



# NEURODIVERSITY AND THE SELECTION PROCESS IN ORGANIZATIONS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE USE OF VIDEO CURRICULUM AS A TOOL FOR INCLUSION

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## Abstract

Traditional and standardised conversational type job interviews represent a barrier for neuroatypical candidates such as autistics, dyslexics and persons with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). These types of job interview hinder opportunities for this vulnerable group to access the labour market because they rely heavily on social and communication skills. This exploratory study advocates for the adoption of video curriculum, inverting the recruiting process perspective from neurotypical to neurodivergent, thus enhancing the inclusivity of organisations. This paper is based on an epistemological statement with a bio-psycho-social approach as the model and the Neurodiversity movement as the inspirational concept.

**Keywords:** neurodiversity, disability, video curriculum, selection process, asynchronous tools, discrimination

## Introduction

This exploratory study advocates for the adoption of video curriculum as a tool to enhance the inclusivity of the



selection process for neuroatypical candidates, such as individuals with autism, dyslexia and persons with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). These vulnerable people, or people with disabilities, experience daily barriers to access the labour market due to the use of traditional job interviews which rely heavily on social and communication skills, which are not usually mastered by neuroatypical people (Farkas et al., 2021).

Although recent trends in organization studies highlight the importance of inclusion in the workplace as a balance between individual uniqueness and belongingness (Shore et al., 2011), there's still very little room for an evaluation of the different characteristics and needs which characterize neurodiversity. On the other hand, scholars are fostering the adoption of new tools both in the workplace and in the recruiting process to overcome these limits (Austin and Pisano, 2017). In line with this tendency, the aim of this study is to show the potential benefits of the video curriculum as a tool to invert the recruiting process prospective from neurotypical to neurodivergent, and thus enhancing the inclusivity of organizations.

Starting from the review of recent pioneer studies on the subject and from preliminary interviews, we intend to explore the use of video curriculum as a meaningful and personalized tool to enhance the relationship with hiring organizations, providing better opportunities for neuroatypical people.

In the next sections we start by framing the issue of inclusive selection processes for neuroatypical people, referring to the Neurodiversity movement who first claimed and developed the inspirational concept. We continue by presenting the video curriculum tool and reviewing the studies conducted so far on its adoption. We then present the findings of our preliminary interviews. We conclude by discussing the potential for further studies on the subject, arguing that in line with the WHO's ICF (International Classification of Functioning and Health) the video curriculum can be considered as a "reasonable accommodation" which works in the *relational* sphere and can promote the job orientation of neuroatypical people by enhancing awareness of personal image, narrative skills and subjective experiences.

## The neurodiversity movement and the barrier of the selection process

### Neurodiversity movement

The Neurodiversity Movement began in the late 20th century as a new kind of civil rights movement, alongside the claims for disabled peoples' rights originating from activists and scholars. The term Neurodiversity was coined in 1998 by autistic sociologist and activist Judy Singer (1998; 2016). Taking as its basis the definition of biodiversity, human neurodiversity is the variability among the nervous systems of each human being, the set of different characteristics that make up the neurology of each person on earth. We are all neurodiverse. However, in the enormous variability that distinguishes our brains, in the neurodiversity that unites everyone,



there are certain characteristics that seem to occur with higher frequency.

The Neurodiversity movement refers to the majority of the population as “neurotypical”, as they have a “typical” neurodevelopment, subject to the inevitable and natural differences between one individual and another. About 20 percent of the population, however, represents so-called “neurodivergences” or “neuroatypicals”, and consists of people who for one reason or another have followed a neurological development different from the average to a greater or lesser degree: their nervous system, in some areas and in ways that differ from individual to individual, has organised itself in atypical ways. Autistic, ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder), dyslexic, dyspraxic, Tourettic, dyscalculic and dysgraphic people (among others) fall into this ideal category.

In the framework of greater social and institutional attention on this topic, studies have highlighted that autistic people have some very valuable skills which can be applied in the workplace (Jacob et al., 2015). They might have very good attention to detail, or be really good at sticking to routines and timetables. Therefore, they are likely to be very punctual and reliable. Several other notable strengths of autistic people have been identified: thoroughness, accuracy, deep focus, concentration, observational skills, excellent long-term memory, visual skills, analytical and spotting approach, creativity, honesty, loyalty and commitment (National Autistic Society, 2023). In this regard, the employability of neuroatypical people in IT jobs has been noted (Pinchevski & Peters, 2017; Silberman, 2016).

Nevertheless, according to International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy 2020-23<sup>[1]</sup>, people with disabilities are still often excluded and marginalized, and progress made in recent decades – including implementation of the ground-breaking UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006 – has been seriously challenged by the COVID-19 crisis. Current intervention policies and inclusion practices have so far been inadequate for a series of reasons: stigma, a lack of appropriate infrastructure (such as office setup or staffing structures), as well as the tendency to refer to generalised and abstract assumptions rather than engaging with the specificities of individuals (which often differ significantly from one another).

## **The barriers of the selection process: ableism, stigma and minority stress**

In this study, we intend to focus on the job interview as a high-stress situation for neuroatypical people, thus representing a barrier to their inclusion in organizations. Stress and anxiety affect many autistic youngsters and adults, causing significant distress that may be expressed in ways that challenge the person and those who have to evaluate them during a job interview. In fact, traditional and standardised conversational type interviews rely heavily on social and communication skills, so autistic candidates may well struggle to “sell themselves” in an interview, even if they have all the right skills. In particular, they may face challenges with:



- understanding body language and maintaining appropriate eye contact
- knowing how to start, maintain and end conversations or answers to questions
- judging how much information to give – especially if questions are open
- thinking in abstract ways, or considering “what if?” scenarios
- varying their tone of voice and finding the appropriate level of formality
- keep focus in a noisy context

In study on a sample of 17 autistic workers (Acanfora, 2020), most of the respondents (64.7 percent) experienced the recruitment stages poorly, and in many cases the candidate or applicant always had to pretend to be neurotypical in order to avoid being discarded immediately. In the same survey, 76.5 percent of respondents believe that the inclusion of neuroatypical people is not sufficiently addressed.

Job descriptions often include skills that are not essential for the job to be carried out effectively. Qualities such as “excellent communication skills” or “good team player” are often included as default skills, even if they are not necessary – and many autistic people will not apply for jobs demanding these attributes.

A survey conducted on a sample of 2,000 recruiters (Fiorentemente, 2014) indicates that a large proportion of recruiters consider “standing”, that is the first impression the candidate gives, as the most important part of the interview. According to Acanfora (2022) this reveals that, despite the myriad of words about the importance of diversity in organizations and the efforts of all the people who work to promote a real culture of diversity inclusion, a large proportion of recruiters consider it quite normal to let biases and prejudice influence hiring decisions. During hiring processes employers tend not to see abilities; employers see autism, dyslexia and ADHD, considering them as an obstacle rather than an opportunity. This can be seen as the reflex of an *ableism* that permeates our societies (Siebers, 2008; Paolini & Paolini, 2022): a form of discrimination that assumes certain abilities as a normal condition, stigmatizing people who don't comply with those standards.

At this regard, it is important to remember that autistic people live constantly immersed in a world that is structured and calibrated on the ideal neurotypical person. They must face and adjust to aspects such as excessive sensory stimulation, sociality, verbal and nonverbal communication (Howlin, 2013) in a constant effort to decode social and linguistic signals and norms that do not belong to them (Lindsmith, K., 2016). This produces severe psychological distress, increased also by “stereotype threat” (Walton et al., 2015) and social stigma (Botha and Frost, 2020), where subjects feel they are being evaluated in light of a negative stereotype about the group to which they belong. Social rejection can also be internalized and self-perpetuating, causing long-term consequences on quality of life (Markowitz, 1998). These conditions may explain why autistic people



are more likely to face workplace discrimination in terms of unfair dismissal, workplace harassment, underemployment, and unemployment (National Autistic Society, 2023).

Organisations can make many minor adjustments that can help autistic candidates to apply for jobs, and enable them to demonstrate their skills as potential employees. Many of these adjustments may also benefit other candidates and enhance overall efficiency in recruitment. The first of these concerns enabling people to feel comfortable expressing themselves and their characteristics, even when they are atypical.

## The video curriculum: An Asynchronous Digital Tool to Improve Performance and Self-recognition

The *video curriculum* is an additional asynchronous tool for traditional methods of recruitment and selection of personnel (Rubinstein, 2020). Good reasons for adopting this tools include its enhancement of self-recognition and self-empowerment, and greater awareness of personal image, narrative skills and subjective experiences which can promote the job orientation of neuroatypical people.

The basis of the video curriculum is a video resume: a short video created by a job applicant to describe skills, qualifications, and past experiences (Doyle, 2020). Video resumes have developed due to advances in technology and the advent of popular video posting sites, and their use is expected to increase, becoming most prevalent among recent college graduates (Bruner, 2007) and Millennials (Lorenzi, 2008).

Two are the main points that make this tool promising: a) it is asynchronous; b) it is narrative.

In reference to point a), this tool does not enable a face-to-face synchronous job interview, but constitutes a monologue set up on pre-selection online platforms. Although still usually conducted in the traditional way, new forms of job interview have emerged, such as the asynchronous video interview (AVI). In this type of interview, candidates connect to a web platform and answer a series of questions by recording a video monologue. Following this, recruiters have the opportunity to view these videos, evaluate candidates, and decide whether or not to invite them for an in-person interview.

In reference to point b), the video curriculum can be considered as a narrative tool of self-recognition, as highlighted by studies in psycho-pedagogy and pedagogy of work (Capo, 2021; Capobianco, 2016), including those focusing on capacitation (Costa, 2013; Margiotta, 2014) and self-management (Savickas et al., 2009). The video curriculum as a self-narrative process can lead to the development of two fundamental dimensions: the enhancement of personal image and the awareness and the enhancement of the subjective experiential figure. Some studies reveal the impact on university students and doctoral students who, thanks to the use of mediated narrative techniques in employability support workshops, have benefited from the creation of a real



digital self-portrait (Capo, 2022). Therefore, this tool shouldn't be conceived as a substitute for the classic paper document, but rather as supplementary, and functional for the asynchronous presentation of one's personal characteristics. We want to stress the concept of a video resume not just as digital content but also a product that is the result of a journey, possibly facilitated by experienced trainers and professionals, through which a structured path can help a person to put themselves "in the spotlight".

## Preliminary interviews

In this explorative study we have conducted five in-depth interviews with the parents of young adults between 18 and 24 years old diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. This sample has been chosen for three reasons: a) parents of neuroatypical people are stakeholders and strongly engaged (both emotionally and practically) with the issue of these subjects entering the labor market; b) whilst interviewing neuroatypical subjects presents ethical and methodological issues (as this very study underlines), parents constitute the most reliable voices advocating for their needs and desires; c) as neurotypical researchers, we risked having ableist bias while conducting research on neuroatypical subjects.

Interviewees were contacted through personal acquaintances of one of the two authors within associations that deal with autism in the Italian regions of Campania and Lazio. Three interviews were conducted via digital platforms and two face to face.

Interviews dealt with the barriers faced by young Asperger adults during selection processes for jobs. During the interviews we explained the idea of video curriculum and collected feedback and suggestions. We found that the interviewees were well prepared on the normative framework about work inclusion in Italy, and shared similar problems in parenting neuroatypical persons.

From the interviews we drew three main findings, which contributed to our proposal of the video curriculum as a tool for inclusion:

- The use of an asynchronous tool for job interviews was considered by all the interviewees as a fruitful exercise to overcome problems related to sensorial overstimulation to which most neuroatypical subjects are exposed, such as loud sounds, odors, strong lights.
- Interviewees found the idea that neuroatypical people could use technology to enhance their self-determination very convincing, presenting themselves in a monologue with a pre-established list of things to say, with foreseen approaches and timings, and knowing in advance the questions they would have to answer.
- All interviewees considered the video curriculum as a fruitful exercise if supported by a wider reconfiguration



of the recruitment process, in which every step is precisely defined in order to give candidates the possibility to identify precise intermediate goals and focus their motivation on them. Specific goals and motivations are, in fact, very important aspects for the psychological and emotional working of neuroatypical people, as highlighted in literature (Acanfora, 2022; Doyle, 2020; Howlin, 2013).

## Concluding discussion

This exploratory study highlights the potential of the video curriculum as a tool to overcome the barriers that neuroatypical people experience in the selection process. In the context of neurodiversity, we strongly believe that asynchronous tools for the selection phase, such as the video curriculum, can play an important role in giving neuroatypical people opportunities to demonstrate their skills as potential employees.

While further studies need to be conducted in this area, within the framework of this exploratory study we want to highlight some aspects worthy of consideration.

In order to better evaluate the possible adjustments to include persons with disabilities in the work environment, it is useful to draw inspiration from the theoretical and methodological reference framework of the International Classification of Functioning and Health (ICF). The ICF is inscribed in the bio-psycho-social paradigm in which the World Health Organization operates, and represents a philosophy of approach to the person that, rather than highlighting personal difficulties, brings out the shortcomings of contexts, to the extent that the latter do not allow a full expression of the capabilities of each and every person (Capo, 2022). Following the ICF and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the video curriculum can be considered as a “reasonable accommodation” – in other words the changes an employer makes to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to someone’s disability.

This is in line with the neurodiversity theory (Singer, 1998; 2016), which states that neuroatypical people do not need to be cured, but need accommodation. This framework thus projects us into a system of designing those “reasonable accommodations” that are no longer merely considered in a structural sense, but which acquire a significance which is decisive in the *relational* sphere. Within the bio-psycho-social model of neurodiversity, understanding work-related intervention and treatment becomes more about adjusting the fit between the person and their environment (Siebers, 2008) than about treating a disorder. This entails analysing work contexts to ensure that facilitators enact the various professional enabling factors and, if necessary, modify, mitigate, or redesign barriers that prevent performance.

It is important for all of us to foster an environment that is conducive to neurodiversity, and to recognize and emphasize each person’s individual strengths and talents while also providing support for their differences and needs. To improve employment outcomes for adults with autism, it is necessary to identify factors associated with successful transition to work from the perspectives of the individual and from those who work with or





support them (Hedley et al., 2018).

## Managerial implications

The managerial implications associated with the use of video curriculum as an inclusive tool in the recruitment process encompass a range of interconnected aspects. A central element is the necessity to allocate additional time during the recruitment phase, enabling candidates to create their video curriculum. This involves the provision of suggested timeframes, predefined formats, and clear illustrative guidelines regarding the role for which the candidate is applying.

Three to four weeks may be needed for the creation of a video curriculum. This timeframe allows candidates to adequately prepare, write their script, record, and edit the video to present the best version of themselves. It also provides candidates with the time needed to seek guidance or support, where required.

The video curriculum would allow employers to anticipate essential actions for accommodating the skills and individual competencies of neurodivergent employees. This involves personalizing role descriptions and responsibilities, which is crucial to ensuring that employees feel comfortable in their roles, thereby maximizing their potential.

The use of video curriculum intersects a wider range of managerial implications related to the inclusion of neurodiversity in organizations. Promoting flexibility and stability is essential, as flexible solutions offer a sense of stability, contributing to a balanced working environment. The establishment of predictable routines, advance communication of changes, and the provision of flexible working hours are all strategies that provide neurodivergent employees with a greater sense of control and security. The adaptation of the work environment is another critical aspect. This may include sensory accommodations such as the use of headphones or earplugs to reduce noise, adjustments to lighting conditions, and the creation of secluded spaces free from distractions. Promoting a work environment characterized by calmness, consistency, inclusiveness, respect, predictability, and reliability is fundamental to fostering inclusion. Communication in the workplace plays a crucial role as well, given the challenges related to communication and social interactions often experienced by neurodivergent individuals. Managers must identify and clearly explain behavioral norms and expected communication practices. Additionally, allowing adequate response time during interactions and providing multiple communication channels, both verbal and written, are key factors in enhancing communication effectiveness. The use of technology provides opportunities to support neurodivergent employees in this sense, as alternative forms of communication, such as instant messaging and speech synthesis technologies, can facilitate effective communication.

The establishment of a support system is equally crucial. Involving colleagues, supervisors, job specialists, family members, or friends in assisting neurodivergent employees in various activities, such as transportation





to the workplace or task explanations, can be an effective strategy. A colleague experienced in interacting with neurodivergent individuals can serve as a mentor, offering support in challenging situations and simplifying communications. Finally, continuous training is of great importance: organizations should invest in ongoing training for managers and colleagues on neurodiversity issues. Awareness and training can contribute to creating a more inclusive work environment.

In conclusion, the inclusion of neurodivergent individuals in the workplace requires active commitment from organizations and managers. These individuals can offer valuable contributions to the organization, provided the appropriate conditions are created for their success. The pandemic emergency has accelerated and cleared the way for the use of technology to replace certain dynamics that, whether out of conviction or simple traditionalism, proved to be ableist. Among these, personnel recruitment processes may take advantage of technological change to rethink classic models in the direction of a greater inclusivity.

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