

# Supporting Neurodivergent Students in Management Education: A Framework for Inclusive Pedagogy

**Jessica L. Doll**

*Department of Management, Appalachian State University, USA*

**April J. Spivack**

*Management & Organisation, Hanken School of Economics, Finland*

**H. Kristl Davison**

*Department of Management, Appalachian State University, USA*

**Gordon B. Schmidt**

*School of Management, University of Louisiana - Monroe, USA*

**Allie Turner**

*Presbyterian College, Clinton, USA*

**Abstract.** Although roughly 15-20% of the U.S. population is considered neurodivergent (Doyle, 2020), scant attention has been paid to neurodiversity within post-secondary management programs and classrooms. As these programs facilitate the professional development of future managers, educators should prepare future employees and managers to work with, and support, neurodiverse people. This begins with understanding how to support neurodivergent students within undergraduate management classrooms and promoting awareness among neurotypical students to support collaboration. Moreover, developing skills in supporting neurodiverse peers, classmates, and future workforce members is critical. This article aims to increase educator awareness of neurodivergence in higher-education management classrooms, presents suggestions for incorporating neurodiversity understanding into classrooms via creating a class diversity climate built around compassionate pedagogy and universal design for learning, presents suggestions for implementation unique to management education, and shares implications for educators.

**Keywords:** neurodiversity, neurodivergent, student support, future workforce, higher education, compassionate pedagogy, universal design for learning.

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*Any enquiries, please contact the Publishing Editor, Peter Neilson [pneilson@neilsonjournals.com](mailto:pneilson@neilsonjournals.com)*

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## 1. Introduction

Andy is excited about her first organizational behavior class. After locating a seat in the crowded room, she looks over the syllabus—20% of the grade is based on class participation, 30% is timed quizzes, and the other 50% is a team project. She is anxious about speaking in class and working on team projects, and starts to fidget, disrupting her classmates and earning a glare from the professor. Andy is neurodivergent. Her accommodation letter from the disability resources office indicates that she can get extended time on the quizzes, but nothing else. Her enthusiasm for the class fades.

While this is likely a fairly common scenario in classrooms, we believe that faculty new to supporting neurodivergent undergraduate and graduate organizational behavioral (OB) and management students will benefit from the discussion presented in this article. Specifically, we suggest that instructors could better support neurodivergent students in management classrooms by (a) increasing awareness of neurodivergence, (b) extending support past basic accommodations by creating a supportive classroom climate, c) adopting a compassionate pedagogical approach using universal design for learning (UDL) practices which align with the core OB learning idea of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), and (d) offering suggestions for incorporating these practices specific to the management classroom.

## 2. Literature Review

### *Neurodivergence*

Neurodivergence describes individuals with variations in thinking patterns, whose brains develop or function differently from neurotypical societal standards (Cleveland Clinic, n.d.; Rosqvist et al., 2022; Walker, 2014). And while neurodivergence is not always indicative of a disability, medical diagnoses reflecting neurodivergence include autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a disorder that affects social interactions, communication, learning, and behavior; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which is characterized by a persistent pattern of inattentive, hyperactive, and/or impulsive behaviors; and other disorders including dyslexia, dysgraphia, and sensory processing disorders (see Appendix A for specific examples). Estimates suggest that 15-20% of the U.S. population are neurodivergent (Doyle, 2020), and diagnoses are increasing as awareness, access to testing, and measurement of the disorders improve (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; Hughes, 2016; Hess, 2021; Kapp, 2020).

Consequently, the proportion of neurodivergent students in higher education is increasing—10-30% of post-secondary students are considered neurodivergent (Dwyer et al., 2023). As such, there is a need to both comply with regulations and