

COACHING DYSLLEXIC PEOPLE IN THE MODERN WORKFORCE

If up to a fifth of people are neurodiverse, how much talent potential is going to waste when they are overlooked at work, asks [Thomas Imfeld](#) – and what can coaches do to help drive forward change?

The modern workplace thrives through innovative people designing complex, cutting-edge output. The business world seeks adaptable people who think and act in ways that are customer-centric, value-driven and iterative. Employers want strong team players who challenge the status quo, see the big picture, simplify messages and craft innovations. Where to find them? How to develop them? If you are willing to develop and evolve the strengths of individuals while overcoming gaps through technology and personal development, continue reading.

Neurodiverse people often bear the crucial strengths described above. Too often, these people are overlooked due to alternative life paths, academic grades or behaviours. Creating instead of reproducing is what many neurodiverse dyslexic people strive for. When employers build a work environment consisting of empowered, diverse and inclusive mindsets, positive team dynamics and applied technologies, all employees thrive in the process.

According to a report by Ernst & Young LLP (EY), employers should implement a neurodiverse talent strategy, and adopt a strengths-based approach to hiring talent and day-to-day work, focusing on four levels:

1. **Building capability:** determine how dyslexic strengths can be deployed in the organisation to help meet business objectives.
2. **Targeting performance:** use assistive technologies, tailored processes and specific strengths-based performance criteria to enable dyslexic individuals to perform exceptionally in role.

3. **Driving motivation:** adjust workplace design and provide support, coaching and mentoring schemes to build dyslexic confidence.
4. **Enhancing efficiency:** train managers to recognise, facilitate and accompany dyslexic strengths to achieve greater organisational and individual productivity.^{1,2}

In the context of talent, Kelly Cooper, global head of people and culture at ManpowerGroup Talent Solutions, says: 'We're in a war for talent right now globally. But there's a large group out there who could help fill those needs. Dyslexic talent can genuinely make a huge dent in the skills shortage, especially post-Covid, and we need to zero in on it.'³

An estimated 15-20% of the global population is neurodiverse – over a billion people. Neurodiversity recognises that everyone's brain is wired differently, and that everyone has their own unique ways of thinking, interacting and experiencing the world. Examples of neurological differences include ADHD, autism, Tourette's syndrome, dyspraxia, dyslexia and dyscalculia. Neurodiversity is based on the concept that neurological variances should be recognised and respected just like other human variations, such as gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Bear in mind that it is possible to have several neurological differences concurrently. In addition, there are varying manifestations of the differences in each person, making each unique.

Dyslexia is a neurological condition that typically affects reading, writing and/or spelling. It has no bearing on intelligence or creativity.

About 10% of the global population is dyslexic. At its core it's about processing information: this means people with dyslexia can find it difficult to process information they see or hear, and it may affect organisational skills. The degrees vary in every individual. Dyslexics can also have strengths in areas like design, problem solving, creative skills, people skills and oral skills. The founder of Made By Dyslexia, a global charity led by successful dyslexics, talks about dyslexic thinking skills that include visualising, imagining, communicating, reasoning, connecting and exploring.⁴ Forward-thinking employers and coaches focus on the potentials to be developed. It's a choice to focus on strengths, adaptation, change, resiliency and performance. Leaders understand the value to be found in people who successfully face adversity and find strength from struggle. Numerous studies suggest that a strong work ethic – embracing tenacity, endurance and resilience – outperforms academic predictive metrics.

Many dyslexics learn to deal with setbacks and many find positive ways forward. In work settings, dyslexia-aware coaches recognise the challenges that may come up in areas like organising time, communication patterns and modes of thinking. Learning preferences are also considered. Dyslexics typically learn less from reading and more from other sources, such as video and audio material. Awareness of different learning styles is useful in the coaching process.⁵

From a coaching perspective, the coaching process supports individuals with dyslexia to develop a balanced understanding of their differences, build up confidence, take actions and contribute effectively within teams. The coaching process can include:

1. Shifting mindsets for positively navigating some of the challenges that dyslexia can bring.
2. Changing perspectives to focus on what is possible and how it gets done.
3. Helping to solve specific, important problems in the workplace and in team settings.

Coaching can help dyslexic people to recognise when and how to advocate for themselves constructively and effectively in various settings. This can contribute to positive team performance. In team coaching, the collective intelligence of the individuals who are part of a team can be enhanced.

For coaching in individual and team settings, cross-cultural and global coaching are useful. The Cultural Orientations Framework⁶ brings together coaching and culture and integrates group, or collective, considerations. Neurodiverse clients frequently encounter environments, systems, structures, mindsets and attitudes that ignore or do not support their needs. To find productive solutions, the ability to explore confidently and experiment with paradoxes and contradictions is useful.

Individually and in teams, working with time can be a challenge. When does working at 80% to 150% of capacity matter? What are the trade-offs, benefits and consequences (short-, medium- and long-term) of practices in place? Dyslexics are often embedded into teams with their own dynamics and needs. Since allowing for evolution in thinking and actions is complementary to arriving at specific goals, global coaching supports clients by considering five additional perspectives including spiritual, political, psychological, managerial and physical.⁷ For example, whether at school or in a

career (or indeed beyond), being able to access mindfulness and apply ethics is useful for making decisions and for sustainable performance. Endurance and longer-term wellness are important to individual and team performance, so these should be considered as well. Political perspectives elucidate how to build positive influence for individuals and teams within an organisation to create desired results.

From an employer's perspective, empowering dyslexic employees often includes technology. Optical character recognition (OCR), voice-to-text technologies and numerous computing solutions exist to enable these employees to focus on what they do best. Artificial intelligence further diverts focus from flawless spelling, penmanship or grammar to teamwork, team dynamics, motivation, performance and results. In some countries, legal frameworks support neurodiverse rights and responsibilities. Some jurisdictions support employers and/or dyslexics directly with grants to pay for productive accommodations and modifications in the workplace. External and internal coaches assist employers to achieve specific goals for effectively incorporating dyslexic employees in their teams and organisations. Working together, employers, dyslexic employees, and internal and external coaches can shape the workforce for the better.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Thomas Imfeld (he/him) – MA, MCOF, AC member and dyslexic thinker – is founder and director of bullseye international GmbH in Germany and Luxembourg. His focus is on unleashing potential in individuals and small teams by applying global and cross-cultural coaching. Drawing upon diverse transnational industry and public sector experience, and as a member of the dyslexic tribe himself, Thomas supports organisations with diversity and inclusion mindsets in order to reach meaningful, important objectives. Thomas, a US/Swiss national, speaks English, German, French and Spanish.

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