IDENTIFYING LINE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT AND NEURODIVERSITY TRAINING NEEDS FOR NETWORK RAIL

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May 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

This report has been commissioned by the TSSA in collaboration with Network Rail. The purpose of this report is to gather, analyse and conclude on key information on the line management of neurodiverse employees (i.e. employees diagnosed with dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADD/ADHD or Asperger syndrome), so that the TSSA can develop a bespoke training/toolkit for line managers at Network Rail who are responsible for managing neurodiverse employees.

METHODS

Information was gathered on the line management of neurodiverse employees from three sources: extant literature; secondary analysis of primary data from interviews (n=18) with transport industry line managers; and, primary data gathered from interviews (n=10) with Network Rail line managers. Findings were analysed based on identifying facilitators required to effectively line manager neurodiverse employees and the challenges line managers face when managing neurodiverse employees. The findings were analysed by applying the social model of disability.

RESULTS

Support practices for line managers appeared sophisticated, extensive and wide-ranging. However, there appears to be a gap between the rhetoric of organisational support for such activities and the experiences of line managers. There is a need for line managers to be trained on a wide-range of issues related to managing neurodiverse employees. Line managers need to have the authority to make informal/minor reasonable adjustments. Facilitative factors included TSSA partnership, neurodiversity champions and dyslexia training. Challenges included: lack of understanding of neurodiversity, managing changing working arrangements, lack of disclosure by staff, and, increased pressures on managers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Line manager training should include attention to thirteen aspects of line managing a neurodiverse employee (see Table 5.1). However, such training needs to be complemented with modifications to wider organisational facilitation practices.

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1 INTRODUCTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report presents the findings of a research study which aimed to identify a line manager training strategy for the TSSA and Network Rail to facilitate the inclusion of neurodiverse employees. The report begins by describing what is meant by neurodiversity and the needs of Network Rail in relation to its diversity management strategy. The report then describes the data collection methods and presents the key findings emerging from the interviews with line managers. The report concludes by presenting a set of recommendations of training needs for line managers to facilitate the TSSA and Network Rail in its diversity management initiatives.

1.1 NEURODIVERSE CONDITIONS AND NEURODIVERSITY

This research focuses on four neurodiverse conditions: dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADD/ADHD and Asperger syndrome, all of which are covered by the Equality Act 2010 in relation to disability. The focus on four neurodiverse conditions relates to the most cause of concern and priority for advocates and sponsors of this report, Network Rail and the TSSA.

Neurodiversity is partly a political term that has arisen as a response to the stigmatising effect of medical language, which frequently terms such conditions as “weaknesses", "difficulties" and "disorders". While difficulties with such conditions are not denied, the concept of neurodiversity is one of viewing such conditions as normal human variation (Paletta, 2013). In other words, society should put far more effort into accepting neuro-differences than trying to “fix” or “cure” people diagnosed with such conditions.

The occurrence of neurodiverse conditions in society is unclear and made particularly difficult to measure because of overlapping descriptions of such conditions (Portwood, 2000) and how individuals are often co-diagnosed with two or more conditions (Hendrickx, 2010). However, research suggests dyslexia affects 2-15 per cent (POST, 2004), dyscalculia 6 per cent (Barbaresi et al., 2005), ADD/ADHD 1-4 per cent (NCCMH, 2009) and Asperger syndrome 1 per cent (Brugha *et al.*, 2009) of the population.

1.2 THE “ISSUE”

Since its formation in 2002, Network Rail has endeavoured to be a more diverse organisation from top to bottom. Currently, Network Rail is mid-way through a diversity and inclusion strategy (see Network Rail, 2014). The aim of the strategy is to become a more open, diverse and inclusive organisation with safety at its core. Network Rail aims are based on three themes: access and inclusion, benchmarks and behaviours, and, collaboration.

By undertaking this strategy Network Rail is acknowledging diversity and inclusion needs to be improved in a wide-range of areas. One area Network Rail is seeking to improve upon is acceptance of disability as a form of difference, with conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADD/ADHD and Asperger syndrome prevalent among its workforce. Indeed, anecdotal evidence gathered by Network and the TSSA trade union confirm more could be done to make Network Rail a more inclusive employer when it comes to employing people with such conditions.

Network Rail is aiming to improve diversity and inclusion in a range of ways, but particularly in terms of improving skills of line managers with people management responsibilities for neurodiverse employees. This strategy makes perfect sense, as a wide-range of research indicates a pivotal role of line managers in creating positive employment experiences for disabled employees. For example, line managers have been shown to have a positive impact on employees recovering from chronic ill health (Munir *et al.*, 2009), a stroke (Coole *et al.*, 2012), cancer treatment (Amir *et al.*, 2010), a mental health condition (Sainsbury *et al.*, 2008), and serious illness and injury (Cunningham *et al.*, 2004).

That said, a further and more hidden dimension to the "issue" needs to be acknowledged before proceeding any further, namely the changing nature of organisations, such as Network Rail. Network Rail remains in public hands, but it is subject to the commercial imperatives faced by its many partnered rail franchises. Similar to Network Rail's private sector counterparts, research suggests managers employed by the publicly owned transport industry face and continue to face high levels of restructuring, work intensification, longer hours, operating in complex working environments, declining job security and radical changes in functional lines of authority (Morris and Farrell, 2007). As such, attempts to improve diversity and inclusion needs to acknowledge the business environment that Network Rail operates in, as well as how the business environment puts significant pressure on how people are managed at this organisation.

1.3 AIMS OF THE REPORT

The aims of this report are to:

- identify the experiences of line managers and perceived facilitators and challenges to managing neurodiverse employees; and,
- based on identifying perceived facilitators and challenges, provide a range of recommendations to assist the TSSA trade union in designing a training programme for line managers at Network Rail who manage neurodiverse employees.

2 METHODS

To gather a range of information on what would help develop a bespoke training/toolkit for line managers at Network Rail responsible for managing neurodiverse employees included the following.

2.1 LITERATURE SEARCH

A literature search was conducted with the aim of identifying a range of extant materials that considered the line management of neurodiverse employees. Key terms used when searching for such literature included combinations of: "line manager", "manager", "neurodiverse", "dyslexia", "dyscalculia", "ADD", "ADHD" and "Asperger syndrome". The literature search was conducted via a range of academic search engines, e.g. Web of Science, Ingenta, EBSCOhost, followed up by more generic searches aimed at locating books or open access on-line resources on such matters. The search led to the identification of a limited, yet useful range of literature on these topics. The literature found

was limited in the sense that it was typically advisory and rarely of a theoretical nature or based on empirical findings. Further, in the clear majority of cases, resources focused on individual conditions, were rarely industry specific, thus indicating a clear need to supplement existing literature with primary information.

2.2 SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY DATA BASED ON TRANSPORT INDUSTRY LINE MANAGERS

A second step involved the re-analysis of a wider dataset on neurodiversity in the transport industry (see Richards et al., 2012; Richards and Sang, 2016; Sang et al., 2016). This dataset captured line manager experiences of managing neurodiverse employees in the transport industry. Interviewees were recruited through emails sent out via the TSSA membership database. Participants self-selected themselves for the study, suggesting participants were likely to have a good range of experience of the key issues under investigation. Further, out of the 18 who responded to the call, 17 worked for a publicly owned part of the transport network. The interviews were conducted between October 2012 and March 2013. The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 60 minutes and averaged 40 minutes each. Interviews were conducted by telephone. Anonymised details of the interviewees can be found in Table 2.1. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription company.

Line manager	**Occupation of line manager**	**Neurodiverse condition(s) of employee**
1	Facilities Help Desk Manager	ADHD, Asperger syndrome, dyslexia
2	Station Manager	Asperger syndrome
3	Project Manager	Dyslexia, ADHD
4	Programme Manager	Asperger syndrome
5	Project Manager	Asperger syndrome
6	Project Manager	Dyslexia
7	Transport Support Manager	Dyslexia
8	Buildings Manager	Dyslexia
9	Signalling Manager	Dyslexia
10	Train Controller	Asperger syndrome, dyslexia
11	Senior Project Manager	Asperger syndrome, dyslexia, ADHD
12	Planning Engineer	Dyslexia, Asperger syndrome
13	Senior Engineering Manager	Asperger syndrome
14	Health and Safety Specialist Manager	Asperger syndrome
15	Operations Manager	Dyslexia
16	Licensing Team Leader	Dyslexia
17	Examination Manager	Dyslexia
18	Surveyor Manager	Dyslexia

Table 2.1: Details of interviewed transport industry line managers and managed neurodiverse conditions

2.3 PRIMARY DATA BASED ON NETWORK RAIL LINE MANAGERS

Interviews were commissioned specifically with the current report in mind. Key themes identified in the extant literature and analysis of the previous interviews were used to form the basis of such interviews. Interviews were also based on discussions with the TSSA's Organising Director Equalities

(Education) and the Equalities, Education and Projects Organiser, and Network Rail's Diversity and Inclusion Programme Manager. Details of interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. In total ten interviews were conducted with Network Rail line managers with current or recent experience of managing neurodiverse employees. Interviewees were recruited via emails sent out via Network Rail. Participants self-selected themselves for the study, suggesting participants were likely to have a good range of experience of the key issues under investigation. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the interviewees' place of work. The interviewees were located at five major Network Rail hubs. The interviews ranged in length from 45 to 60 minutes and averaged 50 minutes each. Interviews were conducted between December 2015 and December 2016. Anonymised details of the interviewees can be found in Table 2.2. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription company.

Line manager	Occupation of line manager	Neurodiverse condition(s) of employee
A	Workplace Development Manager	Asperger syndrome
B	Commercial Manager	Dyslexia
C	Business Development Manager	ADD, dyslexia
D	Risk and Value Manager	ADHD
E	IT Services Manager	Dyslexia, Asperger syndrome
F	Help Desk Team Leader	Dyslexia, Asperger syndrome
G	Service Delivery Manager	Dyslexia
H	Route Control Manager	Dyslexia
I	Project Manager	Asperger syndrome
J	Station Manager	Asperger syndrome, ADD

Table 2.2: Details of interviewed Network Rail line managers and managed neurodiverse conditions

All the findings were analysed in terms of identifying the many needs and challenges faced by line managers when managing neurodiverse employees. All the findings were also analysed in the context of the social model of disability. The social model of disability recognises disability does not reside within the individual; rather it is the consequence of the broader environment, including organisational practices. The social model of disability is compatible with changing nature of work in the transport industry, the Equality Act 2010, the concept of neurodiversity, as well as the ethos of Network Rail's diversity and inclusion strategy and the TSSA's general stance on disability in the workplace.

3 FINDINGS: FACILITATION AND CHALLENGES IN THE LINE MANAGEMENT OF NEURODIVERSE EMPLOYEES

In this section, the three sets of findings are presented in turn. Each sub-section highlights the support line managers need when managing neurodiverse employees. Each sub-section also highlights challenges line managers face when managing neurodiverse employees.

3.1 LINE MANAGING NEURODIVERSE EMPLOYEES

The extant literature reveals a range of ways by which line managers can be supported when given the task of line managing a neurodiverse employee. The findings from the literature suggest line managers given such a task need to be supported in a range of ways to effectively and appropriately manage the performance of neurodiverse employees. Details of recommended support is summarised in Table 3.1.

Organisational support practices for line managers	**Details and reference**
Training	• Avoiding discrimination at the selection and promotion stages/awareness of atypical education and employment experiences/fragile ego of employee due to poor experiences (Hendrickx, 2010) • Awareness of learning styles of neurodiverse employees (Reid and Kirk, 2001) • Publicising and implementing disclosure procedures (Sumner, 2009) • Recognising and acting upon non-disclosed neurodiverse employees (Fitzgibbon and O'Connor, 2002)
Leadership style	• Adopt consistent style (National Autistic Society, 2005; Kindersley, 2009) • Avoid random allocation of work (Hendrickx, 2010)
Assistive technologies	• Standard or bespoke IT for dyslexia and dyscalculia (Sanderson, 2001) • Inexpensive alarms, beepers and voice recorders for ADD/ADHD and Asperger syndrome (Painter el al., 2009)
Minor/informal reasonable adjustments	• Work structure, flexible working practices, avoidance of hectic parts of the working day, wearing of headphones (Adamou et al., 20103) • Regular breaks to avoid over-sensitisation and breaching limited attention skills (Carnes and Holloway, 2009)
Major changes in work routine	• New performance appraisal system or change of line manager (Kindersley, 2009)
Managing performance	• Follow up oral conversations with clarifying emails/asking for progress reports (Carnes and Holloway, 2009) • Close supervision of easily distracted employees (Johnson, 2005) • Liaising with external sources of specialised support (Hurlbutt and Chalmers, 2004) • "Buddying system" (Adamou et al., 2013)

Table 3.1: General ways of supporting line managers manage neurodiverse employees

The literature also reveals a range of challenges that are likely to mitigate against line managers seeking to better manage a neurodiverse employee. Such challenges are summarised in Table 3.2.

Challenge	Details of challenge and reference
Partial or limited disclosure	Team conflict, e.g. sense of favouritism (Babineau, 2010)
Lack of wider support	Does not receive support to carry out people management role effectively (Gibb, 2003)
Confidence to act	Experience may be limited or previous poor experience of providing support (Beattie, 2006)
Time consuming	Supporting an employee may detract from wider/primary commitments of line manager (Roulstone et al., 2003)
Complexity	Supporting employee may call on complex skills and wider support for such skills is lacking or absent (Coole et al., 2012)

Table 3.2: General challenges to supporting line managers manage neurodiverse employees

3.2 LINE MANAGING NEURODIVERSE EMPLOYEES IN THE TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

The interviews with transport industry line managers with experience of managing a neurodiverse employee revealed a great deal about such practices in a particular industrial context. The interviews, as such, revealed a great deal of good practice. The good practice to emerge from the interviewing process highlighted a range of support for transport line managers. This good practice is summarised in Table 3.3.

Organisational support practices for line managers
• Expertise from human resource and occupational health practitioners
• Senior management allowing line managers to make informal/minor reasonable adjustments, seeking of expert advice form external organisations, authorised purchase of assistive technologies
• Provision of training on neurodiverse conditions, making reasonable adjustments
• Disability support networks
• Provision of classes to improve basic maths and English skills
• Work experience for people with learning difficulties/disabilities

Table 3.3: Support for line managers managing neurodiverse employees in the transport industry

However, the clear majority of the interviewees also reported a wide-range of challenges to better supporting the neurodiverse employees they have responsibility for. These challenges are summarised, with wider details, in Table 3.4.

Challenge	Examples of challenges
Impact of support role on wider role	• Supporting employee was challenging • Lack of support "sucks" line manager into providing more and more support • Toll on health
Impact on team/wider work group	• Allowances made impact on team morale • Line manager constantly explaining performance issues • Team members ridicule neurodiverse employee
Changing nature of work	• Workload increase, multi-tasking and flexibility in role bring out disability
Disclosure	• Failure to pass on details to new line manager • Partial disclosure – some colleagues knew and some did not
Transition process to new line manager	• Lack of or inadequate handover between line managers
Uncooperative employee	• Employee does not listen or respond to support
Office distractions	• Noisy offices • Outside distractions, e.g. low flying planes • Requests to close blinds conflicts with wider office views on such matters
Maintaining professional boundaries with employee	• Not been assertive enough in managing employee • Becoming "friends" with employee
Severe employee problems	• Wider, often more severe mental health problems, conflict with attempts to manage neurodiverse condition
Human resources professionals at cross purposes	• HR primary concern legal compliance; actual support for employee appears a secondary concern
Guidance on personal issues	• Problems with personal hygiene and appearance
Financial authorisation of assistive technologies	• Repeated authorisation required every time employee changes place of work

Table 3.4: Challenges to the line management of neurodiverse employees in the transport industry

3.3 LINE MANAGING NEURODIVERSE EMPLOYEES AT NETWORK RAIL

Network Rail line managers reported a wide-range of ways in which they believed they were supported when managing neurodiverse employees. The support is summarised in Table 3.5.

Organisational support practices for line managers
• Availability of awareness training, particularly in dyslexia
• Diversity and inclusion training
• Reasonable adjustments training
• Organisational information on neurodiverse conditions
• Poster campaign materials
• Drawing of expertise from external specialised organisations, e.g. Dyslexia Action and Prospects
• Human resource specialists – policy and practice advice; HR business partner
• Employee assistance programme
• Occupational health specialists
• Drawing on expertise of external medical practitioners, e.g. psychologists and psychiatrists
• Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network
• Working in partnership with TSSA
• TSSA Neurodiversity Champions
• Policies supporting and informal sanctioning of a range of reasonable adjustments
• Support for assistive technologies as reasonable adjustments
• Supportive senior management
• General line manager training on human resource management issues

Table 3.5: Support for line managers managing neurodiverse employees at Network Rail

The support for managing neurodiverse employees at least broadly compared with the wider literature and findings from the wider transport industry on such matters. Network Rail, moreover, also benefited from the input of TSSA Neurodiversity Champions in certain locations. However, the interviews revealed gaps between what is officially and formally available to help facilitate the better management of neurodiverse employees and what happens in such situations. The many challenges reported in the interviews, with examples, are summarised in Table 3.6.

Challenge	Examples of challenges
Training	• Little or no training on full range of neurodiverse conditions • Emphasis on legalistic side of disability • Limited to awareness training • Training limited in some locations • Difficulties getting time off to train
Changing nature of work	• Relocation of staff • Work intensification • Increased flexibility in role • New shift patterns • New technologies
Line manager well-being	• Increased workload/extra work not recognised in workload arrangements • Sense of isolation • Lack of support from, e.g. HR, OH and line manager • Drains energy
HR support	• Inconsistent and bureaucratic • Non-specialised • At cross-purposes, e.g. legal compliance over support • New HR advice service, e.g. no single and continuous point of contact, policy compliance
Disclosure	• Non-disclosure of employee • Late disclosure of employee • Limits to what disclosure information can be shared
Employee	• Lack of co-operation from employee
Line management of line manager	• Unsupportive senior line manager • Inexperienced senior line manager • Problem employee transferred from line manager to another line manager
Ownership	• Organisational culture of key actors "turning a blind eye" to problem – bureaucratic support practices
Secondary mental health problems	• Self-harming • OCD
Line manager and operational role	• Impact of supporting neurodiverse employee on primary role of line manager
Teamworking	• Increased workload for other team members • Team members not sure how to interact with neurodiverse employee • Sense of favouritism
Medical model of disability	• Emphasis on coaching employee, psychological assessments
Perceptions of trade union	• Role of trade union seen in terms of collective bargaining or representation at disciplinary or grievance hearings, i.e. perceived to be adversarial and not supportive
Occupational health	• Not aware despite ongoing problems • Mixed experience of such services • Focus on response to absences and serious/visible medical problems
Perceptions of disability	• Unclear if neurodiverse conditions covered by Equality Act 2010
Awareness of sources of support	• Inconsistent use of external specialist organisations • Inconsistent awareness, availability and expertise of Diversity and Inclusion Champions • Unaware of TSSA Neurodiversity Champions

Table 3.6: Challenges to the line management of neurodiverse employees at Network Rail

4 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the report was to gather key information, from a range of sources, on the line management of neurodiverse employees, and to use this information to make recommendations for training to increase the effectiveness of line managers who manage neurodiverse employees at Network Rail.

The process led to a range of generic findings and a range of context specific findings. Consistent across all sets of findings was a clear need for line managers to be trained on a range of issues related to managing neurodiverse employees. A further consistent finding is the need of line managers to be aware of effective informal/minor reasonable adjustments and to have the authority to make such reasonable adjustments. Consistent challenges to the effective line management of neurodiverse included problems associated with disclosure processes, problematic wider support and the wide-range of impact managing neurodiverse employees has on line managers.

Context specific findings also revealed on the one hand sophisticated, extensive and wide-ranging support practices for line managers, yet on the other, highlighted a wide-range of gaps that act as challenges to such support practices. Challenges that can be addressed through better line management training relate to the impact of managing neurodiverse employees on the wider/primary role of the line manager, the difficulties of managing a team with a neurodiverse member, under-recognition of how working practices disable neurodiverse employees, problems with micro-level disclosure processes, problems with managing the line management transition process, the many difficulties of working with uncooperative employees, challenging office distractions, problematic boundary issues, the bureaucracy of securing assistive technologies, and the inconsistent use of third party expertise.

However, the findings indicated wider implications for Network Rail, i.e. equally important issues, but beyond the scope of line manager training. Such findings suggest the review and refinement of the support HR and occupational health professionals provide to line managers, including clearer indication of responsibility, macro-level improvements in managing disclosure, working more closely with third parties with specialist knowledge on neurodiversity (including trade unions), a wider and specialised development of diversity and inclusion networks and champions, and, greater use of equality impact assessments when overseeing major organisational change.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on an analysis of the findings, training for line managers who have the task of managing neurodiverse employees should focus on a range of issues and an associated range of skills. The recommended range of issues and associated skills are summarised in Table 5.1.

Training issue	Skills
1. Social model of disability	• Relevance of social model of disability in the work setting
2. Equality Act 2010	• How the Act relates to neurodiverse conditions
3. Nature of work in the transport industry	• How changes to working practices can disable employees
4. Change of line manager	• Managing the transition of neurodiverse employees from line manager to line manager
5. Reasonable adjustments	• Reasonable adjustments that can be initiated by line manager
6. Teamworking	• Managing a team with a neurodiverse member
7. Employee learning style	• Ways to understand the learning style of neurodiverse employees
8. Disclosure	• Managing and advertising disclosure process
9. Neurodiverse conditions	• Awareness of the wide-range of neurodiverse conditions
10. Uncooperative neurodiverse employees	• Having difficult discussions with neurodiverse employees
11. Employee boundaries	• Developing clear and professional boundaries with neurodiverse employees
12. Managing workload	• Negotiating time and resources to effectively manage neurodiverse employees
13. Neurodiverse specialists	• Seeking advice from and working with expert third parties

Table 5.1: Proposed training needs for line managers of neurodiverse employees

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APPENDIX 1: DETAILS OF QUESTIONS/THEMES FOR INTERVIEWS WITH NETWORK RAIL LINE MANAGERS

1) Tell me about your job, particularly in terms of line management responsibilities, e.g. training, education, career path, support, etc.

2) Which conditions are you familiar with? Where do you get information/knowledge about such conditions? Rate each one.

3) What is your understanding of the Equality Act 2010? How do the conditions relate to the Act?

4) Are you aware of the TSSA's Neurodiversity project? Have you had any dealings with Neurodiversity Champions?

5) Have you had dealings with other relevant third parties, e.g. Dyslexia Action, Prospects, etc.?

6) How many neurodiverse employees have you managed? Tell me about your experiences of line managing each one. What reasonable adjustments have been made?

6) What support is available through HR and OH? Rate the support you have received.

7) What's missing (if applicable)? What would make a difference to you in supporting a neurodiverse employee?

8) Any further comments on line managing neurodiverse employees?