Managing Neurodivergence in Facilities

Benefits of Understanding the value of Neurodivergent Individuals to facility teams, Identifying accommodations and support for Individuals, Assets and Organizations

Steve Course CPMM



Facilities Manager : Mid Atlantic Retina (PA, NJ, DE)

CPMM, NJ Master HVAC Contractors license

Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge, UK: Communication / Film Combined Ba

Penncotech Blackwood, NJ : HVAC technician (Honors)

Experience:

Commercial/ Residential HVAC (Operations manager, Service manager,Service Tech, Installer)

Events: Stagehand, Photographer,Videographer, Lighting, sound (Conventions, Festivals, Venues, Corporate and Private)

Animal shelter worker, Bartender, Server, Bar back, Retail worker and Barista.

Non work interests include :Community radio DJ (event promotion, Music ,Visual Art , Installations , A/V art and animation.

Accommodations Profile : ADHD, EDS , Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Visual stress, Chronic pain,PTSD, Generalized anxiety and Chronic depression :) (Which can also be used as tools and knowledge to help/advocate/ plan).

Empathy Exercise (Mental Coding)

- Dyslexic coding exercise , Vowel swap dictation

  A= $

  E= @

  I= &

  O= #

  U= %



Empathy Exercise

- Imagine you are a child in a classroom.
- Everyone around you did not struggle with the task at all and your parents and teachers are telling you you didn’t try hard enough.Daily.
- Add to that you are also considered a gifted student, are not diagnosed and most will not believe you are struggling.
- Now imagine this as a lifelong experience.

Studies report around 20K additional disparaging remarks will have been received by just age 12 in people with ADHD.

Mental Health

This is why to manage Neurodivergence, you will usually also have to manage Trauma, PTSD, CPTSD, Anxiety and Depression.

When managed well, these traits also become great tools for a Facility Manager.

LinkedIn now includes several Neurodivergent traits as positive attributes.

Neurodivergence - Traits as Tools

ADHD:

Thrives under pressure or in Chaos.

Brings Resiliency, Creativity, Flexibility, and Agility.



Neurodivergence - Traits as Tools

Dyslexia:

-Visual/ Three dimensional thinking,

- Strategic thinking

- Systems thinking

- Sees the bigger picture



Neurodivergence - Traits as Tools

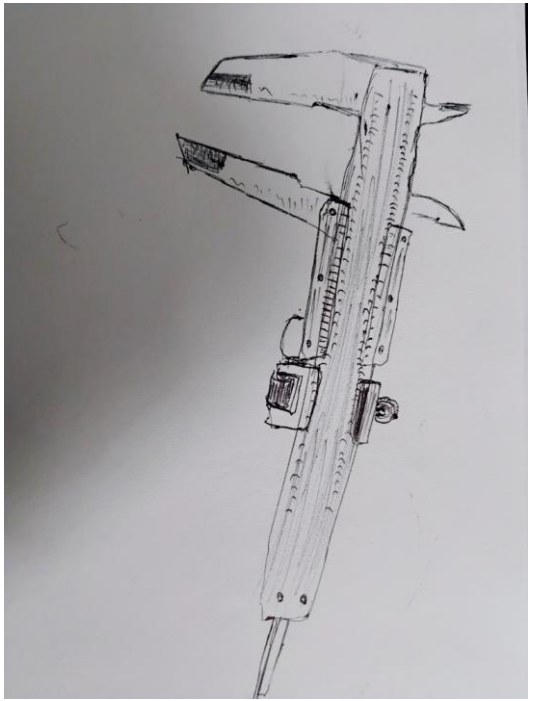
Autism:

- Detail oriented

- Thorough,

- Visual/ Systems thinking

- Thrives with routine and structure.



Neurodivergence - Traits as Tools

Across the board, some common traits:

Empathy

Drive for Justice and Fairness

Hyper Ethical

Honesty, Ability to tell hard truths

Pattern/Trend recognition.

Deep special interests/ Curiosity



All Thrive with external support systems, externalizing executive function. A well set-up CMMS, set up with staff involvement is the perfect tool for this.

What does an Facility Manager do?

Core Skills, standardized, and structured:

- Asset management,
- Technical/Trade Knowledge,
- Space planning,
- Project management,
- Relationship management ,
- Compliance,
- Prioritization,
- Transition to Long term strategy,
- Communication



What does an Facility Manager do?

Core Skills, standardized and structured:

Any finite list we can make is going to miss something, the bottom line is we can identify and meet needs for every thing and person involved with an organization..

In many ways the core of our job is understanding and communicating the value of advocacy for things and people

By advocating for the people and Assets, facility managers find purpose.

Through purpose facility managers find motivation as we see the bigger picture and the bigger impact.

What does a Facility Manager do?

Our role is unique, we speak to everyone in an organisation as a Peer. We are also the main point connection to outside Vendors and building staff and the main point of connection to Building systems and processes. A point of integration.

We have the widest understanding of an organization's needs to inform decisions and assess impacts.

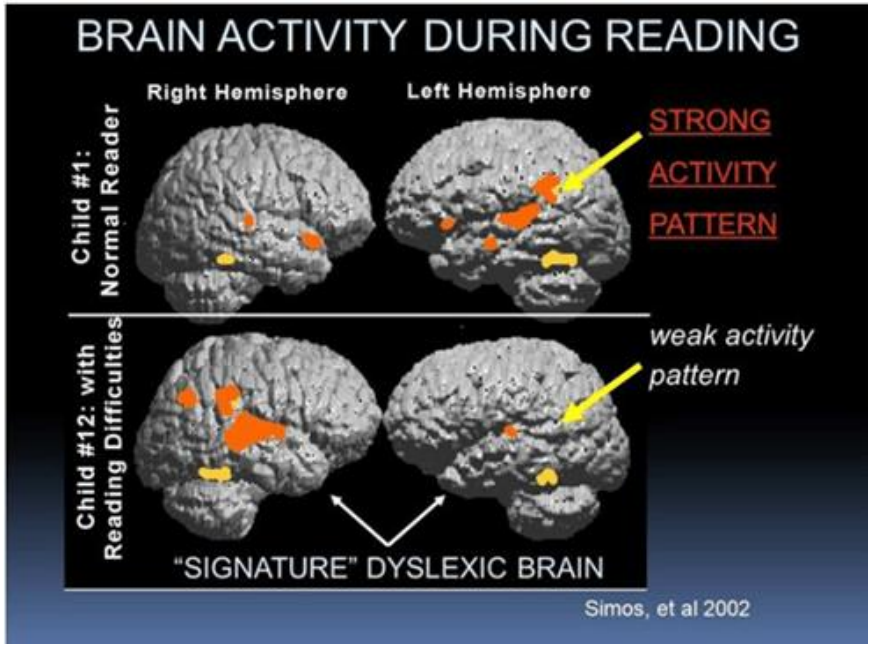
Understanding Dyslexia at a glance

Dyslexia is STRUCTURAL neurological difference - just like Autism and other forms of Neurodivergence

- When the Dyslexic brain is viewed, we see a greater number of small pathways because less of them are “pruned” as the brain develops.

- What is left with can be thought of as a complex collection of “B” roads or country lanes as opposed to highways. As the brain goes to retrieve information instead of a fast track to retrieval, the journey is longer and passes many more and often obscure references and past experiences.

-This can be seen as slower processing, but it can also be seen as deep thinking that considers more abstract variables. What we lose on efficiency and speed, we gain in depth and connectedness



Where do Facility Teams come from?

How do we hire?

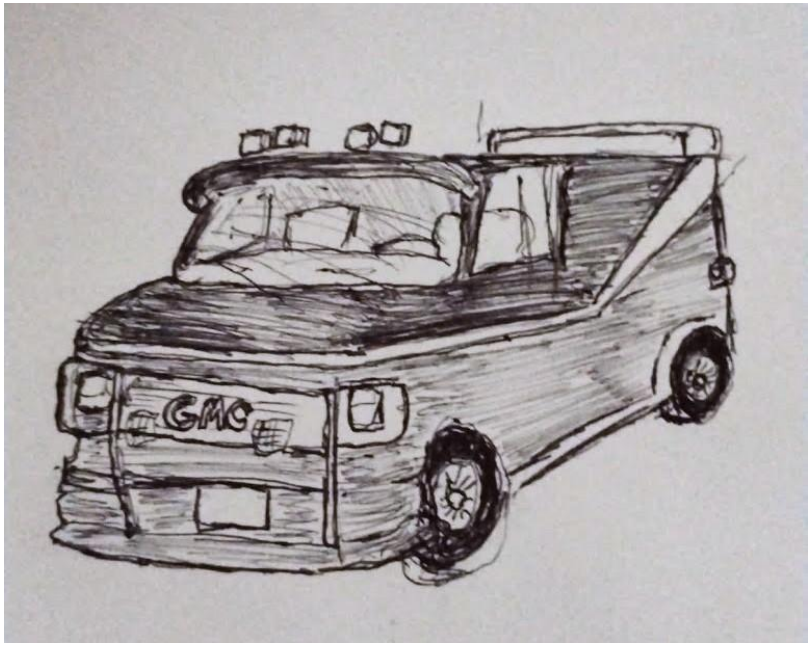
What is the process?

What are the targets?

What is the goal of the hire?

For the organisation and for the team?

Why do I ask so many questions?



Working with Neurodivergent top-down thinkers

With various forms of Neurodivergence we find we are dealing with top down thinkers.

Put context first - work back to the task or project as opposed to teaching step-by-step task instructions.

This approach also encourages overall integration as opposed to isolated tasks.



Working with Neurodivergent top-down thinkers

Step-by-step instructions on a task don’t teach the meaning and the interactions.

Step-by-step instructions also run into Neurodivergent challenges such as non-linear thinking.

Given space and independence, non-linear thinkers can plan and troubleshoot at a higher level of detail than if given repeated steps.

Don’t teach what to think, teach a process for thinking.



Working with Neurodivergent top-down thinkers

The way we go about taking care of our work also needs to be reciprocated.

As we feel the benefits we can give others not only do we understand the value of what we give, we also have more energy to do it and more mental space.

A well set up CMMS is a great tool to support executive function,Organize work, maintain sequence of operation, perform post analysis of work that leads to constant improvement.



Neurodivergent innovators

This is just a few Neurodivergent innovators, Their strengths are rooted in their neurodivergence.

-Einstein : Dyslexic, Visual/ Expansive thinker famous for “Thought Experiements”

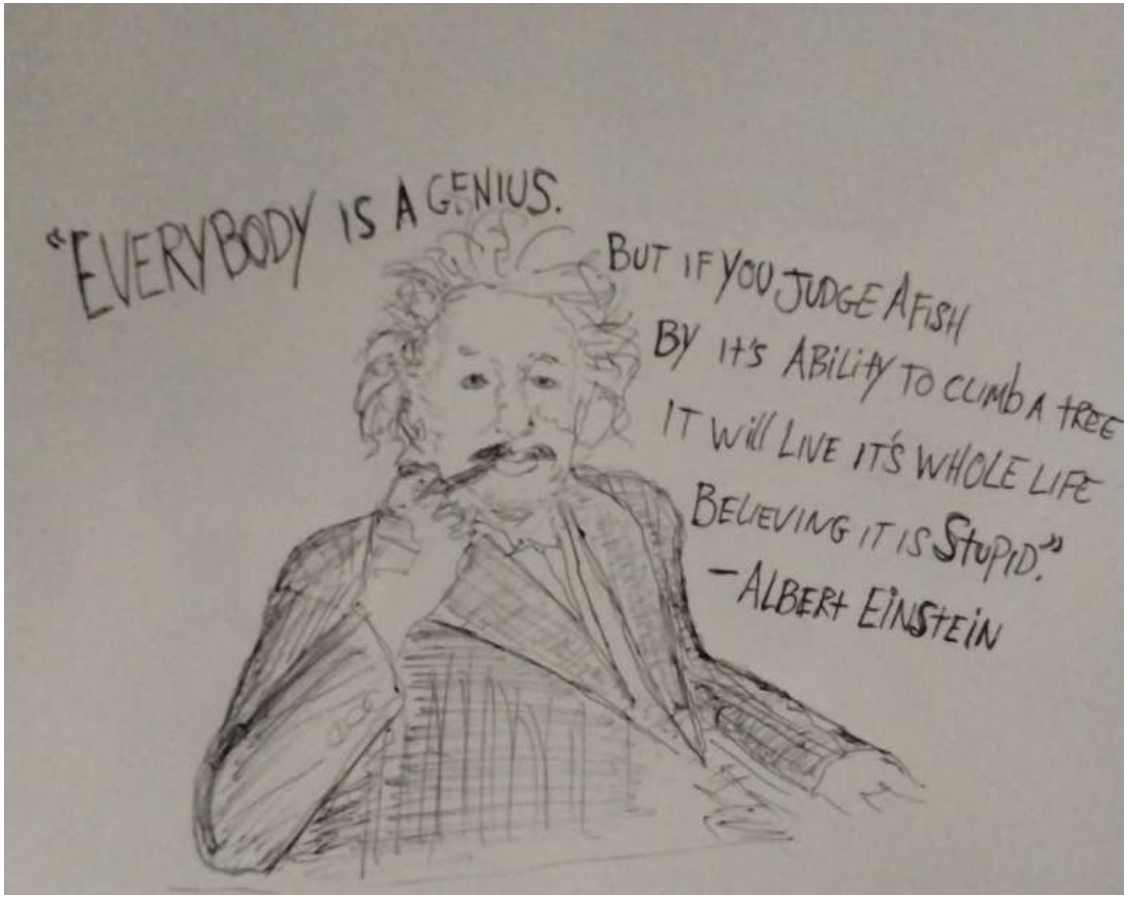
-Temple Grandin- Autistic , Visual/ structural thinker, pattern recognition

- Ingvar Kamprad - Dyslexic, Founder of IKEA

- MI6 actively looks to recruit neurodivergent staff as analysts for their pattern recognition and big picture thinking, also as Detail oriented Spies with high emotional intelligence that thrive under pressure.

- 50% of NASA employees are dyslexic. They are deliberately hired because of their excellent critical thinking skills and spatial awareness.

These skills are also critical in FM!


"EVERYBODY IS A GENIUS.
BUT IF YOU JUDGE A FISH
BY ITS ABILITY TO CLIMB A TREE
IT WILL LIVE ITS WHOLE LIFE
BELIEVING IT IS STUPID."
-ALBERT EINSTEIN

How do we support people? What are the benefits?

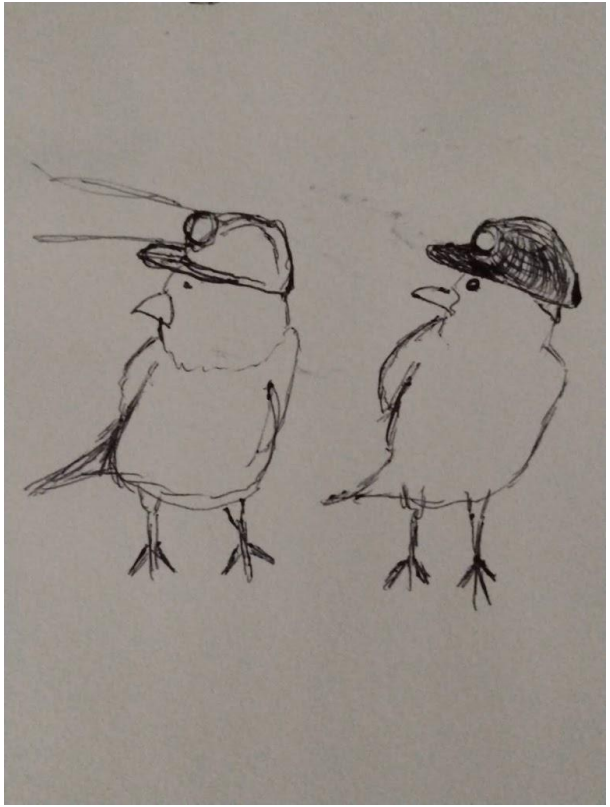
People with different sensitivities have been often described as the canaries in the coal mine. With these traits come sensitivities to:

Toxicity, Unfairness, Burnout, Criticism, Micromanagement

Physical issues, Environmental issues

With Different abilities comes the need to DO things differently. When structures are too rigid to allow space, we lose opportunities to do more and have flexibility.

Supporting these things ripples to support ALL other users of a space or organization. Its Emotional Universal Design.



Maintaining the maintenance department

When not at work, all people have lives, families, interests, and responsibilities.

When staff subsidize work by neglecting these things in the background they add up. This is not sustainable. Especially for Neurodivergent people.

The more workplace background noise - the harder to manage or tune out

The harder to manage workplace background noise, the less capacity people have - so workplace background noise needs to be managed well.

Consistency: treatment must be consistent to maintain the safety to speak up the space to grow and the mental space to think. Once the expectation that one will not be listened to exists, advocacy stops.



Maintaining resources

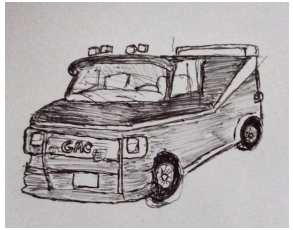
Redefine resources beyond financial and material to:

Rest, Creativity, Agency, Career Progression, Health

Clear boundaries as lines to show where to ask for assistance or collaboration , not forbidden areas not to be touched.

Consistency of support for the rest of the organization creates safety and predictability for rest of company. Less anxiety over issues, more trust in support system, more focus for their primary role.

Homogeneous teams vs diverse teams



It’s hard to find examples of teams that have been successful through sameness. Especially in a position with varied tasks, problems, structures, leases, and many people to communicate with.

Rather than warm bodies filling roles we grow by sharing skills and knowledge and developing and valuing our individual strengths...

All are successful through varied viewpoints, collaboration and diverse individually developed skill sets alongside shared core skills/goals.

Group compliance to shared training is less than Chemistry, growth, or shared goals based on commonly defined successful outcomes. A team that grows together and celebrates each other are invested in their and the organization’s success.

Background Processes

A computer is a good analogy for the brain. The goals are the same.

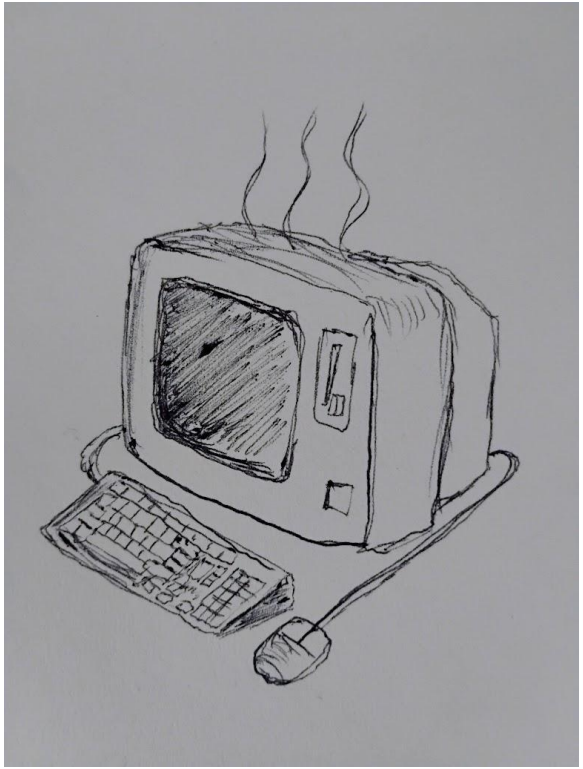
- Minimize background processes! They slow everything down and can overheat the system beyond a certain point.

EG: Lack of stability/consistency cause us to question:

- Can i do this?

- How is this information going to be received?

If these add up, not only are we not in a safe social state we lose focus of the original goal.



Maintaining Well being

When we are stuck in a situation, don't know when it will end, don't know what we can do, our brain will turn to self protection. This could look like a freeze state, inaction, disengagement, avoidance.

Aka Survival mode

In survival mode, whatever our goal was becomes secondary to surviving or making it to the end of the day.

As performance slips, long-term job stability becomes another source of anxiety and another background process.



Advocacy for all

-The organisation, co workers, Vendors, cross department / level advocacy, end users.

-Advocacy for the building and devices and all assets… The System

-Teaching the system as a whole in context, not steps- gives better insight into interactions and decisions.



Some final Tools

- Safe Criticism, Managing emotional impact to get to clear thought.
- Transparency, predictability, Consistency to create safety and dialogue.
- Ask/ answer Clarifying questions
- Maintain Awareness of what you know/ don’t know and the value of others point of view.

- You may know everything about a process or situation, but a person in that process will always know more about their own experience of it than you.

In Conclusion : Takeaways

- Neurodivergent staff have innate skills for this work , If correctly developed and supported.
- Supporting these people reduces stress and increases communication and collaboration across an organization. Increasing visibility, covering more bases , integrating departments and staff. The connective tissue and monitoring system of an organization, The Human knowledge and Data a Facilities department collects can lead decisions.
- Our primary task is to Identify and Meet needs. Continuously. All other goals ride on this.
- Looking for constant improvement through root causes, planning around potential risk keeps us curious. Keeping us curious keeps us engaged.

Inspiration to take home/ Role models for FMs

- One of my Janitors told me upon meeting them for the first time that i have “Big Bird energy”. This was probably my proudest moment in FM.
- Be Big Bird with boundaries.



Inspiration to take home/ Role models for FMs

- Mr. Rogers - If you can have his level of patience, curiosity with everyone in your org you'll learn everything you need to know about gaps to fill to functionality and leave everyone feeling valued and supported.



Inspiration to take home/ Role models for FMs

- Watch Road house (The Patrick Swayze version), it will teach you everything about management and leadership. But that’s another talk for another day.



If you remember nothing else from this talk

As a Facility Manager, We have the opportunity to:

- Improve lives, help people thrive

- Make processes that work for everyone, make everyone feel welcome.

- Keep people safe. Physically and Emotionally.

- Maintain assets, people and create processes and practices that can be our legacy to continue beyond our involvement. Whatever I am handed, it is my goal to hand it on in better condition,Easier to maintain and more sustainable than I received it.

-Our success rides on everyone elses, Figure out what they need and Accommodate that need,



Additional links

50% of NASA employees are Dyslexic-

https://www.allianzcare.com/en/about-us/blog/managing-dyslexia-at-work-as-an-expat.html#:~:text=These%20creative%20processing%20skills%20allow,thinking%20skills%20and%20spatial%20awareness.

https://www.liliforlife.com/en/our-blog/why-nasa-recruits-dyslexic-people/

Neurology of Dyslexic reading

https://www.dyslexia.com/research/articles/alternative-brain-pathways/

Additional links

Davis www.Dyslexia.com

Made by Dyslexia: https://www.madebydyslexia.org/ (Tons of information/ Manager/ Teacher training by the organisation that advocated for Dyslexic thinking to be added to Linkedin as a job skill).

Dyslexia Intro : https://coloradoreading.com/what-is-dyslexia/

Online Dyslexia simulation by Victor Weddell:
https://geon.github.io/programming/2016/03/03/dsxyliea

My contact- https://www.linkedin.com/in/steve-course-cpmm-3b635682/

Accommodations:

Time timer

Straps

Notepad for phone calls

Advance info