

TALEGENT.

Neurodiversity and Talent Assessments

How organisations can use psychometric assessment to support fair, effective hiring for neurodivergent candidates

Executive Summary

15–20%

of the population is estimated to be neurodivergent

Doyle, 2020

Neurodiversity, which encompasses profiles such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia, is estimated to represent approximately 15–20% of the population (Doyle, 2020). Despite this, neurodivergent individuals continue to experience significantly higher rates of unemployment than the broader workforce (LeFevre-Levy et al., 2023). As organisations compete for scarce technical and analytical talent, addressing this employment gap is not only a matter of equity but also an opportunity to access an underutilised source of skills and capability.

Psychometric talent assessments play a central role in this discussion. When designed and implemented effectively, they can reduce reliance on interview formats that may favour neurotypical communication styles and provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate strengths that might otherwise be overlooked. However, when applied without consideration of neurodivergent experiences, these assessments may inadvertently disadvantage capable candidates through criteria that are not directly relevant to job performance (Wegmeyer & Speer, 2023). This paper examines the evidence surrounding both perspectives and identifies practices including inclusive assessment design, flexible timing, transparent feedback and multi-method evaluation that research and industry guidance support as effective approaches to neuroinclusive assessment.

Talegent's position is that talent assessments, when used appropriately, are part of the solution.

Accessible by Design

Assessments should be designed to be accessible, with reasonable adjustments, such as extended time, available upon request.

An Input, not a Hurdle

Assessment should be one input within a multi-method process rather than a single pass/fail gate.

Read in Context

Results should be interpreted in the context of the individual candidate.

Used this way, assessment helps employers meet their obligations to make reasonable adjustments while seeing past communication style to the capability that matters for the role.

Why Neurodiversity Matters in Hiring

Increasing rates of workplace disclosure indicate that neurodivergence represents a significant proportion of the workforce, including individuals who may not have a formal diagnosis. Despite this, a substantial employment gap remains. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2022 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers reported an unemployment rate of 18.2% among working-age autistic people, more than twice the rate for people with disability overall (7.5%) and almost six times the rate for people without disability (3.1%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

18.2%
Unemployment rate, working-age autistic people

7.5%
Unemployment rate, people with disability

3.1%
Unemployment rate, people without disability

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), from the 2022 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

This disparity exists despite many neurodivergent individuals holding comparable qualifications to other jobseekers. Many are screened out during the recruitment process, particularly at the interview stage, before they have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and capabilities (Maras et al., 2021).



Organisational psychology research increasingly frames neurodivergent employees as bringing distinct cognitive strengths and perspectives, rather than viewing neurodivergence solely through a deficit-based lens. It also highlights neurodiversity as an important dimension of workforce diversity alongside other recognised forms of diversity (LeFevre-Levy et al., 2023). This perspective has important implications for assessment design. The focus should not only be on reducing discrimination, but also on developing selection processes that can effectively identify and recognise strengths that may not be captured through traditional, unstructured interviews.

Opportunities: What Assessments Can Contribute

Structured, objective assessment offers several advantages over unstructured interviews and group exercises when evaluating neurodivergent candidates.

01 **Reducing Reliance on Neurotypical Presentation**

Interviews and group-based exercises often value fluent small talk, sustained eye contact, and other neurotypical communication norms that have limited relevance to the requirements of many roles. Personality and cognitive assessments evaluate underlying traits rather than surface presentation, which can reduce the extent to which interview performance substitutes for job-relevant capability.

02 **Surfacing Traits That Interviews Miss**

Candidates who do not engage in typical rapport-building may still demonstrate strong conscientiousness, precision or analytical focus, qualities that are highly relevant to technical and detail-oriented roles but may be overlooked in brief interviews (LeFevre-Levy et al., 2023). Academic research comparing personality profiles between autistic and neurotypical adults has found patterns that diverge from neurotypical norms in specific trait domains; whether these differences are viewed as deficits or differences can influence whether assessment processes support or disadvantage candidates (Wegmeyer & Speer, 2023).

03 **A More Holistic Picture**

Personality assessment is most effective when combined with cognitive and knowledge-based measures, not as a replacement. Because neurodivergent strengths are often domain- or context-specific, using multiple assessment types is more likely to produce a fair and complete picture of a candidate's fit for a specific role than any single measure used alone.

Risks and Limitations

The evidence is not one-directional, highlighting two key risks that both assessment providers and buyers need to consider.

01 **Risk of Unfair Exclusion**

Neurodivergent candidates can score differently from neurotypical norms on standard personality inventories (Lodi-Smith et al., 2019), potentially leading to disproportionate screening-out at the pass/fail stage, even when these differences have little relevance to job performance (Wegmeyer & Speer, 2023). This is less a flaw in personality assessment itself than a caution against applying a single, rigid threshold uniformly across all candidates. Flexible thresholds and a dedicated feedback stage help mitigate this risk (see Best Practice 04 and 05, page 8).

02 **Test Anxiety and Prior Experience**

Some neurodivergent candidates report reduced confidence shaped by difficult experiences in previous interviews (Austin & Pisano, 2017). Anxiety of this kind can depress performance independently of underlying ability, and is compounded where instructions are unclear, time pressure is high, or no practice opportunity is offered (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). Plain-language design with practice items, flexible timing and a voluntary disclosure channel help mitigate this risk (see Best Practice 01–03, page 7).



Together, these risks highlight that an assessment's value depends not only on the quality of the measure itself, but also on how it is administered, communicated and interpreted.

Legal Obligations in Australia and New Zealand

Because some neurodivergent conditions can fall within the broad definitions of disability in both Acts, adjustments to the assessment process can form part of an organisation's legal obligations. This summary is general information only and is not legal advice.

Jurisdiction	Legislation	What It Requires
Australia	*Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*	Prohibits employers, and those acting on their behalf, from discriminating against candidates based on disability during recruitment, including in the arrangements made to decide who is offered employment. Recognises a failure to provide reasonable adjustments as a form of discrimination, unless doing so would impose unjustifiable hardship.
New Zealand	*Human Rights Act 1993*	Prohibits disability discrimination against job applicants as well as employees. Its relevant disability exception applies only where a person would need special services or facilities that it is not reasonable to expect the employer to provide, so in practice employers are expected to make reasonable adjustments.



Best Practice: Designing Inclusive Assessment Processes

Across academic and industry guidance, several practices consistently emerge to reduce bias and support neurodivergent candidates through assessment-based hiring.



01 **Plain-Language Design and Practice Items**

Instructions written in clear, literal language, alongside sample or practice questions before the scored assessment begins, reduce the risk that a candidate is penalised for misunderstanding the format rather than lacking the underlying ability (Elliott et al., 2001).

02 **Flexible Timing and Breaks**

Processing-speed differences are well documented for conditions such as dyslexia and ADHD and may not reflect the underlying ability being assessed (Cook et al., 2018). Extended time and scheduled breaks between assessment stages can help reduce the impact of these differences on assessment performance (Elliott & Marquart, 2004).

03 **Voluntary Disclosure**

A clear, low-pressure channel for candidates to disclose a neurodivergent condition separately from the assessment itself allows for an individual conversation about which accommodations would help, without making disclosure a precondition for reasonable adjustment (Kalmanovich-Cohen & Stanton, 2025).

04 **Flexibility Over Rigid Pass/Fail Thresholds**

Where a standard personality threshold may disadvantage neurodivergent candidates, case-by-case review rather than automatic exclusion reduces the risk of screening out otherwise qualified candidates (Wegmeyer & Speer, 2023).

05 **A Dedicated Feedback Stage**

Following personality or cognitive assessment with a structured feedback conversation allows the candidate to contextualise their results. It also gives the recruiter the chance to interpret scores in light of individual circumstances rather than in isolation (Tippins et al., 2018).

06 **Triangulation Through Reference Checks**

Using the reference-check stage to confirm or expand on assessment results provides an additional, real-world data point, particularly valuable where a candidate's strengths are context-dependent and may not be fully captured in a single assessment session.

Talegent's Approach

Talegent's assessment platform supports several of the practices above directly. Plain-language instructions and practice items are built into candidate-facing assessments, and extended time can be applied to all timed cognitive assessments, consistent with accommodation norms used in educational and workplace testing more broadly (Elliott et al., 2001). Scheduled breaks between assessment stages can also be arranged where needed.

Conclusion

Talent assessments offer organisations a genuine opportunity to remove barriers that neurodivergent candidates have long faced in recruitment, provided they are designed and administered with inclusion in mind.

The evidence suggests that assessments used thoughtfully alongside interviews, structured feedback and reference checks can help organisations see past communication style to underlying capability.

Organisations that do this well are likely to benefit from a segment of the talent market that remains significantly under-employed relative to its qualifications. As awareness of neurodiversity continues to grow, the organisations that treat inclusive assessment design as standard practice will be best placed to access this talent.



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