training plan also emphasizes this by showing how implementing inclusive recruitment, development, and retention strategies is an important step in creating an environment that's safe and supportive for neurodiverse employees. Using tailored approaches in order to meet the need of diverse employees is a must in inclusive organizations.

Findings in this research also showed that critical leadership characteristics include empathy, openness, and the ability to build trust and psychological safety. These are built into the training module to arm leaders with a powerful tool kit of knowledge and skills required to lead diverse teams successfully. It can be seen that the program's attention to inclusive leadership aligns with general theories, based on how they stress the fact that successful leaders are fundamental for promoting conditions in which neurodiverse employees can succeed.

The study also provided insights into the challenges and opportunities leaders face when managing neurodivergent employees. Even though it's not easy to challenge biases and offer specialized support for diverse needs, a diverse team can bring unique strengths to the team and the organization, if leveraged correctly. In this sense, the training program offers a holistic framework that can be used by talent managers.

The best practices in the development of an inclusive training program were carefully examined and incorporated. Among these are the adoption of evidence-based methodologies, utilization of feedback processes and pathways as well as allowing for continuous improvement. Thus, the design and methodology of the program reflect these best practices too, creating a powerful and dynamic tool that can be used to promote inclusive talent management within the organization.

The knowledge base also states the need for and importance of inclusive leaders, which have the ability to create a psychological safe space for their teams, and build trust, helping everyone feel valued and respected. The training program also covers this, promoting inclusivity at leadership level, which is especially needed when managing diverse employees, and aligns with the well-established theories of inclusive leadership.

The approach used for understanding neurodiversity in the workplace within the training program is based on the existing definitions, knowledge, and benefits of neurodiversity. Neurodiverse people bring unique strengths and experiences to the organization, as it is already documented in the existing literature. Since the literature also highlights the need for awareness and proactivity when it comes to managing biases related to neurodivergence, the program includes those and it proposes strategies that can help better mitigate them in practice, in order to have a more equitable workplace.

This study employs methodological solutions, such as data collection and ethical considerations, that align with the protocols of existing research. In this regard, the program was informed by data collection and analysis that enabled creating training materials that are evidence-based and relevant. Ethical considerations, maintaining participant confidentiality, and informed consent, all adhere to the principles of high-quality research and program development.

Nonetheless, there are several learning and program development areas where the new insights provided by the study's findings can be applied, as they go well beyond the existing knowledge limits. The use of AI in talent management, especially in relation to finding, recruiting, and retaining neurodiverse employees is an underdeveloped field within the traditional DE&I literature replicating the chosen practices and insights. This innovative practice can fully become one of the key ways for organizational advancement when it comes to the way technology can be utilized in fully supporting neurodiverse employees.

Altogether, the training program for leading neurodiverse teams outlined above is well-grounded and based on expert knowledge on talent management, inclusive leadership, and understanding neurodiversity. While it is consistent with the known principles, it might contribute to the field by incorporating AI solutions and advocating for more comprehensive empirical studies. Overall, this would provide an unprecedented opportunity to enhance the effectiveness and adequacy of workplace neurodiversity initiatives.

5.2 Areas for further development

To gain a better understanding on the subject and implement effective strategies for leading neurodiverse teams, there are a few areas that can be further developed.

Firstly, feedback should also be gathered from leaders that work in companies all over the world, as it would be beneficial and it would provide a better understanding of how cultural differences can influence organizational culture, and therefore the approach of managing neurodiverse employees. By taking the cultural differences into consideration, the training plan could better incorporate them in order to increase its effectiveness, regardless of the cultural context in which it's applied, and improve inclusivity.

Secondly, while qualitative insights are invaluable and offer a deeper insight into the subject, conducting quantitative studies that focus on the experiences of neurodiverse employees will also be beneficial, as they can offer robust data that inform leadership strategies. Such studies can identify common challenges and success factors from the perspective of neurodiverse employees, and that will in turn help leaders better understand and adapt to their needs.

Another hot subject, artificial intelligence (AI) offers the opportunity to improve the recruitment and retention of neurodiverse employees by reducing the bias that can be present in job descriptions and application processes and identify the strengths of the candidate that match with the requirements of a specific position. If fed productivity data and other characteristics, AI can propose plans for development and support systems that are tailored to each employee, providing them with the exact resources they need, and constant feedback on their progress. AI can also be used to compensate in specific areas that prove to

be challenging for various neurodiverse employees, such as task organization and time management, taking notes, etc. Overall, talent management strategies could greatly benefit from this approach.

As there is more and more awareness of neurodiversity and more individuals are able to get diagnosed, the discussion related to neurodiversity in the workplace is only expected to expand as well. More openness in this direction can create the opportunity for gathering better insights and feedback into the matter, and continuously refine DE&I strategies. Organizations should remain receptive to these evolving discussions, continuously integrating new knowledge and experiences into their practices to stay responsive to the needs of neurodiverse employees.

Through focusing on these areas, organizations can enhance the knowledge they currently have and leverage it into building higher-performing and more supportive environments for neurodiverse teams. The more the areas are improved; the more success and well-being the neurodiverse employees and overall organizations can attain.

Inclusivity does not mean assimilation; an inclusive organization is one that adapts to the needs of its employees rather than expecting employees to conform to a rigid structure. As social creatures, our need for belonging and community extends beyond merely having a job. Recognizing that human resources are, first and foremost, human is crucial. Viewing employees solely as resources limits a company's potential to thrive in today's dynamic environment. By fostering an environment where employees feel valued and understood, organizations can create a sense of community that enhances engagement, innovation, and overall success. This human-centered approach is essential for true inclusivity and organizational growth.

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ChatGPT has been used for phrasing suggestions in this text.

Figures

Figure 1: The Double Diamond (Stickdorn et al. 2018).....31

Figure 2: Mention Counts (BrandMentions).....34

Figure 3: Top Domains (BrandMentions).....34

Figure 4: Related Hashtags (BrandMentions).....35

Figure 5: Sources (BrandMentions).....36

Figure 6: Google Search Trends (GoogleTrends).....37

Figure 7: Theme Map.....42

Tables

Table 1: Core modules 50

Table 3: Training Plan.....53

Appendices

Appendix 1: Discussion Guide	66
Appendix 2: Informed Consent	68
Appendix 3: Brand Monitoring Report	70

Appendix 1: Discussion Guide

Discussion guide

Introduction and informed consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I invited you to take part because, as a leader, your perspective on leading and managing teams is very important.

Survey overview: The interview aims to identify the perspectives of key stakeholders on the conduct of leadership and team management in order to identify possible entry points for future leadership training.

The discussion lasts approximately 40-45 minutes and will be recorded to ensure an accurate transcript and the best possible analysis of the issues shared by you, as stated in the Informed Consent signed earlier.

Anonymity: I guarantee that the discussion is anonymous and that we take care to ensure all conditions of confidentiality. We will keep the recording under a code until the discussion is transcribed and prepared for the analysis stage. Afterwards, the recording will be archived, secreted and available with password only to the interviewer. The notes produced from the discussion will not contain any information that would allow others to associate any participant with what they said during the discussion. If there are questions or topics that you do not wish to answer, you may refrain from answering them by stating so. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers, as it is your own perspective, shaped by your personal experience in leading and managing teams.

Introduction

- First, please tell me a few things about your work in the company.
- How many years of experience do you have in a management position?
- How many employees are you responsible for?

Main questions

- Can you describe your experience managing a diverse range of team members with varying work styles and preferences? What have been some challenges and successes?
- How do you approach communication with team members who may have different ways of processing information or expressing themselves?
- What strategies have you found effective in supporting team members with unique strengths and challenges?

- Can you share an example of a time when you had to adapt your leadership style to better support a team member's individual needs or preferences?
- How do you handle situations where team members may struggle with certain tasks or aspects of their role?
- In your opinion, what are the most important qualities or skills for a leader to possess when managing a diverse team?
- Have you encountered any misconceptions or stereotypes about certain types of employees in the workplace, and if so, how do you address them?
- How do you promote inclusivity and foster a supportive environment for all team members, regardless of their background or differences?

The concluding question

- Of all the points discussed today, what do you consider to be the most important aspects of running a team and managing it?

Conclusion

Thank you for participating, it was a very good discussion. Your perspective is very valuable for this consultation as it will provide benchmarks for future training and professional development plans for leaders.

Finally, I would like to remind you that all your opinions and comments included in the report will be anonymous. Should you have any further questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at the addresses provided in the Informed Consent.

Appendix 2: Informed Consent

Participant consent form for the consultative interview on team leadership and management practices

Master's degree programme: Leading Transformational Change

Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Helsinki, FI

SEICEAN ALEXANDRA - master student

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OBJECTIVE OF THE CONSULTATION

Please kindly attend the *Consultative Interview on Team Leadership and Management Practices*. Before deciding, it is important to understand the objectives of the study and what your participation entails. Please review the information below carefully, and then ask the researchers questions if there are items that are unclear to you and that you need more information on.

The overall purpose of this consultation is to obtain the perspectives and experiences of leaders within Research Partner X in leading and managing a team of diverse employees. We aim to identify potential difficulties encountered in this process and explore successful strategies and practices used in dealing with them. The information gathered will be used to develop recommendations and solutions tailored to the organization's current needs in managing team diversity.

DATA COLLECTION, PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Your participation in the study involves conducting a semi-structured interview based on a list of questions (interview guide) formulated around the overall objective of the study.

The interview will be audio-recorded in order to ensure the most accurate processing of the data provided by you. During the discussion the interviewer will also take notes which will be used in the data processing stage, and these will be treated as confidential as the content of the discussion and the recording.

The recording will be stored by assigning a code so that the confidentiality of what you say during the interview is ensured. Only the interviewer will have access to the audio file and the transcript of the interview, and both the interviewer and representatives of the Human Resources Department of the partner company will have access to the conclusions and general themes resulting from the interviews (anonymized). After transcription of the interview, the data will be processed using qualitative methodologies (thematic analysis).

RISKS

You have the option of refusing to answer any of the questions you will be asked during the interview and, if you wish, you can choose to end the discussion at any time.

Participation in this study does not involve any risks to you that are known to the researchers. The researchers undertake not to subject you to any risk during the interview or in the subsequent stages of processing and interpreting the data and publishing the results.

BENEFITS

The study will not directly benefit you for your participation. However, we hope that the information obtained during the consultation will form the basis for future measures to improve the framework for leadership and management of teams.

PRIVACY

Your answers during this interview will be anonymous. The researcher assumes responsibility for maintaining confidentiality by:

- Assign numerical codes to each participant to be used in all consultation notes and documents.
- Keeping all notes, interview recordings and transcripts, and other identifying data of respondents on devices to which only the interviewer has access, using passwords.
- Respecting the rights of participants, which derive from the GDPR (*General Data Protection Regulation*) legislation.

Each participant's data will be kept in the strictest confidence, except where researchers are legally obliged to report specific incidents (such as abuse or suicide risk).

CONTACT INFORMATION

If during the interview or later during the exploratory study you wish to ask questions about the study, or if you wish to find out more about your rights as a subject in this consultation, please contact Alexandra Seicean (contact details page 1).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this consultation is voluntary. The decision to participate is yours. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this informed consent. After signing it, you will still be able to withdraw from the study at any time and without being obliged to provide any explanation. Withdrawal from the study will not affect the relationship you may have with partner company X. If you withdraw before the end of the data collection phase, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and understood the information provided in this consultative interview and have also had the opportunity to clarify all my questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give reasons for my decision or being liable for any damages to the researcher or to partner company X. I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this consultation.

Name and signature of participant

Date

Name and signature of researcher

Date

Appendix 3: Brand Monitoring Report



neurodiversity

Brand Monitoring Report

22 Apr 2024 - 21 May 2024