

Nurturing Neurodiversity in the Workplace: An Integrative Literature Review

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Abstract

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Research problem: Despite increasing recognition of neurodiversity as a critical component of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts, neurodivergent individuals still face barriers to employment and long-term career opportunities, often due to negative stereotypes, bias, and discrimination. This study attempts to provide a baseline of knowledge about this issue by analyzing trade and professional literature, a vital source of knowledge for Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals, to identify key strategies for supporting neurodiversity in the workplace.

Research question: What are the most prominently discussed HRD strategies—training and development, career development, organizational development—within professional publications in the past 10 years to support neurodivergent individuals in the workplace?

Literature review: Neurodiversity emerged in the wake of growing stakeholder activism and a perceived competitive advantage for organizations seeking innovation and productivity gains. Because it addresses a group with unique characteristics and needs within the workplace, neurodiversity is encompassed within the broader discussion on diversity within HRD. While there is ample literature exploring the conceptualization on neurodiversity and its potential value to organizations, gaps in peer-reviewed research on HRD and neurodiversity include the lack of applied research on strategies aimed at enhancing neurodiversity in the workplace.

Methodology: An integrative literature review was employed. Because so few peer-reviewed research exists on the subject of HRD for neurodiverse individuals in the workplace, articles from trade publications were systematically sought, categorized and analyzed. A sample of 282 articles was collected using replicable search parameters, with 176 articles retained for further analysis. The articles were then systematically reviewed by identifying first, particular characteristics of each article and then to find patterns among these characteristics concerning neuroinclusive strategies within training and development, career development, and organizational development.

Results and Conclusion: The findings revealed a total of 439 strategies spread across the three dimensions of HRD. The study found that the majority of strategies identified pertained to organizational development (205 strategies), followed closely by training and development (189 strategies), while career development strategies were the least represented in the literature (45 strategies). In light of the study, the dominant themes of each dimension of HRD are diversity training (training and development), career coaching and support (career development), and culture change (organizational development). The findings highlight the interconnected nature of HRD strategies used to foster a more neuroinclusive workplace. To ensure feasibility, this study was limited to trade and professional publications from the past decade written in English that are retrieved from the ABI/Inform (ProQuest) database, and as such, the findings may be influenced by the evolving nature of the topic, the variability in the literary genre, and validation through empirical studies. Future research can examine the effects of neurodiversity awareness or acceptability using non-training interventions, the relevance or effectiveness of tools powered by artificial intelligence to support neurodivergent individuals' career progression, and explore how macro-systemic strategies to better foster neurodiversity in the workplace.

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Chapter 1: Background

Since its inception, the term neurodiversity has been steadily gaining interest. Conceptually, neurodiversity challenges pre-existing ideologies of known medical conditions, reframing them as normal variations within human existence. Such a perception has important consequences for the individuals themselves and for the organizations that employ or consider hiring them. The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive review of trade and professional publications discussing neurodiversity within the workplace to characterize popular knowledge on the subject. Specifically, the proposed study aims to provide Human Resource Development (HRD) personnel, training and development experts, and other professionals responsible for employing, managing, or facilitating the inclusion of neurominorities within the workplace with a holistic view of the types of advice, recommendations, and interventions aimed at improving the employability of adult neurominorities.

Neurodiversity is a topic that is situated at the crossroad between a mature topic and an emerging one. To elucidate, the subject of neurodiversity is a continuation of the robust body of research on the topic of autism (Wolff, 2004), yet it is new in how autism and other neurological and developmental disorders are reconceptualized as naturally occurring variations within human cognition (Singer, 1998). Based on a preliminary literature review, there are some attempts to consolidate knowledge since the emergence of the term. However, research reveals that the current body of academic publications lacks practical advice for employers and employees (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022). Despite the lack of evidenced-based and well-researched practical advice on neurodiversity inclusion within the workplace in peer-reviewed literature, trade and professional publications discussing neurodiversity at work are readily available, such as the “Neurodiversity at Work” podcast by Jay Hobbs, the article “Neurodiversity as a Competitive

Advantage” (Austin & Pisano, 2017) published in the *Harvard Business Review*, and other articles published by professional associations such as the UK-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the US-based Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). There is a need to review non-peer reviewed publications to uncover patterns within the literature and to consolidate knowledge, as these sources are read by professionals involved in hiring, planning and supporting the career development of employees, supporting initiatives to enhance organizational performance, and collaborating with stakeholders to develop strategic plans to meet organizational goals.

This chapter aims to provide a background for the present study by examining the current discourse on neurodiversity in relation to employment. It delves into the challenges faced by neurominorities in finding and maintaining employment while also providing reasons as to why organizations may be interested in supporting and nurturing neurodiversity in the workplace.

The Necessity of Employment

Employment is an integral part of an individual’s life. Not only does it provide economic security and a sense of social belonging where individuals contribute their talent and skills to society (Saleh & Bruyère, 2018), but it is also regarded as a critical social determinant of health (C. Doyle et al., 2005). In effect, unemployment may impact individuals in a variety of ways, such as negatively affecting one’s psychological wellbeing and sense of self-esteem (C. Doyle et al., 2005). It is also a cause of mortality and socioeconomic deprivation and affects mental health and psychological wellbeing (C. Doyle et al., 2005). The World Health Organization further states that job insecurity is a chronic stressor whose effects grow with the length of exposure (R. Wilkinson & Marmot (Eds.), 2003, p. 20).

Within the business industry and society in general, equal and equitable access to employment has been the subject of interest for the past several decades and continues to be a topic of interest for businesses and organizations in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. For some, diversity and inclusion are “powerful enablers of performance” (Hunt et al., 2020, p. 2), with research pointing towards a “statistically significant correlation between financial outperformance and diversity on the dimension of gender and ethnic diversity” (Hunt et al., 2020, p. 13). Although diversity can be regarded as an element to improve organizational performance and innovation, marginalized individuals advocate for the right to be employed and be treated equally, without discrimination. Historically, social justice and human rights movements led by marginalized individuals brought landmark legislative changes, such as the Canadian Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination in employment (Ciufu, 2019). To this day, societal events and advocacy-based movements continue to affect how organizations conduct their business. Consequently, organizations face a dual challenge. Firstly, they face pressure to address inequality and systemic issues in the workforce (Nguyen et al., 2023, p. 1). Secondly, they need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to further social causes while navigating potential resistance from employees who either fail to recognize the necessity of such initiatives due to bias (Pendry et al., 2007, p. 31) or perceive insufficient action by the organization (Hirsch, 2022; Zheng, 2022).

Employment-Related Difficulties of Neurominorities

In the past 20 years, a new term advocating for the rights and inclusion of individuals with autism has emerged within the autism self-advocacy movement and is gaining popularity. Largely attributed to Judy Singer, an autistic sociologist, neurodiversity embraces cognitive and mental differences as normal variations within the broad spectrum of humanity. Advocates of the

term call for acceptance and an end to the stigmatization of individuals with health conditions that include autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), developmental coordination disorder (DCD), historically referred to as dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome (TS), and learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dyscalculia and more (N. Doyle, 2020a; N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022; Jaarsma & Welin, 2012; Singer, 1998). People with different types of neurodivergence, also referred to as neurominorities, present with conditions that impact their functioning and integration at work (Austin & Pisano, 2017; N. Doyle, 2020a). These challenges include, but are not limited to, impaired social communication, rigidity or anxiety related to change, and difficulty focusing on tasks and difficulty with sensory processing (Austin & Pisano, 2017).

Historically and in the present, neurominorities face challenges on various fronts, such as discrimination (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Mellifont, 2021), bullying (Mellifont, 2020), and negative stereotypes from employers and co-workers (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Krzeminska et al., 2019). Although some improvements have been observed and noted (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Krzeminska et al., 2019), the literature highlights a significant issue of high unemployment and underemployment, including limited employment access and a lack of opportunities that utilize neurominorities to their full potential (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Krzeminska et al., 2019; Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Furthermore, according to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), 33% of Canadians with autism spectrum disorder are employed compared to 79% without a disability (Government of Canada, 2022). Identifying these issues precisely proves challenging due to the scarcity of research and limited disclosure (Annabi & Locke, 2019).

Consideration for Neurodiversity Talent

Proponents of neurodiversity argue that neurominorities possess skills that can potentially be beneficial to businesses and organizations (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Krzeminska et al., 2019; Walkowiak, 2021). However, the discourse is complicated by several factors.

To start, some people consider neurominorities as overlooked geniuses who can become invaluable assets if given the proper support (N. Doyle, 2020a). The “diamond in the rough” conceptualization of their identity underlies a reductive narrative, suggesting that neurominorities are useful if one can look past their challenges (N. Doyle, 2020b). Furthermore, certain stereotypes exist about the types of jobs neurominorities are best suited for and those they should avoid (LeFevre-Levy et al., 2023); however, neurominorities argue that they possess a broad range of skills, interests, and qualifications, which makes them suitable for a wide variety of jobs (Praslova et al., 2023; Walkowiak, 2021). These skills and qualifications include technical degrees, STEM, computer programming, digital media, medicine, communication, hospitality, and more (Walkowiak, 2021). Moreover, there is a broader narrative encapsulating the discourse on neurodiverse talent, which suggests that diversity, including neurodiversity, benefits organizations by increasing their performance through innovation. In effect, advocates of neurodiversity in the workplace argue that individuals with different experiences can potentially offer new ways of perceiving a problem or solution (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Walkowiak, 2021). Nevertheless, neurominorities encounter employment challenges due to bias and systemic barriers despite the skills and qualifications they possess.

Ongoing Changes and Future Trends Affecting Employment and Employability

The current employment landscape is of concern for both neurotypical individuals and neurominorities alike. Specifically, Carliner et al. (2021) describe the labour market as uncertain

due to a series of developments since the 1980s, which include the following: digital disruptions, globalization, demographic changes (such as population aging and immigration), the speed of transformation, flexibility, the primacy of shareholder value, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Carliner et al., 2021). In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to concerns regarding unemployment rates (Yalnizyan, 2022), which were reported to reach 13.2% in Canada at the peak of the pandemic in 2020 (Government of Canada, 2020). Although the labour market in Canada is showing some signs of recovery, job vacancies remain high in some sectors, particularly in health care and social assistance (Government of Canada, 2023). The aforementioned changes in the labour market and society create a practical necessity for organizations to re-examine neurominorities as prospective workers, as they have been previously overlooked.

Facilitating the Integration of Neurominorities Into the Workplace

Society is increasingly supportive of neurominorities' desire to be recognized as fully functioning skilled individuals who are able to work. In fact, the Canadian government published a news article highlighting the alignment of neurodiversity with core values of diversity and inclusion within organizations and public services (Government of Canada, 2021). This interest extends to Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals because the inclusion of neurominorities in the workplace aligns with broader organizational efforts to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion across gender, ethnic, cultural, and racial minorities, as well as sexual orientation (Ozeren, 2014). A report summarizing the collective voices of HRD professionals from around the globe regarding issues they felt would affect their profession in the near future highlighted that changing demographics and diversity and inclusion strategies, among others, are major trends influencing the HRD field (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development,

2022). Specifically, the report mentioned the collective need to broaden the definition of diversity to include disability, religion, and other marginalized groups, and to rethink how professionals can utilize their expertise to develop effective diversity and inclusion strategies, which include influencing organizational leaders, creating a culture that champions equality, and adapting current ways of working to further diversity and inclusion goals (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2022).

The interest in neurodiversity further coincides with recent pledges from organizations to fight systemic discrimination and improve diversity and inclusion initiatives within the workplace as a result of mounting pressure from social justice movements following the death of George Floyd, an African American who died from injuries inflicted by a police officer during his arrest.

Research Purpose

There is much discussion regarding the advantages of employing and nurturing a neurodiverse workforce within the context of improving overall diversity (Singer, 1998) and leveraging neurodiversity talent to enhance organizational performance (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Baron-Cohen et al., 2009). However, the current body of literature raises concerns regarding the “dearth of applied practitioner research concerning the expression of neurodiversity at work” (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022, p. 352), pointing to a gap between science and practice. For instance, there is currently a lack of documented cases clarifying whether incentivization programs, such as funding for accommodation services, help employers provide tangible support for neurodivergent individuals (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022, p. 355). Existing research also indicates a lack of evidence that commonly used practices provide any meaningful impact (N.

Doyle & McDowall, 2022, p. 356). Moreover, the peer-reviewed literature is scarce on controlled studies measuring performance within the area of neurodiversity talent (Bury et al., 2020, p. 10).

Nonetheless, despite the lack of research regarding evidence-based practices in supporting neurominorities at work, the topic of neurodiversity continues to be of interest within the popular press and social media. For instance, a student newspaper reported that TikTok videos in the post-pandemic era contributed significantly to the visibility of the neurodiversity movement, thus increasing public knowledge around the concept of neurodiversity and the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals (Wickramasinghe, 2022). Furthermore, periodicals covering human resources and business continue to discuss the topic of neurodiversity in relation to the workplace, particularly how neurodiverse talent can be ‘harnessed’ (Ivey Business School at Western University, n.d.; Soraghan, 2023; D. Takahashi, 2023).

Thus, the present thesis explores the literature on neurodiversity within the workplace to determine which strategies are regarded as important for supporting neurodivergent individuals at work so that they may enter the labour market and remain employed. Furthermore, it seeks to characterize the current beliefs underpinning the strategies perceived as important for the integration of neurodivergent workers. To do so, this thesis aims to answer the following research question:

1. What are the most prominently discussed HRD strategies—training and development, career development, organizational development—within professional publications in the past 10 years to support neurodivergent individuals in the workplace?

This thesis provides a study that addresses the aforementioned question. The following chapters are structured as follows. Chapter 2 situates the current study within the ongoing

discussions found in the literature on neurodiversity. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology employed for conducting this research, and Chapter 4 presents the study's results. Chapter 5 concludes the study by discussing the implications of the findings for practitioners in the field and future research, highlighting its limitations and offering suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter situates the current study in the ongoing discussions in the literature on neurodiversity, diversity initiatives within the workplace, and the roles of Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals within the context of the present topic. More precisely, the review will define and explain foundational concepts related to neurodiversity, provide an overview of the evolution of diversity training, situate the notion of intersectionality within disability studies and neurodiversity, examine school-to-work transition strategies, and situate diversity and inclusion within HRD to better frame the relevance of neurodiversity within the academic field and professional practice of HRD.

Background About Neurodiversity

In the previous chapter, this study presented neurodiversity as a term that originated in stakeholder activism within the autism community. A detailed examination of the literature on neurodiversity reveals that some stakeholder activists and certain researchers use the term differently than others. This raises important questions for professionals and researchers alike, as it challenges traditional perceptions and beliefs around disability and disorder, which will also be discussed in this chapter. The present section will begin by broadly defining neurodiversity and then exploring the various facets attached to the term.

Defining Neurodiversity

While, to this day, the terminology continues to evolve and is subject to debate (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022), neurodiversity can refer to the existence of diversity within human brains (Singer, 1998). It is also used by some writers and researchers as an umbrella term for neurological and developmental conditions (N. Doyle, 2020a; N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022; Dwyer, 2022; Kapp et al., 2013) and mental disorders (Mellifont, 2019, 2020, 2021).

Terminology Related to Neurodiversity

The discussion on topics related to neurodiversity employs the following relevant terms, which will be briefly discussed below: neurotypical, neurodivergent, neurominority, and neuroinclusion. To begin, individuals with cognitive abilities that fall within the statistical norms are referred to as neurotypical (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022; Singer, 1998). The terms neurodivergent, neurodiverse, and neurominority are used academically and for self-identification to refer to individuals who deviate from the norm (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021; N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022). However, neurodiversity advocates prefer people to use the term neurodiverse to describe the presence of cognitive diversity within society (such as a neurodiverse society) rather than as another synonym for disability or handicap (such as a neurodiverse person) (Chellappa, 2023; N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022; Singer, 1998). Finally, the terms neuroinclusion, neuroinclusivity, and similar variants have also been observed in trade and professional publications (N. Doyle, 2020b; Uptimize, n.d.) and, to a lesser extent, in peer-reviewed literature (Chellappa, 2023; Mickovski, 2022). A plausible explanation for the emergence of neuroinclusivity relates to how diversity as an ideology continues to evolve, with a current emphasis on inclusion that goes beyond acknowledging differences to actively foster a sense of belonging (Garg & Sangwan, 2021; Kapoor, 2011; Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014).

Neurodivergent Conditions

As previously mentioned, neurodiversity encompasses several neurodivergent conditions (also referred to as types of neurodivergence). Presently, there is some discrepancy in the literature regarding how researchers describe the conditions included under the umbrella, as some of them are included and although some are not; but overall, any conditions affecting the nervous system and the brain fall within this umbrella. Some conditions develop during early

childhood, such as autism, while others are acquired later in life, for instance, a mental disorder that significantly alters brain functions. Below is a list of the types of neurodivergence and their definitions:

1. Autism or autism spectrum disorder (ASD): a condition characterized by some degree of difficulty with social interaction and communication, possible atypical patterns of activities or behaviour, and potential unusual responses to sensory stimuli (World Health Organization, 2022). The experience of autism among individuals can vary along a continuum of severity, whereby a person with autism can be self-autonomous and independent, although another may be clinically described as disabled (World Health Organization, 2022; Zeidan et al., 2022).
2. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): individuals with ADHD may present with inattention, impulsivity, excessive energy, and restlessness, potentially affecting academic and professional performance, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).
3. Developmental coordination disorder (DCD): formerly known as dyspraxia, DCD is a condition affecting physical coordination. Individuals with DCD may appear clumsy or have difficulty learning and mastering certain motor functions, such as tying shoelaces, thus interfering with their functioning at school, at work, and in daily life (Canadian Paediatric Society, n.d.; National Health Services, 2023).
4. Tourette syndrome: a condition affecting the nervous system that results in sudden and uncontrollable twitches, movements, or sounds (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.).

5. Dyslexia: a brain-based learning disorder that occurs in childhood and specifically affects a person's ability to read accurately and fluently and to develop spelling skills (Roitsch & Watson, 2019).
6. Dyscalculia: a condition affecting the learning of mathematics (Haberstroh & Schulte-Körne, 2019).
7. Dysgraphia: a disorder of the nervous system that causes difficulty with writing and fine motor skills (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2023).
8. Mental disorders: any conditions that significantly affect an individual's cognitive abilities (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2023).

The names, definitions, diagnostic criteria, and treatments of these conditions have evolved and continue to do so with advances in science (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022; Morris-Rosendahl & Crocq, 2020).

Explaining Neurodiversity

Broadly, neurodiversity can be understood as a concept, a framework, and a movement (Dwyer, 2022).

To begin, the conceptualization of neurodiversity centres on the elements of natural variance, intrinsic value, and de-pathologization. First, it conceptualizes individual differences within the human experience as factually normal and naturally occurring variances in abilities within the human spectrum of lived experiences (Chapman, 2021; Dwyer, 2022; Jaarsma & Welin, 2012; Singer, 1998). In that sense, neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals are part of neurodiversity because no two brains are alike (Dwyer, 2022). Second, akin to biodiversity, neurodiversity supports the idea that variations in behaviour and cognitive processes are “valuable elements of natural human existence” (Shmulsky et al., 2021). Third, it is de-

pathologizing because it embraces these variations within the brain as simply different and not diseased (Chellappa, 2023; N. Doyle, 2020a).

Neurodiversity is also regarded as a framework or an approach “to dictate a proper way of proceeding in relation to human neurocognitive diversity” (Dwyer, 2022; Shmulsky et al., 2021).

Finally, neurodiversity is an advocacy-based political movement seeking to advance the rights and wellbeing of neurodivergent individuals based on the conceptualization of neurodiversity as a natural variance, the recognition that disability is a social phenomenon, and the criticism of current systems that leads to negative impressions and attitudes towards neurodivergent individuals (Chapman, 2021; Doyle, 2020; Dwyer, 2022; Singer, 1998).

Evolving Views and Language

Because neurodiversity is often discussed within the context of disability, it is pertinent at this point in the thesis to define the following terms: disability, difference, and disorder. Broadly, disability refers to one’s inability to perform certain functions required to survive or to participate fully in society. How individuals understand disability is influenced by two ideologies: the perception that a problem related to an individual’s body or mind causes disability (medical model of disability), and the argument that structural barriers are the cause of disability, not an impaired body or mind (social model of disability) (Haegele & Hodge, 2016; LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007; Sofokleous & Stylianou, 2023). Modern definitions of disability incorporate aspects of these two models to form a comprehensive understanding of how disability manifests. This thesis will elaborate on the models later. Regarding difference, within the context of neurodiversity, some perceive that brain-based differences are inherent aspects of oneself that need to be respected and even celebrated (Singer, 1998). However, the recognition of

neurodivergence as a difference rather than a disability is critiqued by other neurodivergent and disabled individuals who advocate for their rights, challenges, and needs to be recognized (Andrews et al., 2019; Baron-Cohen, 2019; Krcek, 2013). As for disorder, it is a “disturbance of normal functioning of the mind or body. Disorders may be caused by genetic factors, disease, or trauma” (National Cancer Institute, n.d.).

Neurodiversity raises important questions about the language and terms used to describe neurodivergent individuals, particularly the notion of disability, as the language used to describe individuals with disabilities affects the interactions that people within society have with them and how these individuals view their abilities and disabilities (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). Presently, there is a lack of consensus on what constitutes disability, difference, and disorder (Baron-Cohen, 2019) as the conceptualization and use of terms evolve, influenced by professional organizations and key individuals with the authority to define them (Brittain, 2004; Haegele & Hodge, 2016).

Previously, this thesis introduced the existence of two models currently used to conceptualize disability: the medical model and the social model. Under the medical model, disability is associated with “negative and dehumanizing language” (Andrews et al., 2019), as it linguistically characterizes disability in biological terms (Brittain, 2004; N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022), focusing on the aspects of reduced body or cognitive functions (Haegele & Hodge, 2016, p. 195) that are “independent from social-cultural, physical and political environments” (Brittain, 2004, p. 430). In this model, disabled people are considered sick or dysfunctional because they are perceived as not able to function like what is perceived as normal individuals. Thus, interventions under the medical model aim to, as much as possible, help fix the problems (Haegele & Hodge, 2016, p. 195).

The medical model of disability is criticized for several reasons. Critics argue that medical professionals act as “gatekeepers in society and use diagnoses and labelling to determine which individuals receive services, type of services, and benefits” (Haegele & Hodge, 2016, p. 196). This is seen as problematic because individuals who are labelled and categorized according to their diagnosis feel as though their options and opportunities are limited by these labels (Haegele & Hodge, 2016, p. 196). Another criticism of the medical model is that it conceptually reinforces people’s negative perceptions of disability by equating it with being sick or ill (Haegele & Hodge, 2016, p. 196). For many, their disability becomes the defining characteristic that shapes how non-disabled individuals perceive them (Haegele & Hodge, 2016, p. 195).

In contrast, the social model differentiates between disability and impairment (Andrews et al., 2019; Dwyer, 2022; Haegele & Hodge, 2016). Impairment is viewed as an abnormality of the mind and/or body that causes limited functionality, although disability is perceived as a societal phenomenon resulting from systems that neglect the realities of individuals living with impairments (Haegele & Hodge, 2016, p. 197). According to the social model of disability, limitations arise not from one’s bodily or mental function, but from society’s failure to design with individuals’ needs in mind.

At its core, neurodiversity is grounded in the social model of disability (Chapman, 2021; N. Doyle, 2020a; N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022; Singer, 1998). Following the ideologies of the social model of disability, advocates of neurodiversity reframe disability as a political issue while emphasizing the values and strengths of individuals despite their impairments (Chapman, 2021; Dwyer, 2022; Singer, 1998). They argue that disability is not solely the result of an individual’s impairment but stems from socio-political conditions, such as a lack of recognition or accommodation, which create an inhospitable environment for neurodivergent individuals

(Chapman, 2021; den Houting, 2019). Neurodiversity proponents further criticize traditional, pathologizing, and deficit-based language that reportedly fails to recognize the value of neurodivergent individuals (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022). However, the social model of disability, which underpins neurodiversity, is also criticized, particularly concerning types of neurodivergences such as autism, because these individuals can encounter barriers even if societal inclusion were improved (Dwyer, 2022).

As a counterargument, the movement does not call for the complete exclusion of the medical model or the complete adoption of the social model. Rather, it seeks to remove the stigma associated with disability (Singer, 2019), and the original conception of neurodiversity was intended to transcend both models (Dwyer, 2022). To achieve this, neurodiversity proponents advocate for the removal of barriers that hinder participation in socioeconomic activities, reconsider how language is used to characterize the identities and abilities of neurodivergent individuals, and recognize their ability to function despite their challenges.

The State of Empirical Studies on Neurodiversity

Over the past decade, several researchers have taken an interest in neurodiversity and have published literature on the topic. Empirical research into autism demonstrates that embracing neurodiversity leads to a more positive perception of autism without diminishing the desire for help and intervention (Kapp et al., 2013). Such research has confirmed, on a theoretical level, the notion of transcendence or convergence between the medical model and the social model, elucidating that the models are not binary and mutually exclusive.

However, very few empirical studies have been published regarding the implementation of strategies supporting neurodiversity in the workplace. Most notably, Doyle and McDowall (2022) published an empty review highlighting the lack of practical advice for employers and

employees, revealing a growing science-practitioner gap and recommending a new research agenda. Particularly, they emphasized the need for longitudinal evaluations and process analyses of strategies currently deployed at individual, environmental, and systemic levels to better understand how they function as mechanisms for securing employment, improving career development, and enhancing work performance (p. 365). Furthermore, Doyle and McDowall argue that there is much to learn from principles and research currently used in general disability studies, race, and gender studies (p. 365).

Despite the limited research available, there is evidence of a growing interest within the scientific community in evidence-based strategies that can be implemented to improve the employment outcomes of neurodivergent individuals. For instance, a meta-analysis examining strategies to enhance the employment outcomes of autistic individuals recommended interventions such as vocational training, job coaching, social skills training, sensory integration therapy, and supportive employment (Yan, 2024, p. 138). The results also highlight the need for a multifaceted approach that takes into consideration the unique needs and challenges, and further recommends the need for concerted actions between businesses and educational institutions (Yan, 2024, p. 139). Yan's research, while helpful, primarily focuses on autistic individuals and cannot be generalized to other types of neurodivergence. Other published articles explore the consequences of workplace discrimination and bullying of neurodivergent individuals (Mellifont, 2021; Özer et al., 2024), identify evidence-based strategies for improving the long-term employment outcomes of neurodivergent individuals (Mellifont, 2019), review the quality of knowledge disseminated regarding neurodiversity and neurodivergent conditions (McDowall et al., 2024), examine the use of digital technology to improve learning and performance (Kim et al., 2024; Tomczak & Ziemiański, 2023), and explore topics related to inclusion and diversity

management, such as remote work and flexible working hours (Yeke & Özveren, 2024) and reasonable accommodations (Petty et al., 2023).

To summarize, neurodiversity is a concept, framework, and movement supporting the equal respect and appreciation of all individuals in society, regardless of their cognitive abilities. This new way of conceptualizing human identity normalizes conditions that were traditionally sources of stigmatization and marginalization. Although there is a growing body of academic literature discussing neurodiversity over the past decade, some researchers point to a lack of evidence-based empirical studies concerning workplace strategies aimed at improving neurodiversity at work.

Human Resource Development (HRD) and Diversity

This section will define HRD, situate the topic of diversity within its practice, provide an overview of the strategies used by HRD professionals to improve diversity, and review the literature on emerging strategies to enhance neurodiversity.

HRD emerges from the fields of adult education, educational technology, and management, rooted in industrial and organizational psychology, among others (Carliner, 2014). It can be conceptualized as “a process of developing and unleashing expertise to improve individual, team, work process, and organizational system performance” (Swanson, 2022, p. 4). Historically, HRD has focused on activities related to training and development (Nadler, 1974; Swanson, 2022; Torraco, 2005a; Tseng & McLean, 2008), performance or change at a strategic level within an organization (Carliner, 2014; Garavan, 1997; Tseng & McLean, 2008), and better managing the various stages of an employee’s career in response to rising challenges in the business world (Garavan, 1997, p. 47). Additionally, more recent definitions include the notion of workplace satisfaction and the dimension of social responsibility. Therefore, HRD

encompasses any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or ultimately the whole of humanity (McLean & McLean, 2001, p. 322).

Defining Diversity

Different authors have defined diversity; however, a single and globally accepted definition has yet to be established. Although workplace diversity initially focused on gender and race (Kormanik & Chyle Rajan, 2010), contemporary understanding encompasses a broader range of factors, including race or ethnicity, gender, age, colour, physical ability, religion, disability, sexual orientation, values, education, language, economic status (Roberson et al., 2017), and more recently, neurodiversity (Singer, 1998). The Association for Talent Development (ATD) (2024) defines diversity as follows:

Diversity is the presence of differences that may include, but are not limited to, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, physical or mental ability, and age. Diversity may also include differences in political perspective, learning preferences, personality, and communication preferences (para. 1).

The sentiment surrounding diversity is often mixed. Critics suggest that group homogeneity generates less conflict and is more productive, whereas advocates and researchers for diversity argue that it has potential advantages, such as organizational effectiveness and performance (Yadav & Lenka, 2020, p. 902). Although diversity has been extensively explored in Human Resource Management (HRM) (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014), it is also a subject of interest in the field of Human Resource Development (HRD), as HRD's core functions involve

preparing individuals and organizations for learning and change (Kormanik & Chyle Rajan, 2010; Sparkman, 2019). Such strategies include the development, administration, and management of diversity training, which has become common in most major organizations (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Kormanik & Chyle Rajan, 2010).

Diversity in the Workplace

As values surrounding diversity changed over time, so too did the Human Resource Development (HRD) activities within organizations. Diversity has become a popular business topic in the past four decades (R. Anand & Winters, 2008), and renewed interest in the subject arose following the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer who knelt on his neck on May 22, 2020 (Fisher & Rouse, 2022; Gaudiano, 2022).

Following the murder, the name *George Floyd* was searched for more than any other Black individual who experienced police violence (B. Balakrishnan & McGrath, 2023). The event resulted in what has been characterized as the largest racial justice movement in American history (Buchanan et al., 2020) and is regarded as a driving force for race-related diversity (B. Balakrishnan & McGrath, 2023). Organizations and businesses reacted to the justice movement with solidarity statements denouncing racism and pledging to do more to promote equality (Gaudiano, 2022; George, 2021); however, it is difficult to ascertain the motives of organizations, since a recent study revealed that organizations with a diverse workforce saw their stock prices fall after the murder of George Floyd (K. Balakrishnan et al., 2023, p. 738).

Three years after George Floyd's murder and the rise of pledges from organizations, authors in popular media declared a lack of progress (Gaudiano, 2022; Minor, 2023), as some corporations began eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) positions and activities at the start of 2023 (Hsu, 2023; Minor, 2023). On June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court of the United

States of America declared that affirmative action policies used to raise the number of underrepresented minorities in colleges and universities are unconstitutional, raising the question of whether corporate policies around diversity and inclusion may face a similar outcome (Chung & Kruzel, 2023; Hsu, 2023). George Floyd's murder and the subsequent mobilization of the public and private sectors are reminders that the topic of diversity remains important to people and organizations. In fact, the topic of diversity has been the object of concern for organizations since the 1960s (R. Anand & Winters, 2008; Dobbin & Kalev, 2013) and possibly as early as post-World War II (Oyler & Golden Pryor, 2009).

The following subsections will summarize the broader transformations in corporate North American society and how these changes influenced the learning needs relating to diversity in North American organizations before exploring the state of the literature on diversity training as a genre of corporate learning intervention used to support diversity initiatives. It is important to note that there are discrepancies within the literature regarding the division and characterization of the eras of the diversity movement. Nkomo and Hoobler (2014) claim that organizational diversity issues can be traced back to the birth of the United States of America until the mid-twentieth century when white supremacy was the dominant ideology (p. 247), whereas Anand and Winters (2008), Dobbin and Kalev (2013), and Oliha-Donaldson (2020) claim that the origins of organizational diversity efforts can be traced back to the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Anand and Winters further distinguish between the actual beginning of organizational diversity, which they claim is rooted in multiculturalism (p. 358), and the precursors to diversity, which were the eras preceding it (p. 357). This thesis utilizes and adapts the work of several authors to broadly frame the discussion on the evolution of workplace diversity. Specifically, this

thesis will structure the discussion by referencing the major shifts in diversity ideology over time, and by attempting to nuance regional differences.

Compliance and Litigation Avoidance

In the United States of America, before the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1962, the human rights movement and the mobilization of marginalized groups advocated for their rights, fair treatment, and an end to discrimination. These social justice movements played a significant role in driving legislative changes to protect people's rights against discrimination (R. Anand & Winters, 2008; Oliha-Donaldson, 2020) and paved the way for diversity initiatives within the workplace (Portocarrero & Carter, 2022). The cornerstone of this first-wave diversity was affirmative action policies and employment equity programs. Although some ideological differences exist between affirmative action, which originated from the United States of America, and employment equity, the Canadian approach to redressing workplace discrimination, both approaches aim to enforce a more equitable workplace environment (Cohen, 1985; Mentzer, 2002; Oliha-Donaldson, 2020). These included the implementation of quotas to increase the representation of marginalized individuals in the workplace and the establishment of policies and procedures to enforce equity. In response to affirmative actions in the United States of America, companies provided training to employees for compliance purposes and, in certain cases, to avoid litigation (R. Anand & Winters, 2008).

In Canada, the concept of employment equity was introduced by Judge Rosaline Abella, who was appointed as the Commissioner in 1983 to examine the issue of fairness in employment. She sought a term that would be free from any association with affirmative action, especially regarding quotas and reverse discrimination (Mentzer, 2002). The *Abella Report* laid the groundwork for the Canadian Employment Equity Act of 1986, which was enacted during the

governance of Brian Mulroney from the Progressive-Conservative Party (Mentzer, 2002, p. 38). Subsequently, the 1986 Act was criticized by certain groups as largely ineffective due to the lack of an effective enforcement system and was viewed as symbolic in nature (Cohen, 1985; Jain, 1989; Mentzer, 2002). Although the Employment Equity Act was later revised to remedy many of the shortcomings of the initial act, some argue that Canada has experienced four decades of “diversifying whiteness” (Maharaj, 2023), where Canada has increased its diversity initiatives while maintaining a predominantly white workforce.

Assimilation, Multiculturalism, Diversity

In the early 1980s, assimilation as an ideology rose to prominence (R. Anand & Winters, 2008) in the United States of America. The underlying assumption behind this new ideology is that a cohesive work environment can be achieved by ensuring that employees undergo a process of organizational assimilation or socialization, where members of an organization learn and adopt the dominant cultural values and gain the attitudes they need to participate as members (R. Anand & Winters, 2008; Gailliard et al., 2010; Miller, 2018). Typically, organizations focused on providing women and minority groups with training programs to help them assimilate into the organizational culture because there was a prevailing belief that they were less qualified, but also to help them gain more skill and confidence in facing discrimination and bias (R. Anand & Winters, 2008, p. 358).

In the 1990s, multiculturalism, broadly defined as a political belief that acknowledging and celebrating peaceful coexistence and equal valuation of diverse origins within society, rose to prominence (Oliha-Donaldson, 2020, p. 20). Multiculturalism was often used interchangeably with the term diversity; however, over time, the use of multiculturalism declined in favour of diversity (Oliha-Donaldson, 2020, p. 21). The literature notes that the term diversity broadly

gained acceptance in academic and corporate settings due to its straightforward recognition of difference (Oliha-Donaldson, 2020, p. 21). To clarify, multiculturalism differs in nature between the United States and Canada. In the United States of America, multiculturalism is viewed as assimilatory, where individuals from minority groups abandon their cultural heritage in favour of the dominant group. In Canada, multiculturalism is expressed through the metaphor of the mosaic, where individuals' distinct cultural heritages are recognized. Additionally, the topic of multiculturalism becomes more complex when discussing interculturalism, Quebec's social and cultural integration model, which can be seen as a middle ground between an assimilatory model of multiculturalism and a cultural mosaic. This thesis acknowledges that cultural differences surrounding multiculturalism can potentially affect workplace practices; however, it is beyond the scope of the present thesis to explore the differences and consequences brought by these models, as its primary focus is on neurodiversity. For the purpose of the thesis, the term multiculturalism refers simply to the recognition of the value brought by the coming together of multiple cultures, potentially leading to complementarity and social and cultural enrichment.

Multiculturalism and diversity were significant because it was the first time in history that the term 'workforce diversity' emerged in publications, specifically from the report entitled *Workforce 2000* (R. Anand & Winters, 2008, p. 358). Notably, non-peer-reviewed publications in the late 1980s and 1990s covering the topic of diversity, such as *Workforce 2000* by the Hudson Institute and *From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity* by Roosevelt Thomas, played a crucial role in shifting the attention of organizations towards a new ideology of diversity during a time of escalating tension between proponents advocating for diversity and those who saw these efforts as a threat to the status quo (R. Anand & Winters, 2008; Oliha-Donaldson, 2020). *Workforce 2000* urged organizations to become more diverse in preparation for major

demographic changes in society affecting labour and the consumer market and *From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity* argued that minority groups faced serious challenges in their careers due to limited upward mobility (R. Anand & Winters, 2008; Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014).

Conceptually, the ideology of diversity represented a departure from previous ideologies, as it emphasized the importance for organizations to accept and cultivate a culture that embraces and values heterogeneity. Unlike earlier ideologies, the goal of diversity was not to focus on a particular group but to recognize the intrinsic value it brought to the organization, promoting its acceptance and even celebration (Kapoor, 2011). This new perspective gained widespread acceptance among competitive organizations, leading them to seek ways to develop and manage diversity (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). To enhance diversity within their ranks, organizations implemented various strategies, such as the conscious recruitment of minority groups, organizational development initiatives (including diversity audits to monitor progress), outreach programs (such as community engagement and scholarship funds), and diversity training (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The contemporary framework regarding diversity weaves ideologies from past diversity movements into what we now consider the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) framework (Oliha-Donaldson, 2020). Central to understanding DEI as a construct is the idea that diversity is a foundational element of organizational excellence and effectiveness (Oliha-Donaldson, 2020). The term inclusion is best defined as an active process whereby organizations advocate for and seek to implement strategies that enable the authentic participation and contribution of employees of all identities (Hay & Fleming, 2024). Key features of workplace inclusion are as follows (Shore et al., 2018):

- Psychological and physical safety
- Involvement in teamwork, access to information and resources
- A sense of belonging
- Feeling respected and valued

The practice of inclusion must be systemic, thus present at all levels of an organization (Hay & Fleming, 2024).

Recently, neurodiversity has been recognized as a type of diversity that should be considered when planning and designing workplace-inclusive practices, including diversity training (Mahto et al., 2022).

Diversity Training

Diversity training is a broad term used to describe any activities designed to reduce bias among managers and workers (Paluck et al., 2021, p. 542). It can be defined as “a distinct set of instructional programs aimed at facilitating positive intergroup interactions, reducing prejudice and discrimination, and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and motivation of participants to interact with diverse others” (Bezrukova et al., 2016, p. 1228). Although diversity training is a commonly used term for these activities, other terms refer to similar training programs, such as “awareness training, sensitivity training, diversity programs, and cross-cultural training, diversity education, and diversity workshops” (Phillips et al., 2016, p. 264).

Over the past 50 years, the development and implementation of diversity training have become popular practices as diversity and workforce differences gained prominence (R. Anand & Winters, 2008; Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Pendry et al., 2007). Although its origins can be traced back to the affirmative action policies of the 1960s, diversity training has now garnered international interest (Kawasaki & Zou, 2023). From compliance to DEI, ideologies surrounding

diversity in the workplace have evolved, driven by the social, cultural, and political narratives of their time period and by advocacy movements. These changes affect, in part, how employers respond to policies and social pressure while pursuing organizational effectiveness, and particularly regarding the training offered to employees. Initially a response to legislative changes occurring due to mounting advocacy efforts, diversity became firmly rooted in organizations' strategic development and management practices.

However, there is a lack of consensus and clarity on how diversity training should be developed (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Paluck et al., 2021; Pendry et al., 2007). Diversity training designs vary in focus, duration, and type, with some targeting specific groups, while others are more general, some being shorter one-time events, others span several weeks, and some aiming to raise awareness, and others focus on changing behaviours (Bezrukova et al., 2016). The topics covered in diversity training also vary significantly. Although issues related to gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation are more readily discussed (Sabat et al., 2014), there has been limited coverage of disability (Phillips et al., 2016). Within the context of neurodiversity, diversity training can help neurotypical employees understand workplace and social expectations from neurodivergent colleagues (Austin & Pisano, 2017, p. 101).

Although diversity training is widely used, there is a lack of empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). Currently, it is also difficult to determine which diversity training interventions positively affect employment outcomes (Phillips et al., 2016). Critics argue that diversity training is often viewed as “window-dressing” to gain legitimacy (Dobbin et al., 2011; Hughes, 2018; Portocarrero & Carter, 2022). Empirical research over the past five decades shows that outcomes following the administration of diversity training are often variable (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Paluck et al., 2021; Pendry et

al., 2007). Specifically, meta-analyses, systematic literature reviews, and peer-reviewed articles on diversity training and disability diversity training published between the early 2000s and 2023 provided the following reasons why diversity initiatives do not work.

To begin, the majority of the meta-analysis reports that it is difficult to change an individual's attitude. Although certain interventions demonstrated some efficacy in reducing bias, their effects are often limited in size, scope, or duration (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Paluck et al., 2021). Specifically, when examining learners' reactions to learning, cognitive knowledge (for instance, learning about cultural differences), behavioural change, and attitudinal or affective learning (such as awareness, responsibility, interest, and concern), the most significant feature of diversity training is its ability to generate a positive reaction, such as a feeling of satisfaction (Bezrukova et al., 2016). However, it was observed that post-training effects diminished over time (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Paluck et al., 2021). To elaborate, their attitudes may shift positively and become less biased following the training, but consumption or exposure to societal events or media that negatively portray minority groups might shift their attitudes back to pre-training levels (Bezrukova et al., 2016).

The next reason why diversity training shows a lack of effectiveness is that it can potentially activate bias rather than reduce it (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Kawasaki & Zou, 2023; Paluck et al., 2021; Pendry et al., 2007). A possible reason is that when attempting to correct negative attitudes among historically advantaged groups, it might evoke negative feelings such as anger and contempt (Pendry et al., 2007). Historically advantaged groups may also perceive diversity training as an attack on their identity and therefore unfair, as it is seen as promoting the success of marginalized individuals (Kawasaki & Zou, 2023; Paluck et al., 2021; Pendry et al., 2007).

Thirdly, findings from three meta-analyses conducted between 2013 and 2021 reported that diversity training seemed more effective at changing behaviours and developing skills and knowledge than changing attitudes (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Kalinoski et al., 2013; Paluck et al., 2021), raising questions as to why behavioural changes do not transfer to attitudes (Paluck et al., 2021).

Finally, a meta-analytic analysis of diversity training across cultures revealed that if empirical studies in the United States of America demonstrated a lack of effectiveness in reaching their goals, the results were not better elsewhere in the world for similar reasons (Kawasaki & Zou, 2023, p. 8).

Nonetheless, the current literature contributes to our understanding of what seems to yield some positive effects. Diversity training appeared more effective when integrated or embedded into complementary organizational activities (such as support groups for minority workers and mentoring groups) and when the training combined the development of both attitude and skill, rather than one at a time (Bezrukova et al., 2016). In addition, empirical literature reviews noted that diversity training spanning over four and a half to six hours seemed to be more effective (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Phillips et al., 2016). This is possibly due to the possibility of longer exposure, which is consistent with training literature stating that an increase in opportunities for practice leads to an increase in skill development (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Phillips et al., 2016). However, diminishing returns are observed with training lasting longer than eight hours (Phillips et al., 2016). Studies have found that training distributed across several weeks, rather than delivered in a single session, demonstrated stronger effects on affective-based outcomes (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Kalinoski et al., 2013). This can be explained by the possibility that longer training provides more opportunities for social contact, which could then

potentially improve employee attitudes towards minority groups (Kalinowski et al., 2013) and greater opportunities to practise the skills being taught (Bezrukova et al., 2016).

Regarding neurodiversity training specifically, McDowell et al. (2024) conducted brief research among 127 employers and 985 neurodivergent employees. Data revealed that most training was frequently created in-house by neurodivergent colleagues rather than by neurodiversity specialists, further calling for more rigorous training on the topic (McDowell et al., 2024, p. 149).

Overall, with over five decades of empirical studies on diversity training, the academic community has begun uncovering certain elements that can be used to improve the effectiveness of the design, development, and implementation of diversity training. However, there is still much research to be done to better understand what works with respect to diversity training and other Human Resources and Human Resource Development (HRD) strategies. For instance, if integrating training with other organizational strategies is more effective, there is currently a lack of research presenting a successful configuration of diversity training programs (number of interventions, the exact duration of the training and the type of complementary strategies that should accompany diversity training) (Bezrukova et al., 2016).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theoretical concept, an analytical framework, and an approach originating from Black feminist ideology that seeks to shed light on the dynamics of difference experienced by social minority groups (Cho et al., 2013; Goethals et al., 2015). Although the term itself was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal theorist and Black feminist, one of the earliest recorded articulations of intersectionality was made as far back as 1851 (Strand, 2017). In her article “Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique

of antidiscrimination, feminist theory and antiracist politics” (Crenshaw, 1989), Crenshaw revealed how Black American women’s workplace experiences were undermined by the compounding effects of race and gender in ways that were different from race or gender alone (R. L. Brown & Moloney, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality is best described as “a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (Steinmetz, 2022). It rejects the use of a single-axis analytic framework because it often fails to consider the simultaneous and multiplicative relationships of oppressive systems (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). In other words, analyzing the situation only through a single lens, such as racism or sexism rather than how they interact, can potentially lead to distortion, obscuring, and erasure of power dynamics, and consequently, lead to inequalities.

Facing criticism for being too theoretical since its emergence, scholars have since developed more robust and comprehensive approaches to facilitate the application of the intersectionality framework in research methodology (Strand, 2017). The contemporary intersectionality framework focuses on questions related to power and inequality and more specifically on the following five tenets: an understanding that social identity categories and power systems shift over time and space; a recognition that privilege and marginalization can coexist within individuals and groups; a commitment to social justice; a dedication to anti-essentialism and the variation within categories; and an investment in the multiplicative nature of identity(ies) (Smooth, 2013, p. 21).

Recently, peer-reviewed and professional literature underscores the importance of intersectionality in the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (Ayoko & Fujimoto, 2023). It is an emerging paradigm in disability studies (Goethals et al., 2015), and a

growing body of peer-reviewed articles on neurodiversity integrates intersectionality into the discussion or as a theoretical framework. Intersectionality is significant to diversity, equity, and inclusion practices because historically, DEI-related efforts were sequential, first focusing on race, then on gender, sexual orientation, and so on. Intersectionality complements DEI because it informs researchers and practitioners of the need to explore the interdependent and multiplicative effects of several axes of difference to obtain a more inclusive and global portrait of the situation (Goethals et al., 2015, p. 75). Applying an intersectional lens to disability studies further improves inclusion by avoiding overgeneralizing a particular group of people, as it centres on exploring the full range of experiences and perspectives of individuals through their lived experience (Goethals et al., 2015, p. 88). Intersectionality can also be used to critically engage with the notions of ability (and competence) by examining how ability is normalized and how diverse forms of ability are excluded (O'Dell et al., 2016, p. 176). Ultimately, integrating disability into intersectional analyses reveals how issues of diagnosis, support, and disability-related topics intersect with gender, race, sexuality, and class, shedding light on biases and inequalities (Botha & Gillespie-Lynch, 2022, p. 98). Regarding neurodiversity, a study revealed preliminary evidence that neurodiversity hiring programs inadvertently attract mainly White males to the exclusion of other demographics and found that the perception of inclusion is lower among women and non-binary people (N. Doyle et al., 2022), therefore highlighting the need to monitor inclusion using an intersectional approach.

Over the course of 50 years, a theoretical framework originating from the Black feminist movement evolved into a widely adopted approach to exploring how multiple systems of oppression interact and create unique experiences for individuals. In recent years, the government of Canada incorporated intersectionality as a guiding principle in its policymaking,

action plans, and training courses to address gender equality and disability (Government of Canada, 2022, 2023). In Quebec, despite popular discourse framing intersectionality as a weapon used by the federal government against Quebec (Martin, 2023), the term appears in several official documents, such as the *Plan d'action pour la réussite en enseignement supérieur 2021-2026* (Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, 2021), which seeks to guide public educational institutions in improving access to higher education, increasing student perseverance rate and facilitating socio-professional integration post-graduation, and the *Cadre de référence pour les projets pilotes en analyse différenciées selon les sexes dans une perspective intersectionnelle (ADS+) 2022-2027* (Secrétariat à la condition féminine, 2023), a gender analysis framework that recommends using an intersectional lens to investigate gender inequality.

Although intersectionality is present in peer-reviewed research and theoretical articles discussing the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities and neurodivergence, and in government action plans, there is a need to understand how pervasive the topic of intersectionality is in the workplace and specifically within the literature consumed by professionals who play a vital role in planning or implementing strategies aimed at improving diversity, equity, and inclusion.

School-to-Work Transition

Higher education occupies a crucial role in preparing individuals for active participation in society by helping students acquire knowledge and skills that can be readily transferred to the workplace. Globally, the student population with disabilities is experiencing rapid growth (Dollinger et al., 2023, p. 1). Concurrently, neurodivergent students are increasingly engaging in postsecondary education, yet they encounter persistent challenges arising from functional differences, accommodation requirements, and societal biases (Dwyer et al., 2023, p. 1). A

review of the literature highlighted the importance of work integrated learning as an effective school-to-work transition strategy.

Work integrated learning is an educational approach underpinned by social-cultural theories. These include John Dewey's views on the importance of experience and reflection, Kolb's Experiential Learning Model, a framework centred upon the development of learning experiences and their application in other contexts, Lev Vygotsky's insights into social interactions as a method of learning not only knowledge and skills but also workplace norms and behaviours, and Lave and Wenger's perspective on communities of practice as a social learning system (Hay & Fleming, 2024). Currently, work integrated learning (WIL) is a proven strategy that improves labour outcomes for students in general. Research has revealed that students who complete co-op work terms or internships are more likely to find employment, especially in their field of study (Gatto et al., 2021). For students with disabilities, studies show that those who participated in a work integrated learning program had more employment success upon graduation compared to those who did not (Bellman et al., 2018, as cited in Gatto et al., 2021). The benefits of WIL extend beyond improving career outcomes; as research also demonstrates that internships improve persistence rates for students with disabilities in STEM programs (K. Takahashi et al., 2018), enhance the soft skills (such as work completion, task accuracy, punctuality, communication and self-regulation) required to be successful at work (Clark et al., 2019), and positively impact self-concept (i.e., beliefs about one's self-image and self-worth drawn from life experiences and feedback from others) (Hanson et al., 2021). A recently published article expands on the concept of an inclusive work environment, highlighting essential tenets, techniques, and qualities for organizations to implement when designing initiatives, including educational materials, handbooks, risk management strategies, and

employee welfare policies (Hay & Fleming, 2024). Despite the body of research supporting the use of work integrated learning, limited findings also point towards the necessity for more equitable access to these programs for students with disabilities or neurodivergence, greater availability of work placement options in organizations that provide accommodations, and the necessity for student disability offices to provide support in work situations (Gatto et al., 2021, p. 128).

HRD, Diversity, and Neurodiversity

In 2018, *Occupational Health & Wellbeing* reported that a poll conducted by the UK-based Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) among 300 HR professionals revealed that three quarters of employers ignored neurodiversity, 17% were unsure whether their organization had a neurodiversity policy, and 10% confirmed that one was in place (Faragher, 2018).

Employability is a concern for HRD professionals as the world continues to change, both in the nature of work and in new forms of work resulting from ongoing global changes, often referred to as disruptions, brought forth by innovation, the development of new knowledge, the digital revolution, and a variety of social factors, to name a few (Carliner et al., 2021; Hamzah et al., 2022; Hite & McDonald, 2020; Nilsson & Ellström, 2012). These challenges directly impact what is characterized as organizations' most valuable asset: their people, and the task of securing skilled and highly skilled labour to meet both current and future organizational needs has become vital to their success (Nilsson & Ellström, 2012). In this regard, HRD professionals play a critical role as strategic business partners responsible for recruitment, training, and development (Nilsson & Ellström, 2012, p. 27).

Additionally, social movements such as the neurodiversity movement have prompted organizational professionals and leaders to re-examine a pool of human resources and talent that have been historically overlooked. These social movements, combined with ongoing global disruptions, create multiple pressures for organizations to reconsider their approaches to employee recruitment and support.

Potential Strategies That Can Support Neurodiversity Within the Workplace

The literature on diversity and neurodiversity documents potential strategies and frameworks that HRD professionals can develop to guide the creation of a more neurodiverse workforce.

General Training and Learning Development. Neurotypical workers may benefit from training related to the specific needs of their neurodivergent colleagues (Austin & Pisano, 2017, p. 101). Although the literature does not specify which needs should be addressed in training, it mentions several that could be the focus of various learning and development interventions. For instance, promoting and developing the use of inclusive language by avoiding ableist terms helps communicate inclusivity and acceptance (Chellappa, 2023). Understanding the need for accommodation services also appears to be important to some (Austin & Pisano, 2017).

Likewise, the literature on neurodiversity emphasizes the need for training for both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals within the organization (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Patton, 2019; Rao & Polepeddi, 2019). Currently, the literature lacks specificity regarding the actual skills to be developed or topics that could be of interest. Nonetheless, it does document the need for neurodivergent workers to obtain specific on-the-job training to develop the competency required for their positions. An article examining the remote work needs of neurodivergent employees during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights a strong need for communication skills to

be developed but specifically with regard to technology-mediated communication, such as video conferences and emails (Szulc et al., 2021). In addition to training, it is suggested that regular performance evaluations be conducted, and based on the outcomes, that the necessary adjustments or accommodations be made (Rao & Polepeddi, 2019). However, performance evaluations can potentially have negative effects on both marginalized individuals and privileged individuals with equal performance (Portocarrero & Carter, 2022, p. 7). Evidence indicates that performance evaluation can be influenced by evaluators' attitudes towards a person, such as their liking or trust, as well as the quality of their relationship, which can impact the evaluation (Javidmehr & Ebrahimpour, 2015, p. 295). Personal bias in performance evaluations can originate from stereotypes and hostility towards gender, race, and other differences stemming from social, familial and religious backgrounds and affect what they observe and retain in memory, and influence what they attribute to an employee's behaviour (Javidmehr & Ebrahimpour, 2015, p. 295).

Although Portocarrero and Carter (2022) and Javidmehr and Ebrahimpour (2015) do not mention individuals with disabilities or neurodivergence, the stigmatization of neurodivergent and disabled individuals is well discussed in peer-reviewed literature (Krzeminska et al., 2019; Mellifont, 2021; Sabat et al., 2014). Regarding people's perception of disabled individuals, they are considered high-warmth, i.e., worthy of sympathy, but regarded as lacking in competence (Sabat et al., 2014). Negative reactions, harsh judgments, and potential workplace incivility are reasons why individuals with invisible disabilities are reluctant to disclose their challenges to employers and colleagues (Patton, 2022).

In terms of training and development for managers, some sources indicate that they need to be familiar with support programs or resources for neurodivergent employees (Austin &

Pisano, 2017, p. 101). Additionally, management must develop supportive relationships and commit to reducing barriers (Patton, 2019, p. 927). Individualized consideration is seen as a leadership skill that can benefit neurodivergent individuals (Patton, 2019, p. 927). Finally, to remove personal bias from performance evaluation, among other tasks, the literature recommends ongoing training to manage emotional reactions towards employees while focusing on improving how evaluators observe and rate others (Javidmehr & Ebrahimpour, 2015, p. 295).

Diversity Intelligence. Improving diversity intelligence (DQ) through employee and manager training can potentially facilitate the goal of achieving diversity and inclusion (Hughes, 2018, p. 260). DQ values employee differences without attempting to make everyone alike and provides leaders with an opportunity to reflect on their actions and behaviours towards all employees and to effectively implement new strategies. Reportedly, DQ can help organizational leaders better interact with the changing demographics in America and the global economy by embracing differences as strengths rather than weaknesses” (Hughes, 2018, p. 76). Although the literature on DQ claims that it can be measured and evaluated (Hughes, 2018, p. 261), a preliminary search did not reveal any empirical evidence in the literature.

Masking and the Disclosure of Neurodivergence. Masking, also referred to as social camouflage, describes cognitive and behavioural strategies individuals use to hide their identity or conform to a specific set of social behaviours (Kidwell et al., 2023). It is a strategy employed by autistic neurodivergent, non-autistic neurodivergent, and neurotypical working adults to achieve a goal (Pryke-Hobbes et al., 2023). In the context of neurodiversity, neurodivergent individuals use masking strategies to minimize aspects of themselves that can potentially be considered undesirable and adopt behaviours that align with those of neurotypical individuals (Kidwell et al., 2023). Masking behaviours have been theoretically and empirically linked to a

resource drain, requiring time, energy, and sustained effort, which increases the risk of developing depression, anxiety, stress, exhaustion, and decreased self-efficacy (Kidwell et al., 2023, p. 57).

Disclosing health conditions is seen as a potentially viable strategy to improve neurodiversity in the workplace (Mellifont, 2021; Patton, 2022; Shmulsky et al., 2021). Some research indicates a possible link between disability identity affirmation and increased self-esteem, greater acceptance, and better mental health (Shmulsky et al., 2021). Patton (2022) argues that studies have demonstrated the positive psychological effects of disclosing hidden identities despite the risks (p. 1174), as it can provide access to accommodation services and legal protection, allow individuals to be themselves, and enable colleagues to better understand one another (Patton, 2022). This situation is not unique to the corporate environment; a similar practice is currently used in higher education and K-12 education. However, despite the presence of legislative policies requiring the disclosure of medical conditions to obtain accommodation services and the report that these services are beneficial, students in higher education still face social barriers, discrimination, stigma, and microaggressions (Condra et al., 2015; S. A. Smith et al., 2021). Students reported that peers were significantly less respectful and positive when they disclosed accommodation needs (S. A. Smith et al., 2021). Disclosure is also challenging with regards to mental health disabilities as due to delays in obtaining the diagnoses and challenges in determining functional impairment (Condra et al., 2015).

Currently, peer-reviewed literature recommends that HR policies and practices aim to provide an inclusive and psychologically safe environment where workers feel more comfortable disclosing their neurodivergence. This can be achieved by fostering a climate that appreciates individual differences, creating a sensory-friendly work environment, increasing the availability

of support and resources to combat fatigue resulting from masking, and providing identity-positive and individualized accommodations (Kidwell et al., 2023, p. 58).

Universal Design for Learning. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an educational model used to help instructors and instructional designers develop accessible training and learning experiences (Coplan et al., 2021), has been documented as a potentially useful strategy in addressing diversity initiatives, particularly in the context of disability and neurodiversity, by ensuring that inclusive practices are present and utilized throughout the employment lifecycle (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022, p. 366).

A meta-analysis of 18 studies (Capp, 2017, p. 805) examined the relationship between the UDL framework's principles (such as providing multiple ways of representing knowledge, multiple ways for students to demonstrate knowledge, and using multiple strategies to engage students) and the learning process. It concluded that the UDL framework generates some positive effects on the learning process for all students. For instance, using video games and alternatives to traditional print-based text appears to increase engagement (Capp, 2017, p. 802). Additionally allowing students to use different strategies to communicate, such as using symbols or writing with assistive technology, has shown positive results. Finally, employing the three-block model (TBM) of UDL, a method for "creating inclusive environments and improving student engagement" (Katz, 2013) by approaching inclusive learning design in three blocks, leads to increased levels of social and academic inclusiveness and autonomy, increased student engagement, peer-to-peer social interaction, increased academic and social engagement, and higher motivation levels (Capp, 2017, p. 803).

More information and research are presently required to determine how UDL functions within the workplace and how to best apply it.

Embedding support systems into the workplace. Another potential strategy is to create support systems for neurodivergent employees. For instance, they may benefit from coaching and mentoring strategies, using a “buddy system” that pairs a neurodivergent employee with a neurotypical colleague who offers additional assistance (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Patton, 2019). Support mechanisms providing neurodivergent employees with guidance and planning to aid their career development within the organization are also recommended in the literature; however, these strategies are also currently used to support neurotypical employees. The specific details of how coaching or mentoring differs for neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals remain elusive.

HRD Professionals as Facilitators of Neurodiversity

Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals occupy crucial roles within organizations to support diversity and inclusion initiatives. They are also well positioned to assist neurodivergent individuals in achieving long-term employment. Recently, neurodiversity has gained attention among HRD professionals to improve the employability and working conditions of neurodivergent individuals within the context of organizational diversity, inclusion, and equity initiatives (DEI). Much has evolved regarding the notion of diversity since the early 1900s. Contemporary conceptualizations of diversity include the acceptance and celebration of differences that go extend race, gender, and sexual orientation to encompass disability and neurodiversity.

The management of diversity within organizations has also changed over time, influenced by socio-political movements and dominant ideologies framing the diversity discourse of their time. From a business and labour management perspective, neurodivergent individuals are now regarded as an untapped pool of talent that can potentially enhance innovation and organizational

performance. This requires HRD to adopt strategies that successfully integrate and nurture neurodivergent employees in the workplace.

Historically, diversity training was offered to employees and managers to help raise awareness of differences and improve acceptance; however, decades of research show that diversity training is not effective in reducing bias. Existing literature on diversity management provides some strategies that can be used to improve diversity in general, but there is currently a lack of empirical studies on the strategies that work specifically in the context of neurodiversity.

Some of the suggestions, namely facilitating the development of diversity intelligence, developing spaces and an organizational culture that allows neurodivergent individuals to openly disclose their condition, and using universal design for learning within the workplace, are promising ideas that require further exploration.

The present study seeks to answer the following question: what are the most prominently discussed HRD strategies—training and development, career development, organizational development—within professional publications in the past 10 years to support neurodivergent individuals in the workplace?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will justify the methodology used to answer the following question:

1. What are the most prominently discussed HRD strategies—training and development, career development, organizational development—within professional publications in the past 10 years to support neurodivergent individuals in the workplace?

This section will commence by justifying the choice of methodology. It will then explain how the sample was selected, how the data was analyzed, and finally, how the credibility and trustworthiness of the study were ensured.

Choice of a Research Methodology

The nature of the research question requires a systematic search of existing literature to draw a synthesized conclusion. There are three ways to proceed: a meta-analysis, a meta-synthesis, and an integrative literature review.

To begin, a meta-analysis is a set of techniques used to analyze the results of multiple quantitative studies to understand the effects of a single study in the context of all the studies on the subject (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 357). Since a meta-analysis is, in essence, a systematic review of multiple experimental studies to understand their combined effects, this strategy has been ruled out due to a lack of available studies (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022).

Similarly, a meta-synthesis is an “integration of results from qualitative studies to interpret (not aggregate) the findings and results” (Leary & Walker, 2018, p. 530). Because meta-syntheses require the researcher to interpret the results of several qualitative studies, such a strategy has also been ruled out due to the lack of empirical research on neurodiversity.

Given the ruling out of the previous two methods, the integrative literature review was selected as the methodology for this study. The integrative literature review is defined as a

systematic process of exploring, critiquing, and synthesizing an existing body of literature to gain insight and knowledge (Cronin & George, 2023; Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020; Hopia et al., 2016; Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016). Although initially intended for peer-reviewed literature, the analysis can also include other types of literature as long as it is systematically and transparently reviewed.

How the Sample Was Selected

This section will present how the sample was selected. More precisely, it will explain the following: the choice of the literature included within the sample, the use of keywords to access the literature to be analyzed, the selection of databases and the reasons for which they were selected, other strategies for selecting relevant literature to be analyzed, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to select the literature after the search.

Two important factors were considered for the selection of the sample. First, existing peer-reviewed literature confirmed the lack of empirical studies concerning the implementation of workplace strategies supporting neurodiversity (N. Doyle & McDowall, 2022). Second, an initial search into professional sources revealed that the subject receives more coverage than in the peer-reviewed literature. Trade and professional publications, as well as reports from non-profit and government organizations, address neurodiversity in the workplace. As a result, this integrative literature review explores the coverage in trade and professional publications.

To enhance feasibility, the study focused on publications from the ABI/Inform (ProQuest) database, limited to English-language sources from the past ten years (January 2013 to March 2024) and excluded peer-reviewed articles.

The data collection procedure consisted of the following steps:

1. Selected keywords included ((“neurodiversity” OR “neurodivergen*”) AND workplace AND (“learning need” OR “learning design” OR “training” OR “inclusion effort” OR “diversity management”) NOT (funding OR grant* OR “Drugs abuse” OR Drug*)).
These terms, derived from the literature review, focus the search on articles discussing neurodiversity or related terms, such as neurodivergence, neurominority, or neuroinclusivity, in relation to the workplace.
2. Searched of the ABI/Inform (ProQuest) database. The initial search yielded 293 entries. Of these articles, 10 entries were removed for being available in multiple publications. Additionally, 1 was removed for being a peer-reviewed article.
3. Performed a systematic review (Torraco, 2005b) of the 282 entries by reading the articles to identify relevant publications and writing structured abstracts to facilitate later analysis. Abstract-only screening was generally not possible due to the nature of the literature. Relevant articles had to:
 - a. Address neurodiversity in a workplace setting.
 - b. Discuss HRD strategies—training and development, career development, or organizational development—either explicitly or implicitly.
4. During the full-text review, it was noted that further exclusion criteria were required. Articles solely discussing recruitment strategies, which fall outside the scope of HRD, benefits for employees with neurodivergent children, and interior design considerations for neurodivergent employees were excluded. An additional 106 articles were excluded, resulting in a sample of 176 articles.

To answer the research question and to help other researchers replicate the study, the following search information was extracted and recorded into an Excel spreadsheet:

- Information about the search itself, namely the name of the database consulted, the keywords used to search the databases, and the search date.
- Publication information, including the year of the publication, any information about the author if available, and the type of publication.
- Information regarding neurodiversity and the strategies supporting its implementation in the workplace. This includes a brief description of how the author characterizes the term neurodiversity, and if discussed, the strategies proposed or documented related to improving neurodiversity in the workplace, and the dimensions of HRD the article addresses, namely, training and development, career development, organizational development, or other areas.
- Any additional notes that may be relevant to the research are also recorded. These can include information on authors and whether they are neurodivergent and how it affects their employability or working conditions, or managers and workers who work with neurodivergent employees.

Finally, an assessment of whether the article is relevant, thus included in the research, or not relevant and excluded from the research, was recorded following the review. Additionally, the present study is exempt from ethics because it does not involve human subjects.

How Was the Data Analyzed?

This section will describe the data analysis process used to answer the research question. To begin, the data collection phase involved gathering the following information:

- General information: year of publication, type of publication, and sector or industry.

- Research results: key findings related to HRD strategies—training and development, career development, and organizational development—as well as workplace practices.

Given the nature of the research question, a methodical analysis of the literature for recurrent themes was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns in workplace strategies that support neuroinclusive environments. The synthesis of the data involved analyzing the strength of the patterns:

- Themes that are recurrent in all the articles constitute a dominant pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in 51% to 99% of the articles constitute a strong pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in 33% to 50% of the articles constitute a weak pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in 15% to 32% of the articles constitute an interesting pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in 7% to 14% of the articles constitute a noteworthy pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in less than 7% of the articles constitute a limited pattern.

A strong recurrent theme will indicate that the themes are important strategies to consider, based on the current belief system underlying the work with neurodivergent individuals. The result of the synthesis will be a general characterization of current beliefs underpinning the strategies that are perceived as important for the integration of neurodivergent workers. The strategies used within this study are congruent with the integrative literature review methodology employed to synthesize the literature on a specific topic to generate new knowledge (Torraco, 2016).

Assuring Credibility and Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, a frame interview was conducted at the beginning of the research to reveal any entering biases that could affect the study. Additionally, an audit by another master's student at the end of the study was performed to uncover any bias or problems with the data. Finally, as an alternative to using two researchers, the study was reviewed by faculty supervisors.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the study's findings, beginning with a description of the sample of articles analyzed and followed by answers to the research question.

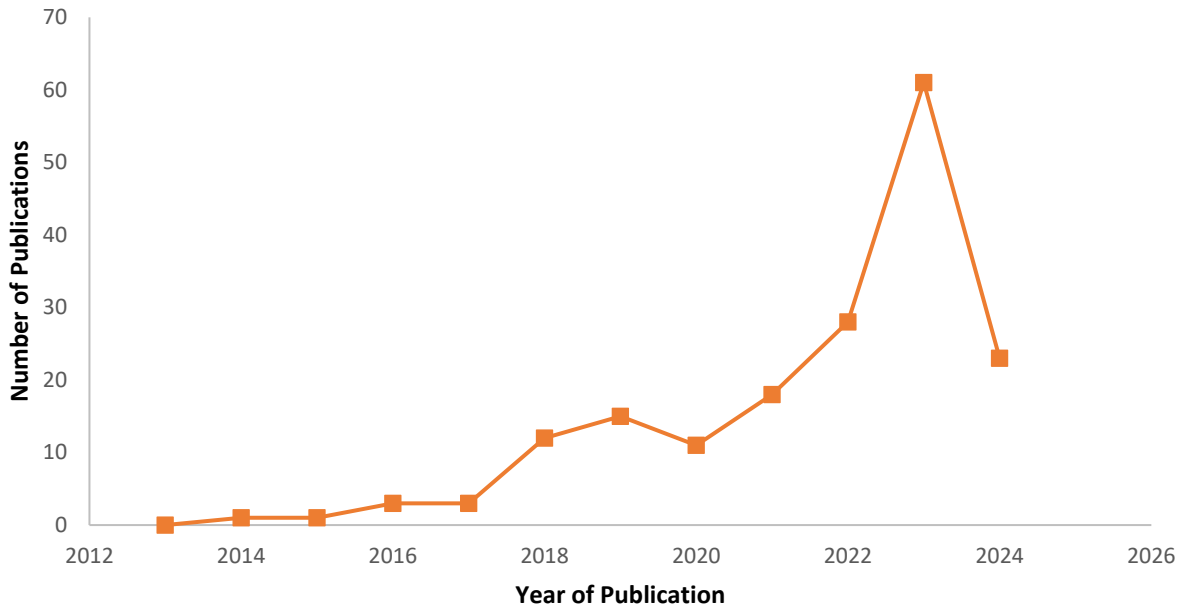
About the Sample

This section provides a description of the research articles selected for analysis. Specifically, it describes the methodology used, their year of publication, the type of publication, and the subject covered.

As noted in the Methodology chapter, the study sample includes 176 articles from trade and professional publications published between January 2013 and March 2024. The following characteristics were tracked: (1) year of publication, (2) type of publication, and (3) publication subject. The overall trend indicates an exponential increase in articles addressing neurodiversity in the workplace. Figure 1 illustrates the number of publications by year. This is consistent with findings from a literature review on peer-reviewed research (Rollnik-Sadowska & Grabińska, 2024, p. 6), exemplifying the growing interest in the topic within research and practice.

Figure 1

The Number of Publications by Year



Note. This figure illustrates the relationship between the number of publications pertaining to neurodiversity in the workplace by year. The search ended on March 31, 2024, explaining the decrease in articles reported for that year.

To get a sense of the types of publications exploring this topic, the publication types and the number of publications for each type were tracked. Table 1 summarizes the results.

Table 1

The Number of Publications by Publication Type

Publication Type	Number of Publications
Blog, Podcast, or Website	53
Industry Report	1
Magazine	33
Trade Journal	89
Total	176

To get a sense of the sectors or industries most concerned with neurodiversity, data from the Publication Subject field in the ABI/Inform (ProQuest) database was analyzed to group

subjects into broader sectors or industries. When multiple subjects were listed (such as Business and Economics, Education), the sector that best represented the focus based on the review was selected. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2

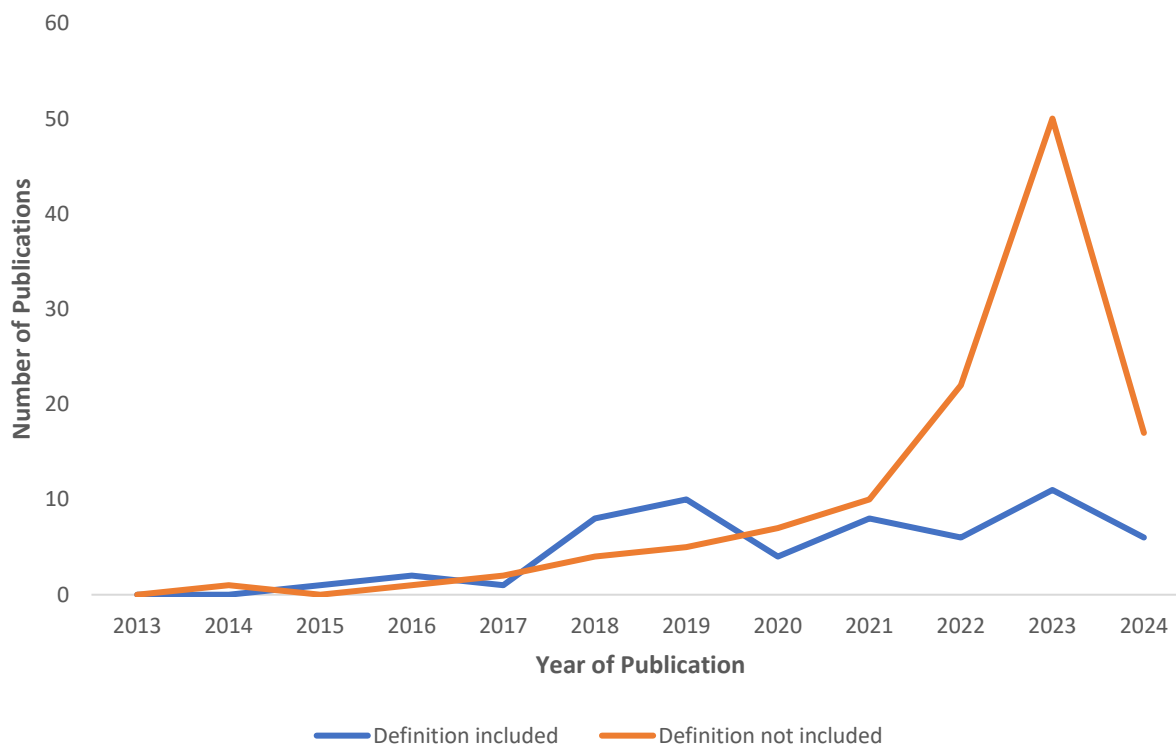
The Number of Publications by Sector or Industry

Sector or Industry	Number of Publications
Advertising and Public Relations	2
Business and Economics	96
Children and Youth (Parenting)	1
Communication	4
Computer and Technology	3
Criminology and Law Enforcement	1
Education	3
Energy	1
Engineering	2
Food and Food Industries	2
Gardening and Horticulture	1
Heating, Plumbing and Refrigeration	2
Insurance	2
Interior Design and Decoration	2
Labour and Law	11
Medical Science	10
Political Science	5
Public Administration	4
Real Estate	1
Shoes and Boots	1
Other (General Interest News)	22
Total	176

To better understand how neurodiversity is framed in trade and professional publications, the study also tracked whether each article provided a definition or explanation of neurodiversity. Out of 176 articles, 57 (a weak pattern, 32.39%) provided a definition, while 118 (a strong pattern, 67.04%) did not. The overall trend suggests that more recent articles tend not to define neurodiversity. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the number of articles by year that include or exclude a definition of neurodiversity.

Figure 2

The Number of Articles by Year with and without a Definition of Neurodiversity



Answers to the Research Question

This section presents the results to the research question:

1. What are the most prominently discussed HRD strategies—training and development, career development and organizational development—within professional publications in the past 10 years to support neurodivergent individuals in the workplace?

It begins by outlining the total numbers of identified strategies, organized according to the dimensions of Human Resource Development (HRD). This is followed by a description of the themes and subthemes that emerged, the strength of the observed patterns, and the strategies or recommendations that were highlighted from the sample. The section is structured according to the HRD dimensions mostly prominently discussed in the sample and concludes with a synthesis of the results.

Total Numbers of Identified Strategies

The study revealed a total of 439 strategies discussed across the three dimensions of HRD. The findings revealed that organizational development strategies were the most frequently discussed, with 205 instances (weak pattern, 46.69%), followed by training and development strategies with 189 instances (weak pattern, 43.05%), and career development strategies with 45 instances (noteworthy pattern, 10.25%).

Organizational Development Strategies

As previously mentioned, organizational development strategies were the most reported type of strategies, accounting for 205 instances (weak pattern, 46.69%).

Notably, 48 out of 176 articles (an interesting pattern, or 27.27%) did not propose any organizational development strategies.

The 205 strategies were categorized into seven broader themes and, whenever pertinent, were divided into subthemes, providing further characterization and clarifications to the strategies that are recommended found in the sample. Table 3 lists the themes, the numbers of instances, and the relative percentage of training and development strategies.

Table 3

Themes, Number of Instances, and Percentages of Organizational Development Strategies

Themes	Number of Instances	Relative Percentage
Culture change	76	37.07
Empty recommendations	2	-
Holistic inclusion	18	-
Inclusive culture	39	-
Psychological safety	19	-
Workplace accommodation	55	26.83
Empty recommendations	5	-
General DEI accommodation	30	-
Neurodiversity accommodation	18	-
Specific accommodation or accessibility strategy	2	-
Policy and program design	38	18.54
Empty recommendations	3	-
Policies and procedures	13	-
Data analysis	10	-
Programs	6	-

Leadership commitment	4	-
Other	2	-
Partnership	21	10.24
Empty recommendations	1	-
External and internal	3	-
External only	10	-
Internal only	7	-
Continuous improvement	9	4.39
Other	6	2.93
Intersectionality	1	-
Bridging the gap between science and practice	1	-
Diversity in leadership roles	2	-
Avoid performative actions	1	-
Specific tool	1	-
Total	205	100%

Culture Change. The sample revealed 76 strategies related to culture change within the workplace, indicating a weak pattern in the literature. This theme represents the strongest pattern in within organizational development strategies, with a relative frequency of 37.07%.

The term culture change is used within the context of this study to represent the transformation of values, beliefs, and practices within the organization. Further subdivision yielded the four subthemes, and they constitute various aspects in which the literature further characterizes the transformation of organizational culture towards neuroinclusion.

The first subtheme, empty recommendations, appeared twice (2 of 76, or 2.63% of the articles in the Culture Change theme), indicating a limited pattern. For the purpose of this study, empty recommendations refer to an instance where a strategy is named without providing specific details, clarifications, or further recommendations.

The second subtheme, holistic inclusion, accounted for 18 of the 76 strategies (or 23.68% of the articles in the Culture Change theme), revealing an interesting pattern. For this study, holistic inclusion refers to the transformation of all organizational systems and processes to foster, or to improve the fostering, of neuroinclusion—a sense that neurodivergent individuals feel accepted, valued, and welcomed into the organization. The study noted the use of the terms

“holistic” and “systemic” in reference to transformations within organizations that involve comprehensive changes to organizational structures, environments, and practices. However, it is unclear whether these terms were used interchangeably. The following strategies, recommendations, and insights emerged from the articles:

- Organizations should move beyond targeted hiring initiatives for neurodivergent individuals, such as an autism hiring campaign, to a neuroinclusive approach that encompasses all aspects of the organization (Chesney, 2024). For instance, companies such as SAP, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, and Dell Technologies have hired neurodivergent individuals through autism or neurodiversity hiring programs, often to fill specific roles in technology-related fields (Austin & Pisano, 2017). However, according to Chesney (2024), a truly neuroinclusive workplace must go beyond hiring neurodivergent individuals for specialized positions (para. 6). Organizations should therefore open access to a wider range of jobs, provide performance support (such as regular feedback from supervisors), career development opportunities, and foster a workplace culture that is welcoming and supportive of neurodivergent individuals.
- Universal design can be applied to the workplace to enhance neurodiversity (Etra, 2023; Williams, 2023). As a reminder, universal design typically develops work-related or learning experiences with access needs in mind, ensuring that individuals who present with certain challenges can use the material, thus ensuring equity and inclusion (Coplan et al., 2021). Although two articles mentioned this strategy, only one provided clarification, emphasizing the need to create multiple versions of a work tool to accommodate diverse access needs (Etra, 2023).

- Organizations can address structural inequality by implementing systemic changes (A. Brown, 2019b; Carter, 2022a; Farmiloe, 2022; Praslova, 2024; Rolack & Gonggrijp-Bello, 2021; Varga, 2023). Although the articles do not define the terms structural inequity and systemic change, this study defines structural inequity as the injustice stemming from interrelated disparities in health, wellbeing, and opportunity, which are shaped by structural factors, such as socioeconomic and political contexts, public policies, and societal values that operate across multiple sectors and levels of influence throughout an individual's life course (Egede et al., 2024, p. 488). As for systemic change, it refers to the large-scale, comprehensive transformation of organizational structures, environments, and practices addressing the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social needs of neurodivergent individuals (Carter, 2022; Praslova, 2024). The articles specifically highlight that a commitment to systemic change is the ideal place to begin transforming the organization towards neuroinclusivity because neurodivergent individuals may not want to be identified by their type of neurodivergence or be treated differently (A. Brown, 2019b; Carter, 2022a; Rolack & Gonggrijp-Bello, 2021). The strategies supporting performance should be offered to everyone, even to people who do not disclose their neurodivergence (Carter, 2022a). Organizations should therefore challenge the dominant norms, address bias in organizational practice and shift the focus away from the individual "fixes" to broader changes within the organization that support all employees, including neurodivergent individuals, such as fostering conditions that support their wellbeing and sustain a sense of belonging (Praslova, 2024; *The Saturday Debate*, 2022). Finally, an article exploring why diversity training does not

work recommended organizations to couple diversity training initiatives with other strategies, such as mentorship and sponsorship programs (not defined in the article), diversity committees or task forces that have the authority to hold the organization accountable (*The Saturday Debate*, 2022).

- Organizations can implement large-scale transformations to enhance neurodiversity gradually by establishing small, measurable objectives and actively involving all members of the organization (Varga, 2023). For instance, organizations can begin by setting one or two goals they believe to have the highest impact and measure its outcome (Varga, 2023). Although no concrete example is shared, Varga (2023) claims that the strategy can build credibility, confidence and trust in the overall direction of the transformation and, as a result, improve momentum (para. 9).
- Leadership buy-in, which involves organizational leaders recognizing the value of neurodivergent individuals and then spearheading the transformation towards neuroinclusivity, is considered by some authors the starting point of the transformative process (“Atlas World Group Inc.,” 2023; A. Brown, 2019a, 2019b; Fordham, 2016; Rolack & Gonggrijp-Bello, 2021).
- Consulting neurodivergent employees, customers, and external clients for insights on improving systems and processes ensures that the needs of everyone are well represented and addressed (“Atlas World Group Inc.,” 2023).

The third subtheme, inclusive culture, was noted 39 times (39 of 76, or 51.32% of the articles in the Culture change theme), emerging as a strong pattern. For the purpose of this study, inclusive culture refers to the belief that prioritizes the creation of an organizational environment that supports neurodiversity. Several factors were identified as key components:

- Inclusive language, which in the context of this study, is understood as avoiding expressions and phrases that could be perceived as exclusionary or marginalizing to individuals or groups based on their differences (Moody, 2022; Thom, 2023; Uddin, 2023; Walker, 2022). This is considered an essential for neuroinclusion, as bias and negative stereotypes are often communicated through the ways individuals speak to and about neurodivergent individuals (Uddin, 2023). Shifting towards the consistent use of non-derogatory language, whether written or spoken by employees, management, or leadership, serves as a tangible expression of an organization's commitment to inclusion (Thom, 2023; Uddin, 2023; Walker, 2022).
- Accountability refers to the obligation of organizations to evaluate and be answerable for success or shortcomings in meeting their neuroinclusion efforts (Colvin, 2024; Duncan, 2024; Macaulay, 2024). This is achieved by collecting and analyzing data to measure progress (Colvin, 2024). Employer and leadership ownership of their diversity initiatives was also highlighted as a critical factor in the success or failure of inclusion initiatives (Colvin, 2024).
- Transparency was described at both organizational and interpersonal level (Colvin, 2024; Macaulay, 2024). At the organizational level, transparency refers to the organization's willingness to openly share information, goals, progress, and challenges related to optimizing inclusion efforts (Colvin, 2024). For instance, it was suggested that HR personnel grant front-line managers the ability to consult HR-related data, as they are the "actually make the decisions that impact outcomes on belonging" (Colvin, 2024). At the interpersonal level, it emphasizes honest, clear, and respectful communication between neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals

- (Macaulay, 2024). Because neurodivergent individuals may present with communication difficulties, managers can promote a culture that values clarity and transparency between work colleagues by encouraging giving and receiving feedback, and fostering a culture where people feel at ease to speak up without any fear of potential stigma or discrimination (Macaulay, 2024).
- People-centric culture reflects the belief that employees are critical to organizational success and that their wellbeing should be prioritized over productivity metrics (Ettling, 2019) by acknowledging and addressing mental health issues in the workplace that can decrease productivity and increase employee turnover rates (Farmiloe, 2023). Organizations that adopt this approach recognize that individuals possess unique strengths, which are often overlooked as the case of neurodivergent individuals due to negative stereotypes, and attempts to foster understanding and collaboration among individuals (Farmiloe, 2023; Mazzoni, 2019; Merrett, 2023; D. Smith, 2022).
 - Meritocracy, for the purpose of this study, is understood as a system in which career advancement and recognition are determined by an individual's demonstrable abilities, contributions, and competencies (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Although limited explanation was provided, the principle of fairness was emphasized, suggesting that systems related to hiring and promotion should be equally accessible to all individuals (McKinsey Insights, 2022; D. Smith, 2022).
 - Specific tools or frameworks were occasionally mentioned as a means to guide inclusive culture-building efforts. For instance, an organization used the Culture Design Canvas framework to guide the discovery and envisioning process of the

organization's core values (Reindle, 2024). Although the framework was not explicitly explained, the article noted that the culture-building activity involved a series of collaborative brainstorming sessions with employees and volunteers throughout the organization (Reindle, 2024).

The fourth subtheme, psychological safety, was mentioned 19 times (19 of 76, or 25% of the articles in the Culture change theme), noting an interesting pattern. For the specific purpose of this study, psychological safety refers to the shared belief that the workplace is secure for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017). Within the context of neurodiversity, a psychologically safe environment is a critical component of an inclusive workplace as it would enable neurodivergent individuals to feel at ease unmasking (Pryke-Hobbes et al., 2023), share personal challenges, and engage openly in communication without fear of marginalization or career repercussions (Haywood Queen, 2023). It is associated with improved job satisfaction and performance (Birke, 2023), and is regarded as a more effective driver of neuroinclusion than general awareness initiatives, as it actively cultivates a sense of security and acceptance (Clegg, 2017). However, few articles provide concrete guidance on how to enhance psychological safety in practice. The recommendations offered are as follows:

- Implement strict measures to address discrimination and incivility (McCorkindale, 2023).
- Use inclusive language and promote mental health at work (Uddin, 2023).
- Ensure that leaders prioritize psychological safety across the organization (Johnson, 2023).

In summary, culture change towards neuroinclusion involves large-scale organizational transformation that fosters inclusive communication, promotes accountability and transparency,

values merit-based advancement, and adopts a people-centric approach that supports individuals in reaching their potential. Integrating universal design and cultivating psychological safety further enhances neuroinclusion by facilitating disclosure, flexibility, and a sustained sense of belonging across all organizational levels.

Workplace Accommodation. The Workplace Accommodation theme represents the second-strongest pattern in the sample concerning strategies pertaining to organizational development with a relative percentage of 26.83% (55 of 205 strategies, interesting pattern). Workplace accommodation refers to any modifications to the work setting or the specifics of a job to enable individuals with disabilities or those hindered by standard work practices to perform their duties effectively (Canadian Association for Supported Employment, 2023). This theme encompasses strategies focusing on adapting work processes and environments to meet individual needs. Further division of the strategies discussed on workplace accommodation yields four subthemes.

The first subtheme, empty recommendations, accounted for five out of the 55 strategies (5 of 55, or 9.09% of the articles within the Workplace Accommodation theme), emerging as a noteworthy pattern.

The second subtheme, general DEI accommodation, was mentioned 30 times (30 of 55, or 54.55% of the articles within the Workplace Accommodation theme) suggesting a strong pattern. This subtheme categorizes accommodation strategies that can benefit a broader inclusion that is not specific to neurodivergent individuals but may include them as well.

Recommendations that emerged include the following:

- Provide flexible work hours and hybrid work (Carter, 2022a; Jacob, 2023).

- Offer accommodation—modifications or adaptations to a job or the workplace so that they are able to participate fully (Anonymous, 2017; Colvin, 2024; Ellis, 2020; Johnson, 2023; King, 2024; A. Nelson, 2018; “Tyson Launches Workforce Support Pilot Program,” 2023), ideally with minimal delays (Anonymous, 2017).
- Provide assistive technology—devices, hardware, software, or products that help individuals, often disabled individuals, with certain tasks to improve productivity or overcome certain limitations (Colvin, 2022c; King, 2024; Maity, 2023).

The third subtheme, neurodiversity accommodation, was noted 18 times (18 of 55, or 32.73% of the articles within the Workplace Accommodation theme), indicating a weak pattern. Although some of the recommendations suggested in the second subtheme were reiterated, the ones categorized under this theme were more specific to neurodivergent needs. Specific recommendations are as follows:

- For individuals with difficulties focusing, offering distraction-free zones (Kollins, 2024), placing these individuals in low-traffic areas (Talent Development, 2018), and providing technology that allows them to remove background noise during remote video calls or meetings (Scrimgeour, 2022) can improve concentration.
- For individuals experiencing challenges being in crowded environments, remote or hybrid work should be made available (Binford, 2022; Pandey, 2021).
- For individuals with social communication difficulties, organizations can allow alternative means of communication, such as using email or live chat as opposed to mandating obligatory live communication with colleagues or clients (Carter, 2022b).
- For neurodivergent individuals, accommodation services should be considered a normal part of performance improvement, not regarded as special treatment (Volkers,

2021), be tailored to the employee's needs (Coulston, 2023; Fordham, 2016; Ovaska-Few, 2018), and ideally, be provided without a diagnosis (Wood, 2023).

The fourth subtheme, specific accommodation or accessibility strategy, was mentioned twice (2 of 55, or 3.64% of the articles within the Workplace Accommodation theme), indicating a limited pattern. Notably, one article suggested conceptualizing accommodation in the following three formats: physical (such as the physical environment), supportive (such as emotional and behavioural assistance), and technical (such as assistive technology) accommodation (Pacilio, 2024). Another article mentioned Microsoft's implementation of the Accessibility Evolution Model as a success story for neurodiversity inclusion; however, it did not explain why this strategy was effective or beneficial (Bleasdale, 2021).

To summarize, workplace accommodation involves providing neurodivergent employees with the tools and means necessary to perform at their best. Findings suggest that accommodation requests be processed with as minimal roadblocks as possible not only to improve performance but also to promote the feeling of inclusion and belonging.

Policy and Program Design. The Policy and Program Design theme represents the third-strongest pattern in the sample regarding strategies for organizational development aimed at fostering neurodiversity in the workplace, with a relative percentage of 18.54% (38 of 205 strategies, interesting pattern). Articles discussing the creation, implementation or improvement of organizational programs or policies to enhance neuroinclusion were categorized under this theme. For the purpose of this study, policies refer to a course of principle or action used as a basis for decision-making; and programs, a set of interventions aimed at achieving specific goals. Further categorization of the sample identified five subthemes.

The first subtheme, empty recommendations, accounted for three of the 38 strategies (3 of 38, or 7.89% of the articles in the Policy and Program Design theme), emerging as a noteworthy pattern.

The second subtheme, policies and procedures, was mentioned 13 times (13 of 38, or 34.21% of the articles in the Policy and Program Design theme), revealing a weak pattern. The findings suggest creating policies that promote fairness, accessibility, autonomy, and non-discrimination by ensuring equitable access to opportunities and resources, and by including protective measures (such as a zero tolerance for discrimination policy, anti-harassment policy, or anti-bullying policy) to ensure that all employees, including neurodivergent individuals, can perform optimally (Gaul, 2021; McKinsey Insights, 2022; Small, 2021; Thom, 2023; Waterworth, 2023).

The third subtheme, data analysis, was noted 10 times (10 of 38, or 26.32% of the articles in the Policy and Program Design theme), emerging as an interesting pattern. For organizational transformation initiatives aimed at fostering neurodiversity to be effective, the literature suggests that data should be collected and analyzed to inform decisions for continuous improvement regarding workplace accommodations (Howatt & Cooper, 2023; Roberts, 2019) and to address bias in organizational practices (Walker, 2022). It also recommends the importance of gathering feedback from neurodivergent employees (Duncan, 2024; Jones, 2024; Kearslake, 2024; Macaulay, 2024) and providing managers access to the data (Colvin, 2024). Additionally, the gathering of “HR metrics” was mentioned as on the topic of making informed decisions; however, no additional information was provided (“Having a Diverse Workforce Is Not Only Right, but Good for Business,” 2023). Furthermore, analyzing attrition data—information concerning employees leaving the organization—was proposed as a strategy to assess how

successfully neurodivergent individuals are integrated and retained within the organization (Hirsch, 2022).

The fourth subtheme, programs, was highlighted six times (6 of 38, or 15.79% of the articles in the Policy and Program Design theme), emerging as another interesting pattern. Strategies within this subtheme propose designing various programs to raise awareness of neurodiversity and to promote the inclusion of neurodivergent employees (HR Daily Advisor Staff, 2020; Nedlund, 2020). Specific recommendations include creating neurodiversity celebrations or awareness campaigns that encompass some or all the following elements: learning events (K. Wilkinson, 2022), self-disclosure (Colvin, 2022c; K. Wilkinson, 2022), and resource sharing (K. Wilkinson, 2022).

The fifth subtheme, leadership commitment, was noted four times (4 of 38, or 10.53% of the articles in the Policy and Program Design theme), emerging as a noteworthy pattern. The findings underscore the critical role of organizational leaders in driving neuroinclusivity efforts (“Atlas World Group Inc.,” 2023; Bahl, 2020; A. Brown, 2019a; Gurchiek, 2018). Their active commitment is seen as essential (“Atlas World Group Inc.,” 2023; Bahl, 2020; A. Brown, 2019a), as they are responsible for initiating and supporting the development of DEI committees, implementing inclusive policies and programs, and appointing roles such as health and safety officers to advance organizational transformation (“Atlas World Group Inc.,” 2023; Gurchiek, 2018).

The sixth subtheme, other, categorized two strategies (2 of 38, or 5.26% of the articles in the Policy and Program Design theme, limited pattern) that fell within policy and program design but did not align with the other subthemes. Notably, one article recommends forming a task group with the objective of identifying opportunities for optimizing inclusion or investigating

workplace discrimination (Anonymous, 2017), while another suggests access to a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) board-certified behaviour analyst (Donnelly, 2020), without specifying any reasons.

Overall, the articles discussing policy and program design primarily highlight the importance of neuroinclusive initiatives and guidelines, as they aim to establish a code of conduct that respects employees from diverse backgrounds and with varying needs. To achieve this, organizational leaders must be willing to support and promote these initiatives. The literature further recommends that data be collected and measured for use in continuous improvement efforts.

Partnership. The Partnership theme represents the fourth-strongest pattern in the sample concerning strategies pertaining to organizational development with a relative percentage of 10.24% (21 of 205 strategies, noteworthy pattern). For the purpose of this study, the term partnership refers to collaborative relationships between stakeholders that are aimed at exploring mutually beneficial goals related to neuroinclusion. This study distinguishes between external partnerships—collaborations with businesses, public institutions, and non-profit organizations—and internal partnerships, which involve cooperation among individuals or groups within the organization. This distinction informed the development of four subthemes reflecting whether the literature recommended one or both types of partnerships.

The first subtheme, empty recommendations, was found once among the 21 strategies (1 of 21, or 4.76% of the articles in the Partnership theme), underscoring a limited pattern.

The second subtheme, external and internal (partnership), categorized articles mentioning both types of partnerships. This accounted for 3 of 21 strategies (3 of 21, or 14.29% of the articles in the Partnership theme), revealing an interesting pattern.

The third subtheme, external only (partnership), categorized articles mentioning partnerships solely with external. This type of partnership was mentioned 10 times (10 of 21, or 47.61% of the articles in the Partnership theme), highlighting a weak pattern. Examples of external partnerships recommended are as follows:

- Organizational outreach programs, vocational rehabilitation programs, and various not-for-profit organizations serving the neurodivergent community to secure neurodivergent talent (Cassidy, 2022; Hodge & Sheehy, 2023)
- Public funding to support organizational looking to enhance neuroinclusion at work (Cassidy, 2022)
- Neurodivergence or autism experts and organizations with neuroinclusion consulting firms to assist with recruitment efforts, provide awareness training, and help organizations re-examine their policies and procedures to be more neuroinclusive (Chesney, 2024; Deveau, 2018)
- Universities and educational institutions, including work placement opportunities or applied research on workplace neuroinclusion (A. Brown, 2019a)

The fourth subtheme, internal only (partnership), was noted seven times (7 of 21, or 33.33% of the articles in the Partnership theme), emerging as another weak pattern. Concerning internal partnerships, the sample discusses the pertinence of collaborating with neurodivergent employees by helping them set up employee-led groups, such as employee resource groups (ERG). These volunteer-led groups comprised of employees working in the same organization meet to discuss and act on issues that matter to them to bring organizational change (Cenkci et al., 2019, p. 2).

Ultimately, the partnership theme highlights the importance of forming alliances inside and outside the organization with employees and with partners from the corporate, public and community sectors. These partnerships can help the organization set up a variety of services from organizational development, career development, training and development support.

Continuous Improvement. The Continuous Improvement theme is the fifth-strongest pattern found in the sample concerning strategies pertaining to organizational development with a relative percentage of 4.39% (9 of 205 strategies, limited pattern). For this study, continuous improvement refers to the organization's willingness to reexamine their current process and pursue ongoing transformations to bring changes that are aligned to its specific goal, in this case, to nurture neurodiversity. Specifically, the literature suggests that neuroinclusivity is not a "one-and-done" activity (Blanchard, 2021). Instead, organizations should continuously re-examine their current ways of functioning, adopt new strategies (Bank, 2024; Johnson, 2023; King, 2024; Reindle, 2024), and provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities to employees (Rolack & Gonggrijp-Bello, 2021).

Others. The sample revealed six strategies (6 of 205 strategies, or close to 3%) that fell within organizational development but did not fit within any of the subthemes, indicating a limited pattern. Specifically, intersectionality was named, but not explained or explored (Coulston, 2023). Additionally, an article highlighted the need to bridge the gap between science and practice (Thom, 2023), ensuring that neurodiversity is well represented in leadership roles (Colvin, 2022a), and avoiding performative actions—gestures or actions that are symbolic in nature without a genuine commitment towards change (Hirsch, 2022). Finally, a specific tool entitled the Mental Health Matrix was presented to help managers identify challenges related to mental health (L. Moore, 2021).

To summarize, trade and professional publications discussed a wide array of organizational development strategies aimed at nurturing neurodiversity in the workplace, with culture change as the one that is the most prominently discussed and workplace accommodation as the second most discussed topic. In effect, the discussion on cultural and systemic transformation as a means to make the workplace more hospitable to neurodivergent individuals while finding ways to support them in their challenge exemplifies how the social model of disability is applied in the workplace. However, many strategies presented lacked precise details or explanation, limiting the actionable value of the findings. Nevertheless, some interesting findings were revealed that they received limited coverage in the peer-review literature that was surveyed and presented in Chapter 2, namely the importance of partnering with internal and external stakeholders, such as educational institutions and public organizations, to affect change on an even larger scale.

Training and Development Strategies

Regarding training and development strategies discussed in trade and professional publications, the analysis identified 189 strategies across the 176 articles (weak pattern, 43.05%). These strategies were categorized into five broader themes and, when relevant, further divided into subthemes. Table 4 lists the themes, the number of instances, and the relative percentage of training and development strategies.

The analysis also examined the number of publications that either did not discuss training and development strategies. Specifically, 44 out of 176 articles (interesting pattern, 25%) did not propose any training and development strategies.

Upon reviewing the findings, the themes were further subdivided, and thematic grouping based on the expression of strategies in the sample was employed to aid in characterization.

Table 4*Themes, Number of Instances, and Percentages of Training and Development Strategies*

Themes	Number of Instances	Relative Percentage
Diversity training	115	60.85
Empty recommendations	24	-
Awareness	69	-
Recruitment	5	-
Communication	5	-
Supporting neurodivergent co-workers	3	-
Microaggression	2	-
Emotional intelligence	1	-
Compliance	1	-
Educational technology	5	-
Training and development for neurodivergent workers	44	23.28
Empty recommendations	3	-
Role-specific and industry-specific training	13	-
Soft skills training (including social communication training)	9	-
Coaching, mentoring, buddy system	7	-
Work integrated learning	5	-
Workplace onboarding	4	-
Life skills training	2	-
Digital skills	1	-
Training for managers and supervisors	18	9.52
Empty recommendations	4	-
Managing neurodiverse teams	11	-
Mental health	2	-
Reasonable accommodations	1	-
Other	12	6.35
Training for leadership	6	-
Training for Board of Directors	1	-
Empty recommendations	5	-
Total	189	100%

Diversity Training. The Diversity Training theme emerged as the strongest pattern within training and development, accounting for 60.85% of the strategies identified (115 of 189 strategies, strong pattern). As a reminder, diversity training is an umbrella term used to describe any activities designed to reduce bias among managers and workers (Paluck et al., 2021, p. 542). To better understand how diversity training is characterized in trade and professional publications, the identified strategies were categorized into subthemes based on the topics addressed. The thematic categorization process yielded nine subthemes, which primarily

represent the specific knowledge or skills addressed in diversity training, with the exception of one subtheme that encompasses training design and educational technology—the use of human-made tools and processes to help facilitate learning—to improve the efficacy of awareness training.

The first subtheme, empty recommendations, accounted for 24 of the 115 strategies (20.87% of the articles in the Diversity Training theme), emerging an interesting pattern.

The second subtheme, awareness, emerged with the strongest pattern within the Diversity Training theme, with 69 of 115 strategies (60% of the articles in the Diversity Training theme), indicating a strong pattern in the literature. Despite awareness being categorized under the same umbrella as diversity training, this subtheme specifically uses the term awareness to gain deeper insight on the topics that working professionals need to understand regarding neurodiversity and creating a neuroinclusive workplace. Specific discussion points and recommendations from the sample are as follows.

First, awareness is perceived as a way to promote understanding of neurodiversity (“Behind Rack Room Shoes’ Commitment to Supporting an Inclusive and Diverse Workforce,” 2024; Carter, 2022b; Duncan, 2024; Johnson, 2023; Macaulay, 2024). Developing widespread understanding contributes to fostering neurodiversity in the workplace, which is reportedly linked to increased innovation, enhanced productivity, improved problem-solving, and a positive work culture (Macaulay, 2024). It is also assumed that a better understanding of neurodiversity among work colleagues means that they would be more inclined to extend support to neurodivergent employees (Oesch, 2019).

Second, training is perceived as a means to dispel inaccurate stereotypes of neurodivergent individuals and reduce the risk of discrimination (B. Balakrishnan & McGrath,

2023; Gaul, 2021; Macaulay, 2024; Small, 2021). This is achieved by providing clarity on the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals (Kendall, 2017), explaining the way their differences are experienced in the workplace (Crist, 2024; Macaulay, 2024), and highlighting neurodivergent individuals' strengths and abilities (Macaulay, 2024; C. Wilson, 2023), such as the ability to hyperfocus, a skill that is present among some individuals with ADHD (Lagosha, 2023).

Third, ongoing awareness training is regarded as an organizational commitment to an inclusive culture (King, 2024). Some suggested training on “disability-related issues to all personnel, specifically those involved in recruitment, hiring, promotion and retention processes” (King, 2024). Others recommended training on psychological safety (“Behind Rack Room Shoes’ Commitment to Supporting an Inclusive and Diverse Workforce,” 2024; Farmiloe, 2023; Gaul, 2021; D. Smith, 2022); however, it is difficult to determine whether the focus is on compliance or simply awareness due to the lack of explanation. Further suggestions included implementing unconscious bias training and cultural competency, but no further explanation was provided (Jones, 2024).

Fourth, awareness training is also used to improve employees' understanding of accessibility—defined as the process of providing people with activities, products and environments that are usable for people with disabilities (Uddin, 2023)—and workplace accommodation. Concerning specific recommendations, one article emphasized the importance of increasing “awareness around assistive technology, both for people with disabilities and for the IT teams deploying it” (Scrimgeour, 2022); and another emphasized the need to train all employees on accessibility protocols (Maity, 2023); however, they did not further elaborate. Additionally, an article recommended that tools, resources, and strategies should be included in

accessibility-related awareness training (K. Wilkinson, 2022). Finally, the need to update existing training materials to make them accessible to neurodivergent individuals was mentioned (Fischer, 2023; Macaulay, 2024; Pazdel, 2023), in addition to the need to update existing diversity training to include neurodiversity (Carter, 2022b).

The third subtheme, recruitment, accounted for five of 115 strategies (4.35% of the articles in the Diversity Training theme), representing a limited pattern. For the purpose of this study, recruitment refers to hiring people into the workforce and this subtheme attempts to identify training recommendations related to the process of hiring neurodivergent individuals. Although some articles reported successful recruitment strategies by changing how they conduct recruitment, they did not share any insights with their readers (Bleasdale, 2021; Talent Development, 2018). Others referred to awareness training as being important to reduce bias within the hiring process (Kiefer, 2021). For instance, hiring managers who rely on interviews or social cues such as eye contact to assess a candidate may not accurately capture neurodivergent individuals' range of talent (A. Brown, 2019b; Selko, 2019).

The fourth subtheme, communications, was mentioned in five of the 115 strategies (5 of 115, or 4.35% of the articles in the Diversity Training theme), indicating a limited pattern. This subtheme was established to better capture instances where communication was discussed in the context of diversity training for a broad audience. Regarding potential guidance and recommendations that can be drawn from the sample, very limited insight can be gained. Specifically, although one article named improving communication skills as a strategy they used, they did not provide any specific recommendations or offered clarifications as to how communication skills helped enhance neurodiversity (Ovaska-Few, 2018). Another mentioned that traditional neurodiversity training (unclear as to what is meant by that) should be replaced

with targeted communication skills training (Etra, 2023), but specific details were lacking. Overall, the articles suggest training employees on communicating in an appropriate, non-derogatory, and non-stigmatizing manner to build connection and foster good working relationships (Etra, 2023; Uddin, 2023). To avoid miscommunication when speaking with neurodivergent individuals, clear, unambiguous instructions and direct feedback were recommended (Volkers, 2021).

The fifth subtheme, supporting neurodivergent co-workers, was noted three times among the 115 strategies (3 of 115, or 2.61% of the articles in the Diversity Training theme), emerging as a limited pattern. This subtheme attempted to characterize training interventions offered to neurotypical employees that can improve the performance of neurodivergent individuals or workplace inclusion. Training to become “neurodiversity champions” was identified, but additional information was not provided to clarify what is meant by the term or how these champions can enhance neurodiversity in the workplace (Degen & Baker, 2023). Additionally, “specially trained job coaches who offer individually tailored support” (Ellis, 2020, para. 20) was mentioned, highlighting that coaches may require training to fulfill their supportive role.

The sixth subtheme, microaggression, was mentioned twice (2 of 115, or 1.74% of the articles in the Diversity Training theme), indicating a limited pattern. Although the articles in the sample do not define the term, microaggression is defined as actions or gestures that feel hostile or insensitive to some aspect of our identity, such as someone’s race, gender, sexuality, parental status, socioeconomic background, or mental health (Washington, 2022). Even though the articles highlighted microaggression as a training topic (“Atlas World Group Inc.,” 2023; Farmiloe, 2022), none provided reasons or offered specific guidance for training and development professionals.

The seventh subtheme, emotional intelligence training, was mentioned once (1 of 115, or 0.87% of the articles in the Diversity Training theme), indicating a limited pattern. Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to an individual's capacity for self-awareness, personal reflection and the ability to recognize, manage and react to emotions from within and from others (HR Daily Advisor Staff, 2020). A study involving neurodivergent individuals revealed that developing EI leads to an improvement in personal and interpersonal skills, thus fostering greater relationships across the entire organization (HR Daily Advisor Staff, 2020). Specific recommendations regarding EI training are as follows (HR Daily Advisor Staff, 2020):

- Train leaders first in emotional intelligence because they will inspire employees to be emotionally intelligent and set the tone for the entire organization.
- Implement real time, interactive workshops that promote social awareness and relationship building through role-play and activities where learners use active listening, empathy and self-regulation.
- Promote corporate social responsibility through employee engagement by developing initiatives that support individuals and communities outside of the workplace (such as food drive, volunteering at a non-profit organization).
- Ensure that the training programs are safe spaces—a space free from ridicule and ostracization—where they can learn about themselves and learn how to regulate their emotions.

The eight themes, compliance, were mentioned once (1 of 115, or 0.87% of the articles in the Diversity Training theme), indicating a limited pattern. The term compliance—which refers to the act of obeying the law or a rule—was selected because of its historical and present ties with diversity training, as previously discussed in Chapter 2. The sample provided little

information on the importance of compliance, with the insight being that organizations should have training in place to “avoid any risk under applicable labour laws” highlighting the need for employers to understand the legal obligations and potential consequences for non-compliance (Veysey, 2023).

The ninth theme, educational technology—the theory and practice of using software, hardware and instructional design approaches to facilitate learning—was referenced 5 times out of 115 strategies (5 of 115, or 4.35% of the articles in the Diversity Training theme), indicating a limited pattern. Given that peer-review literature has not yet found the most effective instructional design strategy to develop diversity training (Bezrukova et al., 2016), this subtheme attempted to identify potentially helpful strategies for educational technologists and instructional designers—professionals who use software, hardware, learning theories and approaches to facilitate learning—to create more effective training and learning experiences.

Additionally, immersive VR technology was used in neurodiversity awareness training to allow neurotypical employees to temporarily experience living with autism, or another neurodivergence, or disability to foster a deeper sense of empathy and understanding (“Celebrating Inclusivity and Empowerment: Highlights from Our EMEA Team,” 2024).

Regarding instructional design approaches, the following were recommended (Cosshall, 2020):

- Providing training in several formats, alluding to the application of universal design for learning in the workplace, to provide neurodivergent and neurotypical individual training in multiple forms that suit their learning needs.
- Breaking learning units into smaller chunks to help manage attention span. Known as chunking, this strategy is a general instructional design strategy to help learners

manage cognitive load—the mental effort required to process information or to learn (Artino, 2008, pp. 426–429).

- Allowing learners to skip ahead in learning units or easily revise topics was suggested as a strategy to help people neurodivergent individuals with potentially cognitive challenges or learning disorders, though the article did not provide further explanations.
- When assessing learning assessments, providing different means to demonstrate mastery was suggested to allow for learners to be in control and to accurately assess learning among neurodivergent individuals. No further details were provided.

Overall, diversity training is a strategy that is primarily used to foster a sense of awareness towards neurodiversity and neurodivergence in the hope of reducing negative stereotypes, encouraging empathy, compassion and acceptance towards neurodivergent employees by upkeeping an environment that is conducive to work. Some articles attempted to provide suggestions on how to improve the design of diversity trainings, such as chunking content into smaller units; but upon review, these strategies were consistent with effective training design in general (Carliner, 2015).

Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers. The Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers theme emerged as the second-strongest pattern, accounting for 23.28% (44 of 189 strategies in training and development), emerging as an interesting pattern. Similar to the previous theme, further division was used to gain a better understanding of the themes and topics discussed in the sample that can foster neurodiversity in the workplace. However, this subtheme distinguishes from the diversity training theme in its

focus on drawing patterns, specifically regarding strategies that are used to assist neurodivergent individuals. The subcategorization process yielded eight subthemes.

The first subtheme, empty recommendations, accounted for 3 of the 44 strategies (6.82% of the articles in the Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers theme), emerging a noteworthy pattern.

The second subtheme, role-specific and industry-specific training, included 13 of 44 strategies (39.55% of the articles in the Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers theme), indicating an interesting pattern. Although the articles do not offer a definition, for the purpose of this study, role-specific and industry-specific training are learning interventions aimed at facilitating the acquisition of knowledge and skills required for a specific job, role, or industry. The terms technical training (Ellis, 2020; Oesch, 2019) and workplace skills training (Colvin, 2022b) were grouped under this subtheme. It is important to clarify that this study did not track the precise recommendations of each industry or job type but considered the greater pattern that emerged from the recommendations.

Specifically, the articles emphasize the importance of role- or job-specific training beyond aligning the neurodivergent individual with their inherent skills (such as matching them to a data analysis position because they are perceived as being good at finding patterns) (S. Anand, 2022; Bahl, 2020; Chesney, 2024; Deveau, 2018; Ellis, 2020; Express Computer, 2023; Fifth Third Bancorp, 2021; Haywood Queen, 2023; Lisanti, 2023; MIT Sloan Management Review, 2023; Oesch, 2019). These skill development opportunities are often offered through neurodiversity hiring programs (Ellis, 2020; Express Computer, 2023). Providing certification and recertification to neurodivergent individuals was also mentioned without specific details as to how they might be helpful for them (Lisanti, 2023). Technical training is often combined with

additional training and development strategies, such as soft skills training (covered in the next theme) to ensure that neurodivergent individuals are employable (Bahl, 2020).

The third subtheme, soft skills training, appeared in 9 of 44 strategies (20.45% of the articles in Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers theme), indicating an interesting pattern. The Association for Talent Development (2024) defines soft skills as “the ability to interact amicably with others, such as communication, leadership, empathy, delegation, flexibility, teamwork, and innovation” (B. Nelson, 2024, para. 1). Articles referring to executive functioning skills training (such as “organization and memory skills”) (Oesch, 2019) were categorized under this subtheme. Certain articles claim that soft skills training is important for neurodivergent individuals but do not offer additional explanations (Kearslake, 2024; Moody, 2022). As for specific recommendations, they are as follows:

- Provide a coach or buddy as continuous support in social skills development, such as navigating social etiquette in the workplace (Behmke, 2018; Rolack & Gonggrijp-Bello, 2021).
- Train neurodivergent employees on skills related to “organization and memory”; no further details were offered (Oesch, 2019).
- Improve self-awareness—one’s conscious knowledge of one’s abilities, emotions, personality, motives, and desires—to further develop their strengths (Carter, 2022b).
Although this can benefit neurotypicals, self-awareness is even more important for neurodivergent individuals because they need to learn how to leverage the strengths they possess to counterbalance certain impairments or limitations (Carter, 2022b).
- Emotional intelligence training may be potentially be helpful not only to facilitate self-awareness, but also to improve one’s ability to manage emotions, navigate social

settings, and maintain positive interpersonal relationships (HR Daily Advisor Staff, 2020).

The third subtheme, coaching, mentoring, and buddy system, comprised 7 of 44 strategies (15.90% of the articles in the Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers theme), indicating an interesting pattern. Although the literature does not define coaching or mentoring, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (Hayden, 2024) defines the terms as follows:

Coaching aims to produce optimal performance and improvement at work. It focuses on specific skills and goals, and may also have an impact on an individual's personal attributes, such as social interaction or confidence. The process typically lasts for a defined period of time or forms the basis of an ongoing management style. Workplace mentorship is a relationship in which an experienced colleague shares their expertise to help a less experienced individual grow and develop. It calls on the skills of questioning, listening, clarifying and reframing that are associated with coaching. One key distinction is that mentoring relationships tend to be longer term than coaching arrangements (para 4–7).

This subtheme specifically tracked the instances where coaching, mentoring or the use of a buddy—a work colleague who is assigned to support the neurodivergent individual—was referenced and their recommendations. Although none of the articles explicitly provide guidance on how to set up coaching, mentoring or buddy systems, findings suggest that the buddy, coach or mentor acts as a support mechanism, and not all articles provide specific details as to the nature of the support (Deveau, 2018), some claim that they help newly hired neurodivergent employees feel comfortable in their new role (Behmke, 2018). Additionally, as noted in the

previous subtheme, the use of buddies has been suggested to help neurodivergent individuals communicate more effectively with different people (Germain, 2023; Rolack & Gonggrijp-Bello, 2021).

Work integrated learning was the fifth subtheme and accounted for 5 of 44 strategies (11.36% of the articles in the Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers theme), emerging as a noteworthy pattern. As previously defined in Chapter 2, work integrated learning (WIL) is an educational approach underpinned by social-cultural theories that provides the learner with concrete work experience through strategies such as learning through apprenticeships and internships (Coplan et al., 2021). Although the sample discussed strategies related to work integrated learning, it provided limited to no information on the following strategies: vocational training to help neurodivergent individuals build “marketable skills that would help them compete for gainful employment” (Fifth Third Bancorp, 2021), paid internships (no further information) (Deffenbaugh, 2023), work experience (no further information) (Angelini, 2023), apprenticeship—a paid work-education program—(Hall, 2021), and on-the-job simulation activities that approximate certain settings to help neurodivergent individuals adjust to new environments or situations (Oesch, 2019). Thematically, the findings emphasize the practical and experiential nature of learning to build competencies through authentic workplace engagement; however, the articles offer limited guidance and insights that can assist working professionals improve vocational training, internships and learning by apprenticeship programs.

The sixth subtheme, onboarding, was mentioned in 4 of 44 strategies (9.09% of the articles in the Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers theme), indicating a noteworthy pattern. The following recommendations were noted:

- Onboarding should prioritize human connections rather than focus on completing administrative tasks, such as filling out paperwork, to help the employee foster a sense of belonging with the organization (Mulcahy, 2023).
- Onboarding should provide company guidelines and explicitly state social or unwritten norms (Cuadra, 2021), including reporting relationships and dress code for neurodivergent new hires (Ellis, 2020). Although the suggestion is not substantiated by an explicit explanation, they were described within the context of providing clear, direct communication, a recurrent recommendation within several themes and subthemes of this study pertaining to communication and teamwork. Another reason for presenting clear guidelines and policies is to reduce the potential feeling of being overwhelmed (Ellis, 2020). In other words, neurotypical employees need to be mindful of potential difficulties associated with neurodivergence, as some have difficulty with social communication and implicit norms by adjusting their strategies accordingly.

The seventh subtheme, life skills training, was counted twice among the 44 strategies (2 of 44, or 4.54% of the articles in the Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers theme), indicating a limited pattern. This subtheme attempted to characterize training that fell outside of technical skills and soft skills but was considered by the sample as relevant for a person's development. Specifically, an article distinguished employability and life skills (Bahl, 2023) when describing a 14-week training program that neurodivergent candidates underwent as part of a "Train, Intern and Hire model" (Bahl, 2023) but did not provide any explanation as to how they might help the neurodivergent hire or any clarification as to what these terms mean. As reported in the article, life skills training (namely financial planning and nutrition) was integrated

into a neurodiversity program by the name of the Dandelion Project (Oesch, 2019). No reasons or explanations were given as to why these skills were useful for personal or professional development neurodivergent individuals.

The eighth subtheme, digital skills, was also referenced once (1 of 44, or 2.27% of the articles in the Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers theme), indicating a limited pattern. Although the term was discussed as part of Digital Skills for the Workplace program, an initiative highlighting the combined strategies of internships within corporate settings and digital skills development in higher education to prepare young adults for “careers in technology” (Moody, 2022, para. 4), the article does not clarify what it meant by digital skills and whether it falls under a job or industry-specific skill.

The findings regarding training and development for neurodivergent workers primarily emphasize the importance of both job-specific and executive functioning skills. The prevalence of job and industry-specific skills in the theme of Training and Development for Neurodivergent Workers suggests that ensuring that these employees possess the necessary skills and abilities is a concern for organizations. To support individual performance, strategies such as buddy systems, coaching, and structured onboarding are recommended. Additionally, the sample highlights the importance of creating a welcoming environment for neurodivergent employees and of clearly communicating workplace rules and expectations. However, although the findings indicate that life skills training can also help neurodivergent employees recognize and leverage their inherent strengths, the articles fail to explain why skills such as nutrition or financial skills would be helpful for neurodivergent employees.

Training for Managers and Supervisors. The Training for Managers and Supervisors theme emerged as the fourth-strongest pattern, accounting for 9.52% within training and

development (18 of 189 of the articles in training and development), highlighting a noteworthy pattern. The strategies within this theme pertain to training activities for individuals in managerial roles, including recruitment managers. Four subthemes were identified.

The first subtheme, empty recommendations, accounted for 4 of the 18 strategies (4 of 18, or 22.22% of the Training for Managers and Supervisors theme), revealing an interesting pattern.

The second subtheme, managing neurodiverse teams, accounted for 11 of 18 articles (or 61.11% in the Training for Managers and Supervisors), emerging as a strong pattern. The sample provided limited information, but nonetheless it proposed that employers consider offering training to managers and supervisors so that they were able to “support neuro-distinct team members to thrive” (Biggs, 2024, para. 9), and learn how to better integrate neurodivergent workers (Selko, 2018), highlighting the need for managers to learn how to support neurodivergent individuals.

Additionally, a call for better training for managers on neurodivergence was highlighted without offering concrete suggestions on how to improve them (Anonymous, 2017). Specific recommendations are as follows:

- Supervisors should receive training on effective communication strategies (no further details provided) (Coulston, 2023; Pazdel, 2023), develop skills related to unbiased assessment of performance and skills (A. Brown, 2019b), and how to design meetings, interviews, and work environments that are accessible and psychologically safe (Carter, 2022b).
- Training on how to hire and terminate autistic employees was suggested (Gurchiek, 2018). No additional information or explanation was given.

- Hiring managers with formal training on autism conduct were mentioned without additional information provided (Talent Development, 2018).

Additionally, an article on how managers can help employees with ADHD did not specifically address training for managers but provided insights that can potentially guide future training projects for managers (Kollins, 2024). These include breaking tasks into smaller chunks, providing accommodation, finding distraction-free workspaces, and connecting the employee with a buddy, and, more importantly, underscoring the need to treat cases on an individual basis, and without typecasting the employee (Kollins, 2024).

The third subtheme, mental health, was mentioned twice (2 of 18, or 11.11% of the articles in the Training for Managers and Supervisors theme), indicating a noteworthy pattern. This subtheme tracked instances where the sample referenced training on the topic of mental health for managers and supervisors. Regarding mental health, the articles recommended covering microaggression and psychological safety, and suggested that mental health training for managers should be compulsory (Anonymous, 2017; Roberts, 2019).

The fourth subtheme concerned reasonable accommodations and was mentioned once as a training consideration for managers (1 of 18, 5.56% of the articles in the Training for Managers theme), revealing it to be a limited pattern. The article recommends increasing managers' knowledge regarding reasonable accommodation to support neurominority employees (Gaul, 2021).

In summary, the Training for Managers and Supervisors theme is primarily associated with strategies for managing and supporting neurodivergent employees at both an individual and team level. Although several articles reference training for managers and supervisors, many lack concrete, applicable recommendations that can be used by HR professionals. Nonetheless, they

highlight the importance of training on the following subjects: microaggressions, psychological safety, accommodation, and bias. The supportive nature of the manager is also highlighted, as articles recommend that managers possess knowledge of the available resources to better support neurodivergent employees.

Others. Findings revealed 12 strategies within the sample that fell outside the established themes (12 of 189, or close to 6.35% of the articles in the training and development theme), revealing a limited pattern. Broadly, these encompass the following subthemes: training for leadership, training for Board of Directors, and empty recommendations following the mention of training. It is important to note that while the articles employ the terms leadership and Board of Directors, it is unclear whether the Board of Directors falls under leadership. This study makes the distinction between these terms and is reported as distinct subthemes to accurately report the findings.

The first subtheme, training for leadership, was mentioned six times (6 of 12, or 50% of the articles in the Others theme), indicating a weak pattern. Notably, leadership training to foster the following knowledge and skills was mentioned: psychological safety (McKinsey & Company, 2023), mental health (L. Moore, 2021), communication (Wood, 2023), emotional intelligence (HR Daily Advisor Staff, 2020), and inclusion (Nason, 2021).

Concerning psychological safety and mental health, training (such as training on non-stigmatizing language) and non-training strategies (such as implementing mental health workplace programs, ensuring that mental health services are available) were suggested (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

Regarding communication, training on understanding emotional language was reported as a factor to consider. In effect, while the term was not explicitly defined, the article stated that

leaders must learn to understand the intention behind the message as neurodivergent individuals may not be able to deliver a message with an emotional impact (such as having a flat affect), and for instance, an urgent message may not appear as such through its delivery (Wood, 2023).

As for emotion intelligence was also reported as a necessity for leaders for reasons already outlined in the emotional intelligence subtheme of the Diversity Training theme (HR Daily Advisor Staff, 2020).

As for inclusion, the article mentioning the strategy provided little insights that can help others, as its primary focus was on reporting a diversity award given to a law firm for their diversity program. Based on the information provided, the award-winning initiative used an “inclusive leadership training program, which teaches how and why to promote inclusion” (Nason, 2021, para. 4), highlighting the pertinence for leaders to receive training on inclusion.

The second subtheme, training for the Board of Directors, was identified once (1 of 12, or 8.33% of the articles in the Others theme), emerging as a noteworthy pattern. The mention of psychological safety for the Board of Director was mentioned within an article covering an award-winning DEI program, but it did not specify the reasons as to why it was particularly important for the intended audience (Ford, 2024).

The third subtheme, empty recommendations, was identified five times (5 of 12, or 41.66% of the articles in the Others theme), indicating a weak pattern. Unlike the previous empty recommendations, which characterized the lack of recommendations at the mention of the theme (such as diversity), empty recommendations categorized in this subtheme were noted at the broad mention of training without any details.

Overall, three observations can be drawn from training and development strategies discussed in trade and professional publications. First, they primarily focus on raising awareness

about neurodiversity, equipping managers and leaders to better support neurodivergent individuals by improving psychological safety, reducing negative stereotypes and bias, and by fostering a sense of belonging. In effect, diversity training emerged as the most frequently discussed theme; however, despite its prominence in the sample, the strategies discussed lacked specificity and the prevalence of empty recommendations across several subthemes limits the insight and the value that can be drawn from the sample. Second, the discussion on training is predominantly focused on people surrounding the neurodivergent individual rather than the individuals themselves. In effect, combined with diversity training (115 instances), training for managers and supervisors (18 instances), training for the Board of Directors (1 instance), and training for leadership (6 instances) account for a total of 140 strategies out of 189 (strong pattern, 74.07% in training and development strategies) as opposed to the 44 instances of strategies discussed concerning neurodivergent individuals themselves. This discovering is not surprising, given the ample discussion within peer-reviewed literature on not only the lack of awareness and sensitivity to neurodiversity but also negative perceptions and violence as contributing factors to the difficulties and hardship neurodivergent individuals face in the workplace (Austin & Pisano, 2017; N. Doyle, 2020a; Krzeminska et al., 2019; Mellifont, 2020; Rollnik-Sadowska & Grabińska, 2024). Third, although this study found limited actionable recommendations on how to support neurodivergent individuals through training and development strategies, trade and professional publication is a source of literature rich with success stories of neurodivergent individuals who have successfully entered the job market through a variety of programs offering technical skills training and soft skills training; suggesting that a combined approach of awareness building, organizational transformation and skill development does improve the employment outcomes of neurodivergent individuals.

Career Development Strategies

Relating to career development, the analysis of the sample identified 45 strategies within the 176 articles (25.56% of the articles in career development strategies). These 45 strategies were categorized into eight broader themes and then, whenever pertinent, were further divided into subthemes. Table 5 lists the themes, the numbers of instances, and the relative percentage of career development strategies.

The analysis also examined the number of publications that did not discuss career development. Specifically, 135 out of 176 (76.70%) articles did not propose any career development strategies, highlighting a strong pattern.

Table 5

Themes, Number of Instances, and Percentages of Career Development Strategies

Themes	Number of Instances	Relative Percentage
Career coaching and support	21	44.67
Empty recommendations	10	-
Peer-to-peer career coaching and support (ex.: ERG)	8	-
Professional, expert-led support	2	-
Specific type of mentoring	1	-
Managerial support	7	15.56
Empty recommendations	1	-
Mentoring	2	-
Promotion equity	4	-
Internship	6	13.33
Access to career enhancers	5	
Access to sponsors	3	-
Skill or project-based career enhancers	2	-
Strategies for neurodivergent individuals	3	6.67
Other	3	6.67
Access to mental health support	1	-
Access to career advancement opportunities	1	-
Access to career advancement data	1	-
Total	45	100%

Career Coaching and Support. Because coaching and support provided by managers and employees are discussed in a variety of contexts, for instance, as training and development strategies and as interventions to be considered in organizational development, this theme

attempted to capture support offered by employees and other professionals that specifically improve career growth. A weak pattern (21 of 45, or 44.67% of the articles addressing career development) emerged in the sample. The study identified multiple career development strategies, including some referring to specific people or professions who can help neurodivergent individuals with their career growth. To better characterize these strategies, the theme was divided into four subthemes.

The first subtheme, empty recommendations, accounted for 10 articles (10 of 21, or 47.62% of the articles in the Career Coaching Support theme), revealing a weak pattern. As a reminder, empty recommendations refer to the lack of specificity when the articles refer to coaching and similar strategies.

The second subtheme, peer-to-peer support, was mentioned eight times (8 of 21, or 38.09% of the articles in the Career Coaching Support theme), emerging as a weak pattern. Peer-to-peer support refers to neurodivergent employees providing career coaching or advice to another neurodivergent employee. This form of support is available in a one-on-one format or in a group setting, such as employee resource groups (ERG), which are volunteer-led groups comprised of employees working in the same organization who frequently meet to discuss and act on issues that matter to them (Cenkci et al., 2019, p. 2). Regardless of the type of support, the strategies typically involve obtaining career-related insights from other neurodivergent peers (Pazdel, 2023, p. 3) and networking opportunities with potential career role models (Khanna, 2023).

The third subtheme, professional, expert-led support, was mentioned twice (2 of 21, 9.52% of the articles in the Career Coaching and Support theme) emerging as a noteworthy pattern. The articles highlighted the importance of expert-driven interventions to help

neurodivergent individuals. For instance, an occupational therapist can provide a wide variety of career-related assistance, which can range from helping them practice interviews to working on specific skills, such as executive functioning or finding ways to lessen the impact of sensory challenges related to neurodivergence that can impact their career progression (Picciuto, 2015).

The fourth subtheme, specific type of mentoring, appeared once (1 of 21, 4.67% of the articles in the Career Coaching and Support theme), emerging as a limited pattern. Rather than a unilateral mentoring approach where the mentor teaches the learner, reciprocal mentoring fosters bidirectional and mutual learning (Haack et al., 2019). Thus, mentoring a neurodivergent employee is a mutually beneficial experience offering personal and professional development to both parties (Haack et al., 2019).

Overall, the sample provided limited recommendations that can be used to guide working HRD professionals. Nonetheless, it underscores the career development benefits of building support systems between employees where neurodivergent individuals can network, support each other, and learn from one another.

Managerial Support. The Managerial Support theme was identified in 7 strategies (7 of 45, or 15.56% of the total articles addressing career development), emerging as an interesting pattern. For the purpose of this study, managerial support refers to interventions and actions from managers aimed at providing career guidance or assistance. Strategies pertaining to team leads and supervisors were also grouped under this theme due to their comparable roles in supervision and providing guidance or support to employees. To better capture the nature of the support offered by managers or people with comparable roles, further categorization was necessary and yielded three subthemes.

The first subtheme, empty recommendations, tracked articles mentioning managerial support as a strategy where the article did not include additional information. One article was found to fit this subtheme (1 of 7, or 14.28% of the articles in the Managerial Support theme), revealing a noteworthy pattern.

The second subtheme, mentoring, was mentioned twice (2 of 7, or 28.57% of the articles in the Managerial Support theme), indicating an interesting pattern. The Association for Talent Development (Association for Talent Development, n.d.) defines mentoring as follows:

Mentoring is a reciprocal and collaborative at-will relationship that most often occurs between a senior and junior employee for the purpose of the mentee's growth, learning, and career development. Often the mentor and mentee are internal to an organization, and there is an emphasis on organizational goals, culture, career goals, advice on professional development, and work-life balance. Effective mentors often act as role models and sounding boards for their mentees and provide guidance to help them reach their goals (para. 1).

Limited information was obtained, as mentoring was named but no further explanations were provided (Haywood Queen, 2023; Pacilio, 2024).

The third subtheme, promotion equity, was noted in four articles (4 of 7, or 57, 15% of the articles in the Managerial Support theme), representing a strong pattern. Promotion equity relates to the notions presented in the meritocracy subtheme in the Organizational Development Strategies section, as it specifically relates to the manager's role in ensuring that all employees have access to fair and equal opportunities by ensuring that performance and opportunities are determined using a merit-based system (Farmiloe, 2022; D. Smith, 2022). Quarterly discussions

with the manager improve the employee experience, facilitate learning, ensure performance alignment, and overall translate to a higher retention rate (Mandapati, 2021).

Although adopting a merit-based approach and offering regular feedback are equally valuable for neurotypical employees, a plausible explanation for the presentation of such content to foster neuroinclusion is the existence of negative bias regarding neurodivergent individuals' work performance (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Krzeminska et al., 2019) and personal bias in performance evaluations (Javidmehr & Ebrahimpour, 2015, p. 295), which can potentially impact the career advancement opportunities of neurodivergent individuals.

To summarize, managers and professionals occupying similar roles appear to be playing a vital role in fostering career advancement among neurodivergent employees by providing guidance, ensuring promotion equity, and helping neurodivergent individuals develop a career plan. From a neuroinclusion perspective, fairness in performance evaluation and promotion equity appears to be consistent with suggestions from peer-reviewed literature highlighting potential bias in performance assessment towards neurodivergent individuals (Javidmehr & Ebrahimpour, 2015).

Internship. The Internship theme was identified six times (6 of 45, or 13.33% of the total articles addressing career development), emerging as a noteworthy pattern. As a reminder, internships refer to short-term work experience within an organization and are a type of work integrated learning (WIL). Peer reviewed literature presented limited availability of work integrated learning opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Gatto et al., 2021).

Concerning the role of internships in career development, the sample stressed the following: the need for remuneration (paid internship) (Deffenbaugh, 2023; D. Moore, 2023), access to permanent positions at the end of the work placement (Bahl, 2023; L. Moore, 2021).

Additionally, an article commemorating the “specially-abled” reported that Accenture India developed an inclusive internship program (the details of the program were not revealed) providing on-the-job opportunities to increase their work experience and develop their career goals, but did not offer additional insight or recommendations (Bahl, 2020).

Overall, the sample provided limited insight on how internship opportunities help neurodivergent people. Nonetheless, paid internships and access to permanent positions were reported as helpful strategies in supporting career growth. Despite the limited empirical research on how internships help neurodivergent individuals, as previously mentioned in Chapter 2, such findings in the trade and professional publication appear to corroborate the limited information that exists regarding work integrated learning’s role in supporting career growth for all individuals, including neurodivergent individuals.

Access to Career Enhancers. The theme, Access to Career Enhancers, was identified five times (5 of 45, or 11.11% of the total articles addressing career development), emerging as a noteworthy pattern. For the purpose of this study, the term career enhancers refer to activities or processes that improve employability and career advancement prospects. The study found two types of career enhancers and they are presented in the subthemes below.

The first subtheme, access to sponsors, was mentioned three times (3 of 5, or 60% of the total articles addressing career development) and emerged as a weak pattern. Specifically, the articles describe sponsors as individuals who can advocate for neurodivergent individuals’ career growth and promotion opportunities, such as a supervisor or a manager (Colvin, 2022a; McKinsey Insights, 2022; Nason, 2021). Although there was no explicit guidance for HRD professionals on sponsorship, participants reported that colleagues who helped them achieve career progression felt deeply valued and included (McKinsey Insights, 2022).

The second subtheme, skill or project-based career enhancers, was mentioned twice (2 of 5, or 40% of the total articles addressing career development) also emerged as a weak pattern. Unlike the previous subtheme, which highlighted the importance of human relationships in shaping career development opportunities through advocacy or offering advancement opportunities, this one underscores the importance of providing neurodivergent employees with the opportunity to take on challenging projects, also referred to as stretch assignments (A. Brown, 2019b), to develop specific skills that can be beneficial for career advancement (A. Brown, 2019b; “Neuro Force,” 2019). Mentorship, specifically, proper guidance and feedback, was also brought up as a strategy to support the neurodivergent individuals navigate the challenges of a stretch assignment (A. Brown, 2019b). Finally, stretch assignments were discussed in the context of neurodivergent individuals “having the same aspirations as all of us” (A. Brown, 2019b, paras. 16–17), potentially suggesting their career aspirations are overlooked.

To summarize, the findings in this study identified the importance of career advocates, otherwise referred to as sponsors, individuals who are committed to seeing neurodivergent individuals succeed, in offering support to these individuals by providing them with career advancement opportunities and stretch assignments aimed at developing the skills required to take on future challenges. Mentorship is used alongside these assignments to help neurodivergent individuals build the competencies they need to succeed.

Strategies for Neurodivergent Individuals. The Strategies for Neurodivergent Individuals theme was identified three times (3 of 45 strategies, or 6.88% of the total articles that addressed career development), emerging as a limited pattern. This theme consolidated strategies or recommendations that neurodivergent individuals can use to improve their career prospects.

Suggestions include taking charge of their professional development, either alone or with the help of others, or having an accountability partner to stay focused on their career goals (Moss, 2024). One article mentioned the importance of career satisfaction as an important element for neurodivergent individuals to consider but did not provide further details (Clegg, 2017). Another article mentioned entrepreneurship as a potential career path but did not provide further explanations (Azrieli, 2022).

Other. Three strategies (3 of 47, or 6.38% of the total articles addressing career development) did not fit within the other themes in career development, forming a limited pattern. In effect, availability and access to mental health support services were a factor that contributed to the career success of neurodivergent individuals in military service (“Neuro Force,” 2019). Career advancement opportunities extending beyond STEM and technology are also an element to consider, as most career opportunities for neurodivergent individuals are narrowed to those industries (Ovaska-Few, 2018). Finally, tracking the career advancement of all, especially neurodivergent individuals, can help organizations such as who get promoted and who are being left out to ensure that career development opportunities and promotions are equitable (Colvin, 2024).

Overall, findings revealed that although career development strategies aimed at supporting neurodivergent individuals are discussed in trade and professional publications, they lack depth and practical specificity. Strategies supporting career growth are often from external sources, either from other neurodivergent employees, managers or professionals, and although some recommendations for the neurodivergent individuals themselves were explored, they were often vague and lacked concrete guidance. Despite the limited information available, these strategies align with discussions within peer-reviewed literature, such as the need for more

equitable and unbiased performance reviews (Javidmehr & Ebrahimpour, 2015, p. 295) and work integrated learning (Coplan et al., 2021).

The Most Prominently Discussed Strategies in HRD

As a reminder, the study revealed a total of 439 strategies discussed across the three dimensions of HRD in 176 articles. In the order of prominence, organizational development strategies emerged as the strongest pattern, accounting for 205 instances (weak pattern, 46.69%), followed by training and development strategies with 189 instances (weak pattern, 43.05%), and career development strategies with 45 instances (noteworthy pattern, 10.25%).

However, among the strongest themes across the three dimensions of HRD, Diversity Training emerges as a strong pattern (115 of 189 training and development strategies, 60.85%), Culture Change emerges as a weak pattern (76 of 205 organizational development strategies, 37.07%) and Career Coaching and Support as a weak pattern (21 of 45 career development strategies, 46.67%). Table 6 describes the strongest themes across the dimensions of HRD, the number of instances of each theme and their relative percentage.

Table 6

The Strongest Themes Across the Three Dimensions of HRD, the Number of Instances and their Relative Percentages

Name of the Strongest Themes Across the Three Dimensions of HRD	Number of Instances	Relative Percentage
Diversity training	115	60.85
Culture change	76	37.07
Career coaching and support	21	46.67
Total	148	100%

Based on the aforementioned findings, although organizational development was the most prominently discussed HRD dimension; however, when comparing themes across the three dimensions, diversity training strategies stood out to be the most widely discussed

(approximately 60%), with 115 instances reported, highlighting its relative significance in fostering neurodiversity in the workplace, as opposed to strategies related to culture change (37.07%) or career coaching and support (46.67%).

Overlaps Across All Three Dimensions of HRD

To begin, findings revealed that a total of 59 of the 439 strategies (13.44%) were empty recommendations, indicating a noteworthy pattern. More precisely, empty recommendations were present in 11 strategies in organizational development strategies (11 of 205 strategies, 5.36%, limited pattern), in 31 strategies in training and development strategies (31 of 189 strategies, or 16.40%, interesting pattern), and in 17 strategies in career development (17 of 45 strategies, or 37.78%, weak pattern). Table 7 and Figure 6 compare the number of empty recommendations across the HRD dimensions. Therefore, empty recommendations appeared more frequently in training and development strategies than other strategies. This raises the question as to why articles suggest training as a solution or part of the solution when it is not supported by an explanation.

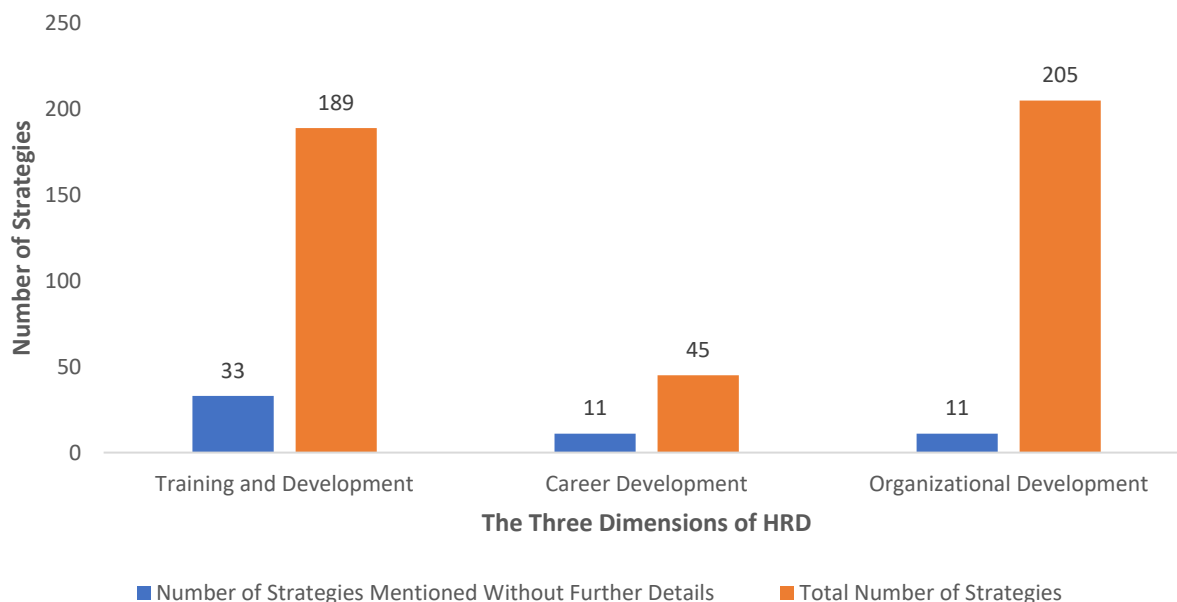
Table 7

Number of empty recommendations across the three dimensions of HRD relative to the total number of strategies

HRD Dimensions	Empty Recommendations	Total Number of Strategies
Organizational Development	11	205
Training and Development	31	189
Career Development	17	45
Total	59	439

Figure 6

Comparison of the Total Numbers of Strategies Without Further Details relative to the total number of strategies in each HRD dimension



Furthermore, after analyzing the data, six overarching themes emerged across the three dimensions of Human Resource Development (HRD). These themes represent commonalities in how neurodivergent individuals are supported through training and development, career development and organizational development.

Awareness as a Foundation. The literature reveals the importance of awareness building for organizational change to occur. According to the sample, diversity training helps build the necessary knowledge and skills to nurture neurodiversity across the organization. This includes communication skills and the use of inclusive language to foster a neurodiversity inclusive workplace, the importance of neutrality and the danger of personal bias in performance assessment and career progression, the knowledge concerning workplace accommodation and what constitutes reasonable accommodation in contrast to what constitutes undue hardship, and more. Additionally, individuals in supportive roles—whether coaches, buddies, managers or ‘neurodiversity champions’—require training to effectively assist neurodivergent employees in their professional development.

Psychological Safety and Inclusive Culture. The theme of psychological safety and an inclusive work environment is emphasized across all three dimensions of HRD. Fostering a neuroinclusive culture involves skilled communication, heightened awareness of neurodivergent strengths and challenges, and active engagement in creating safe spaces. This is supported by training related to emotional intelligence and microaggression, antidiscrimination and workplace inclusion policies, as well as equitable career progression opportunities.

Managers and Organizational Leaders as Supporters of Neurodiversity. Managers require training and support from HRD professionals to better supervise, manage, and assist neurodivergent employees. Additionally, policies and procedures must be in place for managers to enforce them.

Coaching, Mentoring, and Peer Support. Coaching, mentoring and peer support programs can be developed by organizations to help improve learning and can serve as networking opportunities for neurodivergent individuals seeking guidance on career development.

Data-Driven Decision-Making. The literature underscored the need to collect and use data to design training interventions, to ensure equitable promotion and career progression, and to continuously improve organizational development initiatives.

External and Internal Partnerships. Organizations can foster relationships with both internal employees and external partners to increase neurodivergent hires, train neurodivergent and neurotypical employees, form stakeholder and expert HRD process audit groups, and drive inclusive changes across the organization.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This chapter brings the study to a close by summarizing key conclusions, including their implications for practice, research, and theory. It then addresses the study's limitations before closing with recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

This section will begin by summarizing the key findings of the study, presenting how the results can complement the existing body of peer-reviewed literature and reveal new areas for scientific exploration.

Given the gap in peer-reviewed literature, namely the lack of applied empirical studies in nurturing neurodiversity in the workplace, this study set out to explore this topic through a systematic literature review of trade and professional publications within the past 10 years, a source of information and knowledge that is widely available for working Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals, to bring to light the most prominent HRD strategies used to support neurodivergent workers.

The findings of this study indicate that trade and professional literature on workplace neurodiversity primarily emphasizes organizational development strategies, closely followed by training and development strategies. Career development strategies receive the least attention. When examining the strengths of patterns emerging from the themes within each HRD dimension, diversity training occupies an important place within the articles discussing training and development strategies. Such finding also highlights the importance of training and development as a complementary strategy within the three dimensions of HRD.

In fact, the three HRD dimensions intersect in their approaches to supporting neurodivergent employees. Although each area focuses on different strategies, the findings reveal

overlapping themes that emphasize the need for a multifaceted, systemic, and iterative approach that includes training, leadership commitment, psychological safety and overall inclusivity, data-driven decision-making, networking and partnerships. Specifically, HRD strategies do not exist in silos but are interwoven to create a neurodiverse workplace environment, and thus, the findings suggest that neurodiversity inclusion in the workplace is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing process requiring alignment across all HRD dimensions.

Through a systematic review of workplace neurodiversity discussion from the past 10 years, which includes perspectives from researchers, neurodiversity advocates, practitioners and HR columnists, the study confirms the relevance of pursuing interventions using an ecosystemic approach, as suggested by Doyle and McDowall (2022). The study found that most of the interventions discussed in the trade and professional publications are primarily implemented at the meso (organizational) level than at the micro (individual) level. In other words, these strategies are geared towards shaping the work environment via policy changes, cultural shifts, and organizational practices, rather than providing personalized, direct support to neurodivergent individuals.

Moreover, the study confirms the lack of discussion regarding the long-term integration and success of neurodivergent individuals, such as the success stories of neurodivergent leaders who climbed the corporate ladder or case studies of neurodivergent individuals have reached important employment milestones (5, 10, or 20 years of employment), as most strategies focus primarily on fostering inclusive cultures and raising awareness, rather than on sustained career development. Notably, although the topic of recruitment falls outside the scope of HRD and was excluded from the study, a substantial portion of the literature emphasizes recruitment strategies,

further illustrating the imbalance in focus between initial hiring efforts and long-term workplace support.

The study also raises important questions about neurodiversity awareness. Notably, as the years progress, fewer authors appear to be defining neurodiversity, suggesting that the term is already becoming widely recognized and integrated into common discourse. As previously demonstrated in Chapter 4, the gap between articles that provided a definition and those that did not widened over the years, and reached its largest in 2023, with a total of 59 articles that did not provide a definition compared to the 11 that did. Additionally, although diversity training emerged as the most prominent pattern within training and development, it falls under the umbrella of diversity training. Ample empirical research indicates that its effectiveness often varies, therefore contradictory to what the present research suggests. However, the contradictions do not take away from the findings of this study. The results suggest that neurodiversity awareness remains a concern despite indications to the contrary.

Finally, although the literature provides an array of information on various approaches that can potentially enhance neurodiversity in the workplace, the findings suggest that the literature can do more to help its reader gain a deeper understanding of effective strategies and reasons as to why. For instance, the sample shared some instructional design strategies that can improve the quality of the training for neurodivergent individuals, such as chunking, providing content in multiple formats, allowing learners to navigate the learning units at their own pace, and providing different means to demonstrate competence. However, these appear to be effective instructional design strategies that are applicable to everyone, not just neurodivergent individuals. Do such findings suggest that good instructional design strategies support all types of learners, including neurodivergent individuals? Although this study did not set out examine

the relationship between the application of instructional design approaches and the learning outcomes of neurodivergent individuals, the findings point towards the value of instructional design, and thus, instructional designers as critical partners in supporting training and development initiatives.

Implications

This section explores the practical and research implications of the study's findings. It first addresses the implications for HRD professionals, policymakers, and organizational leaders, followed by a discussion concerning research.

Implications for HRD Professionals, Policymakers, and Organizational Leaders

The world is currently witnessing a historic backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts. HRD professionals and policymakers of today face a dilemma: as social perception of DEI shifts, should they continue implementing strategies that support workplace diversity, or scale them back?

Following his inauguration in January 2025, the president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, issued a series of executive orders aimed at dismantling DEI initiatives across both federal agencies and the private sector. In response, many organizations either scaled back or eliminated their DEI policies. However, recent publications are reporting that many of these same organizations are experiencing financial loss as a result of their actions (Melville, 2025). This underscores the importance of maintaining inclusive strategies not only on moral ground but also because inclusive practices are perceived as good for business (Braun, 2025).

This study serves as a comprehensive synthesis of HRD strategies discussed in trade and professional publications over the past decade. It identified key patterns that offer actionable insights for HRD practitioners seeking to foster a more inclusive and neurodiverse workplace. It

is important to note that although these insights fill the current gap in the literature, they are not empirically validated. Nonetheless, these findings highlight opportunities for organizations to refine training programs, career development pathways, and policies to better support neurodivergent employees.

The first implication concerns diversity training. Based on the study, diversity training as a genre does not appear to be waning in popularity, as it emerged as the theme that is most widely discussed. This can be attributed to the growing popularity of neurodiversity but remains poorly understood. Given that neurodiversity is a concept, movement, and framework that recognizes brain-based differences as natural variations within human abilities and experiences, diversity training should aim to develop a clear understanding of neurodiversity. This includes presenting neurodivergent types, the challenges neurodivergent employees face, and, importantly, their inherent strengths. Diversity training should also aim to equip the workforce with diversity-ready skills and knowledge. Although no universal agreement on which skills should be prioritized exists at the present time, the findings of the study suggest the following key topics:

- Communication skills: inclusive language and effective communication with neurodivergent colleagues
- Accommodation: understanding what it is, why it is important not just for neurodivergent individuals but for all employees, what are the legal obligations of employers
- Psychological safety in the workplace: psychological safety, microaggressions, and civility
- Knowledge and skills to support neurodivergent co-workers: coaching and mentoring skills, allyship

- Team building: valuing difference, adopting a strength-based approach or mindset

Diversity training should also be tailored to a profession. For instance, hiring managers or recruitment agents should be trained to assess a candidate's suitability for a position using objective measures. Similarly, managers should be trained in how to conduct unbiased performance assessments. Finally, although few instances of discussions specifically on Universal Design for Learning arose in the sample studied, the literature broadly mentions the importance of accessibility, reasonable accommodation and equitable access to training opportunities. This means that training designers need to consider how their designs impact individuals with neurodivergent types, such as autism, ADHD, developmental coordination disorder, learning disorders, and more.

The second implication relates to the employability of neurodivergent employees. Much of the trade and professional literature presents neurodivergent individuals as employable, highlighting their skills and talents as valuable assets to organizations, an observation that is consistent with findings in peer-reviewed research. One of the strategies discussed in both types of literature concerns work integrated learning. Although peer-reviewed literature primarily focuses on neurotypical individuals and, to a lesser extent, those with disabilities, this study identified discussions on neurodiversity programs, hiring initiatives, and certification programs. These programs not only provide job-specific training to prepare neurodivergent individuals for workplace challenges but also serve as a credentialing mechanism to demonstrate workplace readiness. This suggests that skill-based training plays a critical role in improving employment outcomes for neurodivergent individuals and enhances their credibility in the eyes of employers. However, organizations without specialized programs can still assess employability through

unbiased recruitment practices by prioritizing skills-based evaluations over traditional interviews and matching candidates to roles that align with their strengths.

The third implication for practice concerns authors and publishers of trade and professional articles about neurodiversity in the workplace. The results of this study highlight the need to continue promoting the understanding of neurodiversity and related concepts. However, it was observed that more recent articles on the topic do not include definitions or explanations of the terms. It is important for authors and readers alike to recognize that the conceptualization of neurodiversity is constantly evolving with advances in medicine and science. Emerging studies on the experience of menopausal women and neurodivergence, and specifically how hormonal fluctuations can alter brain function (Gottardello & Steffan, 2024) contribute to how neurodivergence and neurodiversity is understood using an intersectional approach. It is therefore recommended that authors of trade and professional publications systematically define key terms. This will ensure that readers not only understand the terms but be able to identify shifts in its conceptualization over time.

Furthermore, this research identified cases where the mention or suggestions of strategies lacked sufficient clarification to guide or inform the readers. To assist HRD professionals seeking to replicate the results of notable or award-winning programs or strategies, it is recommended that authors explicitly state the distinctive features or approaches and explain their significance.

Implications for Research

This study provides six implications for research.

First, this study is unique, as it expands existing research on neurodiversity by synthesizing HRD strategies discussed specifically in trade and professional publications. As such, the strategies identified represent the views of authors from a variety of professional

backgrounds and represent what HRD professionals are most likely to encounter and implement in the workplace. Future research should examine how these strategies align with or diverge from evidence-based practices in peer-reviewed literature to better understand the implications of their effectiveness and credibility.

Second, this study found that the interest on the topic of neurodiversity is present in the field, as demonstrated by the exponential growth of the literature trade and professional publications. Although this study did not include a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature, the findings within peer-reviewed literature that were surveyed and discussed in Chapter 2 indicate that the topics discussed in trade and professional publications align with themes explored in scientific research on neurodiversity. This reinforces the relevance of these industry-focused discussions and their connection to broader scholarly conversations. These results suggest that authors writing for trade and professional publications are attempting to bridge the gap between science and practice. It is therefore crucial for scholars to continue sharing their research findings in trade and professional publications to ensure that evidence-based insights reach practitioners.

Third, the study also brings to light the importance of organizational development, awareness building, and systemic interventions, which are areas that can benefit from further research. The varied themes found in this literature review confirms that the strategies used to foster inclusion are broad. Existing research shows that initiatives such as diversity training are more optimal when combined with other strategies but the optimal configuration of these strategies is still unknown (Bezrukova et al., 2016) and an opportunity to explore in future research.

Fourth, the results of the study highlight a diverse range of topics spanning multiple disciplines, including education, occupational health, communication, psychology and law. Given the complexity of neurodiversity, it is essential for HRD and neurodiversity researchers to deepen their knowledge in fields outside of HRD to further neurodiversity research and practice.

Fifth, this study demonstrates the inherent value of conducting an integrative literature review on trade and professional publications, a source of literature that is often criticized by the scientific and academic community for its quality. This study found patterns highlighting important industry trends and incidental discoveries that could have been easily overlooked. These limited occurrences in the body of literature should not be underestimated, as trade and professional publications can present emergent practices, trends or tools that have yet to appear in academic literature. Additionally, the results can be used to compare and contrast findings with existing peer-reviewed sources, if they exist, to further guide practice and research. Moreover, it can highlight underexplored areas that are not yet addressed by peer-reviewed sources.

Sixth, and perhaps most fundamentally, is the noticeable absence of empirical research specifically addressing training of neurodivergent individuals. This gap was particularly evident in the peer-reviewed literature examined during the initial phase of the research. Despite setting modest goals of finding a minimum of 15 to 20 empirical research on applied strategies to support neurodivergent individuals in the workplace during the initial phase of this present study, the available peer-reviewed research fell short of this threshold. This is why the angle of the study shifted towards trade and professional publications. In contrast to the peer-reviewed body of literature, the studied corpus extensively covered the topic, yielding 176 relevant articles published, averaging nearly 18 articles per year. These numbers only reflect the articles retained

for this study with approximately 300 total articles found using the ABI/Inform (ProQuest) database.

Limitations

This section discusses the limitations of this study.

To ensure research feasibility, the study was limited to articles from the past decade available in the ABI/Inform (ProQuest) database up until March 1, 2024. Also, the body of literature pertaining to neurodiversity in the workplace is constantly expanding. As a result, the strategies that will be discussed in new publications and articles from additional databases or sources can cause new patterns to emerge or shift the results presented in this study.

The research focused on trade and professional literature to examine proposed HRD strategies without validating the concepts discussed. Additionally, some articles presented ideas that fall outside the scope of HRD, such as recruitment strategies.

This study did not include peer-reviewed or empirical research.

Finally, it is important to note that the authors of articles reviewed in the sample come from a variety of backgrounds and have varying interests on the topic of neurodiversity. Some are neurodivergent self-employers, trainers, and business consultants; some are business consultants, reporters, and others possess an academic background. The genre also greatly varied, ranging from blogs and podcasts to industry reports. Therefore, the quality of available data may have constrained the precision of this analysis. In several instances, the literature cited strategies such as training, mentorship, coaching, and employee resource groups as either recommended practices or those already implemented. However, detailed descriptions were often lacking, necessitating the researcher's own interpretation of the broader message to classify each strategy within a specific HRD dimension.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study concludes with three suggestions for future research, one for each dimension of HRD. These suggestions stem from areas in the literature that would benefit from further scientific inquiries to bridge existing knowledge gaps.

First, with regards to training and development, given the inconsistent results concerning diversity training, the present research suggests exploring the effectiveness of awareness-generating activities through non-training interventions given that corporate training tends to be focused and limited in duration, which typically has limited effects on people's values and attitudes. For instance, the literature discusses, to a limited extent, the benefits of coaching and mentoring towards neurodivergent individuals, but its effect on neurotypical employees remains elusive. Drawing upon findings supporting continuous improvement and sustained action, a case study or longitudinal study examining how mentorship or coaching influences neurotypical employees' attitudes towards neurodiversity, especially when paired with a neurodivergent colleague, could provide valuable insights into factors that drive acceptance or resistance. In addition, recent studies suggest using bypassing strategies rather than corrective ones to address misinformation (Granados Samayoa & Albarracín, 2025). If misinformation is a factor leading to bias, empirical research on training or information using such strategies can help instructional designers create more optimal instructions and interventions.

Second, concerning career development, an underdeveloped area concerns the use of technology to reduce bias in hiring, performance assessment and promotion. Currently, research is emerging on how artificial intelligence (AI) can be a source of bias; however, most is focused on typical diversity issues (age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion, national origin) and on hiring practices (Albaroudi et al., 2024), but omits neurodiversity and

career progression as factors to consider. Experimental research on the use of AI as a tool can help practitioners better understand and such technology to support neurodivergent individuals.

Third, regarding organizational development, the literature primarily discusses strategies at the micro-systemic (such as personal and interpersonal strategies) and meso-systemic (such as organizational policies and internal culture), as well as the intersection between the two. To address the gap in macro-systemic strategies (such as broader societal policies and inter-organizational partnerships), a qualitative or mixed-method study could be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives, such as fostering mutually beneficial business partnerships with nonprofit organizations and educational institutions that provide support or work placement opportunities for neurodivergent individuals.

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