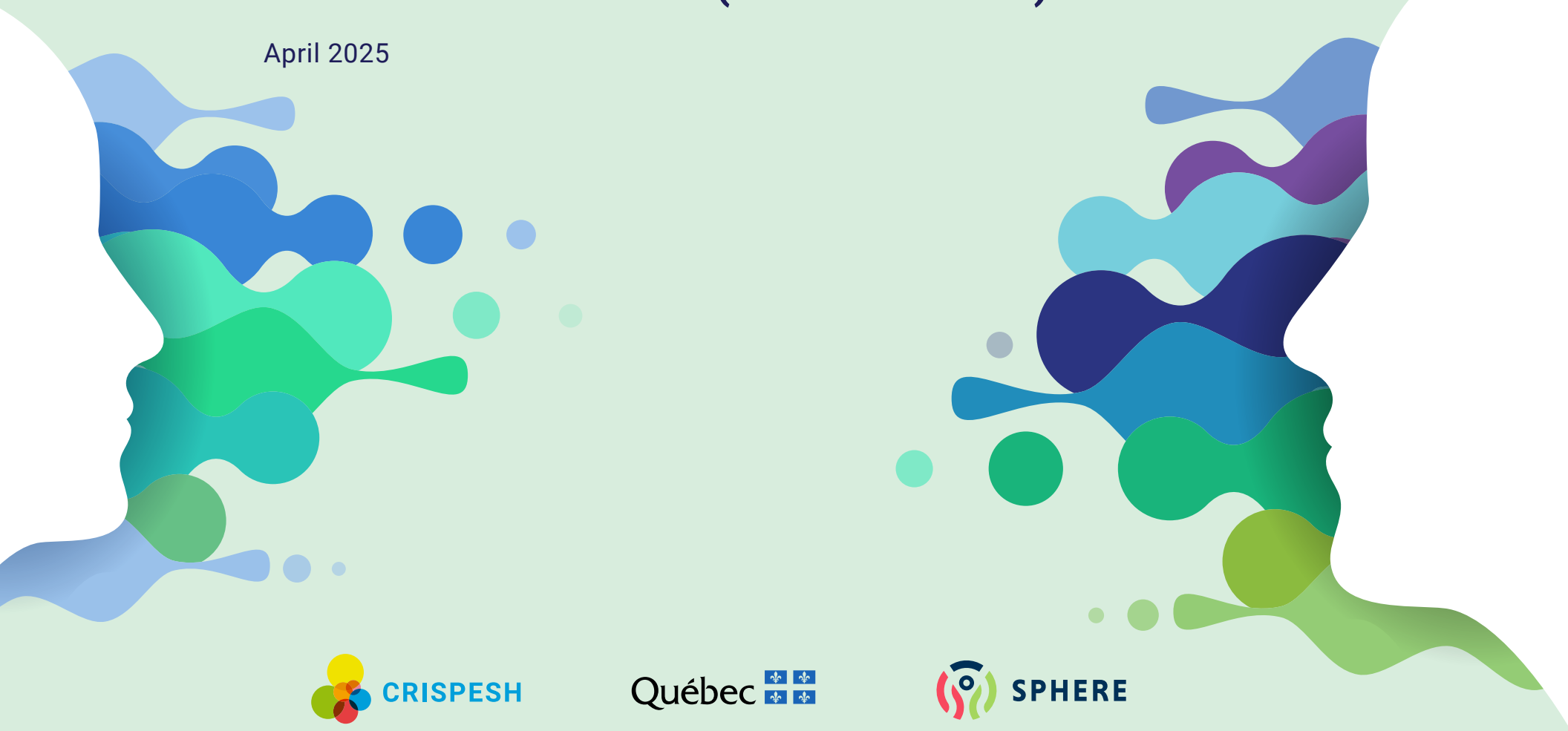
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Facilitating Neuromixed Communication in the Workplace

A Guide for Allistics (Non-Autistics)

April 2025



CRISPESH

Québec

SPHERE

CRISPESH

The Centre de recherche pour l'inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap (CRISPESH [the Research Center for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities]) is a college centre for the transfer of technologies and innovative social practices (CCTT), stemming from a partnership between the Cégep du Vieux Montréal and Dawson College. The mission of CRISPESH is to contribute to the inclusion of people with disabilities in society by supporting organizations in the advancement of knowledge, and the development and promotion of innovative social practices.

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The development of this guide would not have been possible without the invaluable contribution of:

- seven autistic citizen members of the working committee who contributed to the ideation and validation of the guide based on their perspectives and their own experiences of seeking, accessing or maintaining employment.
- six people who contributed to the validation of the guide based on their own perspectives and experiences as allistic employees or employers.

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Introduction

Did you know that it is more common for autistic people than allistic people (that is, non-autistics) to be unemployed or overqualified for the positions they occupy? [1, 2] Numerous studies underscore the fact that communication challenges constitute a major obstacle for autistic people to access and retain employment [3, 4, 5]. These challenges may also limit access to certain possibilities for promotion, as well as their potential and their contribution to the organizations.

In Canada, the right to equality in employment is protected by *the Canadian Human Rights Act*[6]. Although questions of equity and social justice are increasingly under discussion, the fact remains that significant efforts are still required to create more inclusive workplaces and to eliminate the obstacles in employment.

Autistics or autistic people?

The choice of a terminology in line with the preferences and demands of those concerned.

autistics

Certain people describe themselves as autistics (in lower case) and consider that this is a state, a condition or a way of being.

In this document, we will alternate between the terms “**Autistic**” and “**autistic person**” or “**autistic people**” to reflect the diversity characterizing autistic communities.

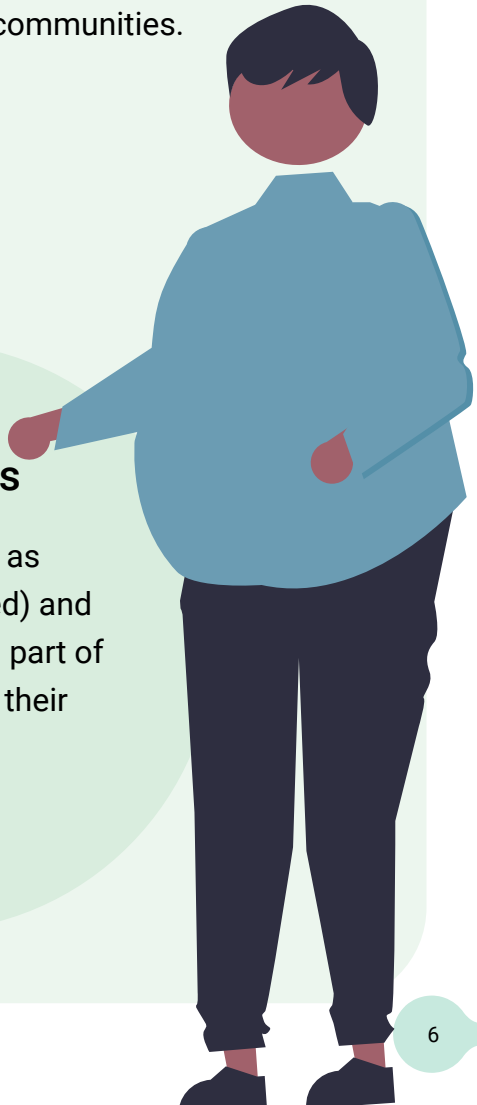


allistics

We use the term “allistic” in lower case to designate those who are not Autistics, since this does not refer to a culture or a shared history.

Autistics

Others self-identify as Autistics (capitalized) and consider that this is part of their identity and of their culture.



Why this guide and for whom is it intended?

This guide aims to support the development of more inclusive workplaces and to provide tools to facilitate neuromixed communication. It particularly focusses on communication between autistic and allistic people.

This innovative guide is based on the idea that all the parties involved have a role to play in fostering communication. Thus, it differs from other guides which treat communication and social interactions between autistic and allistic people and offer recommendations centred on the Autistics. Designed as a tool to guide reflection, this guide deliberately distances itself from a simple "list of practices to adopt or to avoid." It aims to avoid oversimplification and instead to encourage taking into account the diversity of specific contexts in which situations of communication (of interaction) may occur.

This guide aims to equip allistic people – whether collaborators, consultants, employees, employers, interns, supervisors or others – so that they can actively contribute to the creation of more inclusive work environments and promote access to and retention of employment for autistic people. If you are allistic, that is, non-autistic, this guide is intended for you, regardless of your role or the nature of your relationship with the Autistics that you come into contact with in your workplace.

This guide is neither a "turnkey solution" nor a "readymade recipe." It does not offer a list of strategies to foster communication between allistic and autistic people; neither does it offer a description of expected or desirable behaviours or modes of communication. Instead, the objective of this guide is to foster reflection, encourage awareness and propose principles to guide actions and facilitate the evolution of practices in the workplaces.

The stereotype of the autistic person employed by an allistic person

When they think of Autistics in the workplace, a majority of people imagine an autistic person employed by an allistic person. This is a stereotype because, in reality, autistic people – like allistic people – can occupy diverse roles within an organization. They can be employers, employees, supervisors, interns, consultants, collaborators and much more!



Another common misconception is that Autistics are easily identifiable in the workplace. Many people think that they would know if they were working with an autistic person. Sometimes, certain behaviours or modes of communication may allow you to think that a person that you are working with is autistic. It may also happen that someone reveals that they are autistic, thinking that this information might encourage mutual understanding or allow them to have access to some forms of support. In addition, it is possible for a person to display their autistic identity proudly and openly at work.

That being said, it is important to note that many people avoid revealing that they are Autistics, fearing discrimination. Some even go to considerable lengths to camouflage, that is, hide, the fact of being autistics. Consequently, it is better not to make any assumptions about who may or may not be autistic.



Welcoming and tolerating the discomfort inherent in the proposed reflections

This guide may be introducing ideas and concepts which are new to you. It is also possible that this may create some uneasiness, discomfort, even resistance among certain people. We encourage you to consider the ideas presented in this guide with openness and benevolence. Allow yourself time to become familiar with the content and its implications. If necessary, do not hesitate to take a break and come back to it later. Also, do not hesitate to consult the references provided at the end of the document to further your understanding and to learn more about the different aspects covered.

How was this guide created?

This guide was created in the context of a rigorous process, with the collaboration of many people. A working committee, comprised of seven autistic citizen members, two allistic researchers and an Autistic researcher, played an essential role in its creation. Much attention was devoted to the composition of the committee to ensure diversity in terms of:

- age;
- education (from secondary to university level);
- occupational situations (for example: employed, studying, unemployed, seeking employment);
- experiences accessing and retaining employment;
- modes of communication (for example: non-speaking and speaking, preference for written communication, flexible and variable usage of spoken and written communication).

The following are the stages which led to the creation of this guide:



Listing existing guides

Analyzing recommended practices

Targeting relevant practices

Writing the guide

Validating the guide



Listing existing guides: a search of the different available documents touching on the subjects of autism and employment led to the listing of guides written in French or in English. More specifically and at various levels, these guides dealt with communication and social interactions occurring in the workplace between autistic and allistic people.



Analyzing recommended practices: in total, 44 guides were analyzed in depth in order to identify recurrent themes in the ideas and recommendations they propose.



Targeting relevant practices: the committee members evaluated the themes identified, first individually, then collectively. Those considered irrelevant or inadequate were discarded. Themes judged essential that were missing were identified. Discussions among the committee members highlighted a consensus on aspects to be included in the guide.



Writing the guide: the researchers established a plan to integrate these different elements so that some principles which inspired the writing of this guide could emerge.



Validating the guide: six of the autistic citizen members of the working committee read the guide to ensure that it was respectful of autistic realities in its formulations and practices. People representing the targeted public of this guide (that is, allistic employees or employers) also confirmed the clarity and comprehensibility of the guide.

PART 1

Communication

What is communication?

Communication is an omnipresent and complex process which goes beyond the simple transmission of information. All behaviour, whether an animated discussion, a silence or everything falling between the two, is a form of communication[7]. It encompasses not only the information itself, but also the way it is expressed and understood and, in the same vein, the reactions which it triggers[7]. Comprehension is influenced by the relation between those communicating, their communication preferences and the context. And, in return, it affects the components of this dynamic.

Human communication is manifested at various levels:



Verbal communication

The utilization of language orally, in writing, through sign language, in conceptual language, or in other ways.

Paraverbal communication

Oral elements other than words which give meaning to verbal communication, such as the intonation of the voice, the rhythm, the length of sentences and punctuation.

Nonverbal communication

Behaviour and other manifestations which are not expressed in words, but which transmit important information, such as posture, gestures, and facial expressions. In the context of written communication, we can think of calligraphy, the type of font, the colour, and the use of emoticons.

These different ways of communicating interact with each other and overlap. Thus, when someone communicates an idea or expresses a feeling, they often combine a number of these levels (for example verbal, paraverbal and nonverbal). The paraverbal and nonverbal ways of communication may sometimes reinforce, and sometimes modify the message transmitted via verbal communication.

Combination of verbal, paraverbal and nonverbal communication

Diago and Alex are discussing the implementation of an accounting application. Alex explains the expected challenges during the implementation of the application.

Suddenly, Diago receives a sound notification of a text message. He apologizes to Alex and deactivates the ringtone of his cellphone.

He then comes back to Alex and tells them:



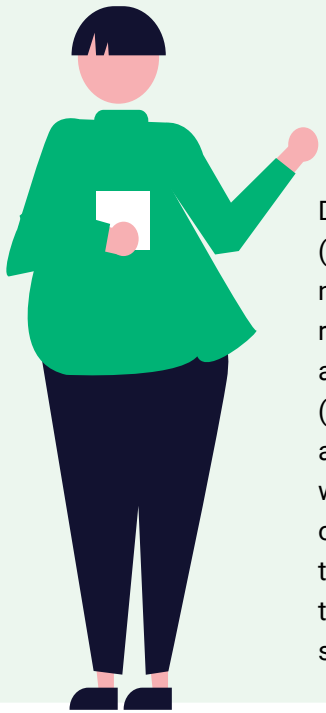
It's okay, you can continue, I'm listening.

During the exchange, Diago nods his head up and down when he understands and asks some questions for clarification when he doesn't understand.

The verbal message ("I'm listening to you"), the paraverbal message (the calm and poised tone of voice) and the nonverbal message (deactivation of the ringtone, nodding of the head, questioning gestures) are all aligned. Alex feels Diego is really listening.

Later in the day, Alex discusses the installation of this same application with Mylène. When Alex begins to explain the anticipated challenges, Mylène receives a sound notification of a text message.

She takes out her cellphone and says to Alex (all while reading and responding to the text message she received):



It's okay, you can continue, I'm listening.



Despite her verbal message ("I'm listening"), Mylène's nonverbal behaviour (reading and responding to a text message) and paraverbal behaviour (distracted tone of voice) are not aligned with what she said. Alex wonders about their interpretation of the situation and doubts the validity of the message transmitted, no longer knowing if she was really listening to them.

Each person has their own style and communication preferences which may include, for example: the length and frequency of interventions, the rhythm of interactions, the mode of expression (for example oral, written, sign language or assisted), the vocabulary utilized, the level of formality, the verbal flow, and the tone of voice. The use and intensity of facial expressions and gestures to emit or understand a message also vary from one person to another and according to different cultures.

Communication is a subjective process, influenced by several factors, such as the context, cultural or linguistic references and the emotional state. Each person's unique experiences and knowledge influence not only the way each person expresses their ideas, but also the way each person understands and interprets the messages received. When people communicate, the greater is the gap between their perspectives and their lived reality, the greater is the risk of discrepancy between the message transmitted and the message understood.

It is important to note that all forms of communication are legitimate. While oral communication is often favoured in our society, other forms, such as written communication, sign language, and the use of enhanced and alternative communication tools such as tables of symbols or vocal synthesizers are just as valid. The visual arts, body arts and music are also forms of communication.

Different but equally legitimate modes of communication

Saël is a non-speaking autistic warehouse clerk who uses a text-to-speech mobile application to communicate. When he first arrived at work, several of his colleagues expressed frustration at having to wait for Saël to write his ideas on his mobile device which then reads them out in a robotic voice. His colleagues found his ideas simplistic and useless, and often the conversation continued without taking into account what Saël was expressing.

On several occasions and in various ways, Mei, the warehouse supervisor, explained that the entire team could benefit from Saël's presence. Since then, his colleagues have learned to slow down the pace of their exchanges, allowing Saël to express his ideas. Although his thoughts are still short, his colleagues now realize that they are not simplistic. In fact, Saël has extensive knowledge of warehouse operations and its organization, and his ideas benefit everyone!



Communicating in a neuromixed work team

At work, effective communication is a definite advantage in terms of efficiency, productivity, the success of the firm or the achievement of the organization's mission. It can also have a significant impact on people's well-being and their work satisfaction. Nonetheless, effective communication is not always easy to establish. Acquiring the ways and means to minimize or overcome obstacles in communication is key, especially when communication styles and preferences vary considerably within teams, as is often the case in neuromixed teams.

What is a neuromixed team?

A neuromixed work team is composed of people with a diversity of identities and so-called neurocognitive profiles. These profiles include aspects such as eye contact, facial expressions, ways of expressing ideas, tone and timbre of the voice, and conversational rhythm.

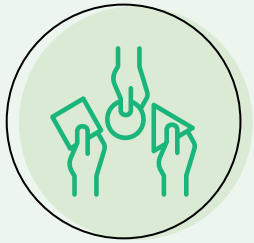
It is important to note that a work team is also mixed according to other social attributes (for example, gender, profession, language, cultural origin, and age), which also affect communication.



Neuromixed communication occurs between people with different neurocognitive functioning and who can, therefore, have different communication styles and preferences. This is the case, for example, in communication between autistic and allistic people. For neuromixed communication to foster mutual understanding and respect, a first step is to adopt a positive view of neurodiversity.

What is neurodiversity?

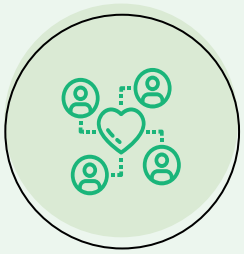
Neurodiversity may be explained by three premises[8, 9]:



Neurodiversity is a form of diversity present in the human population. It is manifest on emotional, cognitive and sensory levels.



The idea that there exists a “normal” or a “superior” neurocognitive profile and functioning is a cultural construct. This idea is no more valid than the notion that there is an ethnicity, gender or culture more “normal” or “superior” to another.



The social dynamics inherent in neurodiversity are similar to those expressed in other forms of human diversity, for example, ethnicity, gender, and culture.

PART 2

A reflective practice to facilitate neuromixed communication

In addition to having a favourable attitude to neurodiversity, the adoption of a reflective practice is vital to facilitate neuromixed communication in the workplace. A reflective practice involves questioning one's own ways of communicating, as well as one's own interpretations. It also means taking a step back and re-examining what seems obvious or commonsensical, but which could instead simply be a habit or the consequence of a lack of information. Reflective practice helps to improve communication. It also fosters better understanding, as well as mutual respect between autistic and allistic people.



The dangers of lists of recommendations

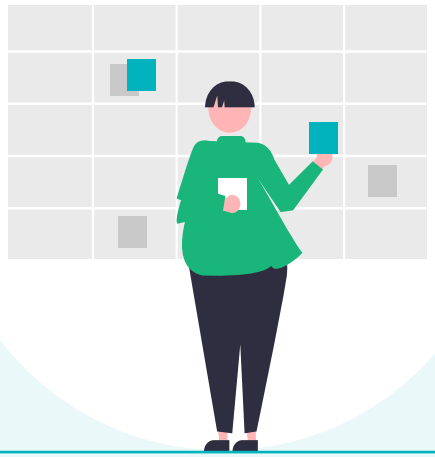
It could be tempting and seem easier to get one's hands on a series of recommendations intended to foster communication between autistic and allistic people. But beware! The systematic application of a series of recommendations, without reflecting on the communication situation at play and its particular implications, can lead to more problems of understanding on one side or the other. Indeed:

- **every person is unique:** the needs and preferences in terms of communication may vary considerably from one autistic person to another;
- **the needs and preferences of all may evolve over time and vary depending on the contexts:** even if certain recommendations could be pertinent for one person in a given context, they could be useless or even harmful in other situations.

So, beware of approaches which propose a "recipe" or a "ready-made solution." In addition to creating a false sense of confidence or of discouragement for those who would adopt them, they can contribute to reinforcing stereotypes and stigmatizing or paternalistic attitudes toward Autistics.

Unique people with different needs

Alex



Alex identifies as Autistic. At work, they prefer to receive their mandates in written form on a monthly basis. This enables them to consult them at any point and responds to their need for autonomy. Alex likes to understand why certain tasks are assigned to them. This gives meaning to their work and allows them to propose more effective options if necessary. Recently, after a romantic breakup, Alex appreciated that their supervisor, Miguel, checked up more frequently concerning the progress of their mandates, since in this difficult emotional context, they had more trouble organizing their everyday activities, including work.

Zinia



Zinia is an autistic woman. She usually prefers that her supervisor, Bruno, meets her first thing in the morning and in the afternoon in the conference room, to present her the tasks with the help of a visual reminder. Zinia appreciates that her supervisor is readily available to respond to her questions. Recently, maintenance work near the conference room was a source of distraction and excessive sensory stimulation (overstimulation) for Zinia. In this context, Zinia and her supervisor agreed to meet in the break room, rather than in the conference room. And they both agreed that the supervisor should have direct follow-ups with Zinia more often, rather than wait for her to request them.

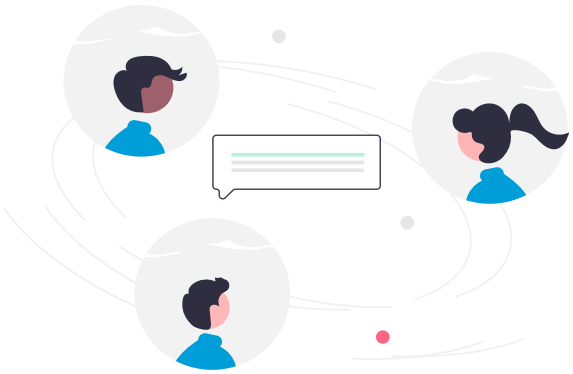
These examples show that Alex and Zinia have very different needs. Alex might feel infantilized with the approach that suits Zinia, while Zinia could feel overwhelmed with the approach preferred by Alex. These examples illustrate how communication strategies must be adjusted to the person and the context.

The questions which then arise are the following: what are the really relevant and useful means of facilitating neuromixed communication? And which could prove superfluous and consume your energy and resources to no avail? In the following section, three key principles are proposed to guide your reflections in this direction and support neuromixed communication in the workplace (and elsewhere!)

Three key principles in support of neuromixed communication

Three key principles are proposed to support the development of a reflective practice which favours neuromixed communication in an approach which is contextualized, sensitive to diversity and adjusted to those engaged in the interaction situation.

Principle 1: Communicating is a collective effort



Effective communication necessitates the active participation of all the stakeholders. In the context of neuromixed communication, the learning of respectful and efficient communication is a shared responsibility[10]. Indeed, facilitating communication at work must be a collective effort which requires a commitment on the part of each person. In other words, it is not just up to the people whose communication style differs from social norms and the most common ways of doing things, as is the case for Autistics, to “make themselves understood” or to explain (indeed, justify) their communication preferences. There is always more than one person engaged in a relation of communication.

The difficulties of communication between allistic and autistic people are often attributed to the latter[11]. This is due in large part to the fact that this shared responsibility in communication is often not recognized. The widely held and persistent idea that autism is purportedly a “trouble in social communication” also does not help. On the contrary, it contributes to reinforcing the negative prejudices regarding Autistics and tends to make them responsible for communication problems, without taking into account the context or the situation. Neuromixed interactions are the object of relations between people who do not have the same advantages with respect to generally expected ways of expressing themselves[12]. In fact, communication problems between autistic and allistic people are often linked to what is called the “double empathy problem.”

It is crucial to take responsibility, collectively, faced with the challenges of neuromixed communication. In other words, everyone has a role to play and a share of responsibility in what can be or can become communication perceived as “successful” on both sides.

The double empathy problem, or the sources of breakdowns in communication between autistic and allistic people

The double empathy problem[11], [13] is a concept introduced by Damian Milton, an autistic British researcher, to question the stereotype according to which Autistics "would be lacking in empathy" and would be incapable of perceiving and understanding what others are feeling. It highlights the social and situational character of communication, as well as its reciprocity. Based on the idea that communication is a shared responsibility, the double empathy problem offers a pertinent explanation of difficulties of mutual understanding between autistic and allistic people.



The double empathy problem describes the challenges associated with misunderstanding the mental state of the other as a mutual phenomenon. Thus, it highlights that autistic people, like allistic people, may experience difficulties in perceiving and understanding others' ideas and emotions.

That being said, it is likely that Autistics, who are constantly navigating the social world of allistics, develop a better understanding and superior strategies for neuromixed communication than do allistic people. Moreover, research has shown that Autistics' behaviour and ways of communicating are often misinterpreted by allistic people, which contributes to an unfavourable perception of autistic people[14].

Thought-provoking questions

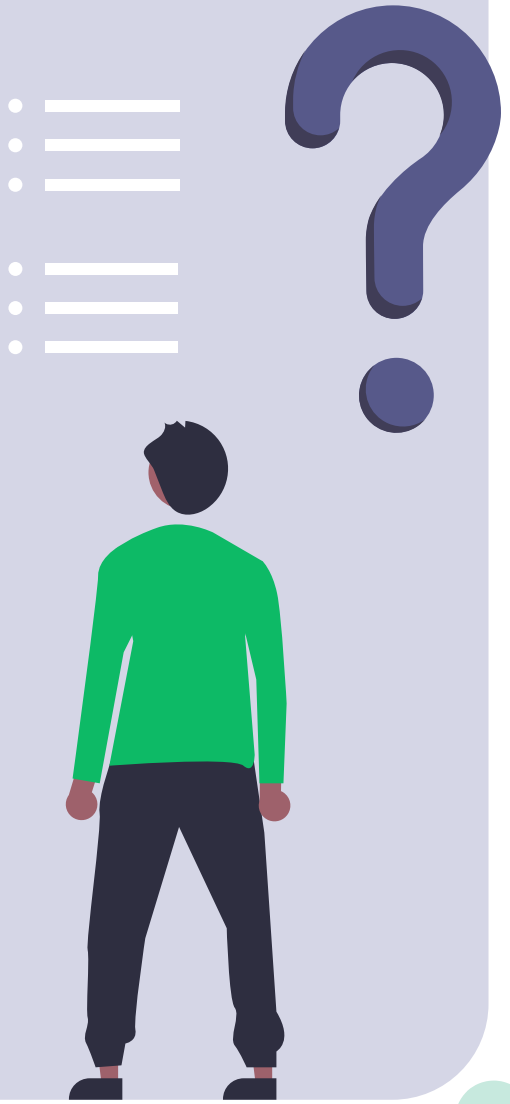
for the development of a reflective practice to support neuromixed communication in the workplace

1. How can the idea that autistic people present a “communication deficit” influence their self-esteem and self-image?

2. What do you think of the idea that Autistics must improve their social skills? And what about the notion that allistic people must improve their own social skills to foster neuromixed communication?

3. How does the double empathy problem affect Autistics and allistic people differently?

4. What actions will you undertake to encourage a shared responsibility in communication between autistic and allistic people in your workplace?





Principle 2: Compensating for the disadvantages generated by neuronormative expectations in communication

Communication is influenced by diverse characteristics such as age, skin colour, ethnicity, gender, the presence (or absence) of a disability, the neurocognitive profile, the level of education, and the profession... In a society or a given group, those who possess certain characteristics benefit from social privileges. In contrast, those who lack them may be rejected, excluded or stigmatized.

What is a social privilege?



A social privilege is an advantage accorded to particular people due to their real or presumed belonging to certain groups which correspond to the norm. These privileges, not due to merit or effort[15], create power dynamics which are detrimental to those who deviate from the norm.

For example, in a society where health is associated with a certain form of body, those deemed overweight will be judged more negatively than others. They may have more difficulty finding employment or experience pressure from those around them, pushing them to invest in costly weight loss products which could, ultimately, harm their health. Similarly, speaking is often considered the "best" way to communicate. In this context, non-speaking autistic people (that is, those who do not use speech to communicate) and those who prefer to express themselves in writing will be judged negatively. They may be pushed by those around them to follow intervention programs along those lines, have trouble finding employment due to prejudices, as well as be frequently confronted with ways of communicating which do not correspond to their needs and their preferences.

It is important to recognize that certain people may belong to a number of groups which do not correspond to the valued social norms and that this could lead to an accumulation of prejudices and discriminations. For example, someone could be identified as autistic and considered overweight. This superposition of marginalization might prove to be particularly difficult, since they must navigate in a world which not only fails to recognize their individuality, but which is also structured to privilege those who correspond to certain characteristics perceived as "better" or desirable.

In neuromixed communication, the modes and styles of communication which correspond to what is generally expected are often perceived as “normal” and “adequate.” Consequently, those who use these ways of communicating are more likely to have advantages compared to those who do not. In the labour market, these advantages (or disadvantages) may have repercussions for access to and retention of employment, the type of position held, the possibilities for advancement or promotion, the obtention of contracts... For example, making and maintaining eye contact during a professional exchange or shaking hands at the start of a meeting are seen as signs of professionalism in many Quebec work environments. However, and as stressed by several Autistics, these practices may be difficult to do for various reasons (for example, the onerousness of physical contact, the coordination of the act, motor function, and the arbitrary cultural nature of this gesture)[16].

Conversely, a way of communicating that deviates from what is generally expected may trigger a negative evaluation from the other, giving the impression that the person is less, indeed, not at all, professional. For example, certain strategies of self-regulation often used by autistic people – such as manipulating an object, playing with their fingers, rotating their chairs, rocking – will often be judged negatively and perceived as a sign of a lack of interest or a lack of attention.

It is crucial to understand that the expectations and practices of communication at work can advantage certain people (generally allistics) and marginalize and exclude others (such as Autistics). These are what we might term neuronormative expectations.

What is neuronormativity?

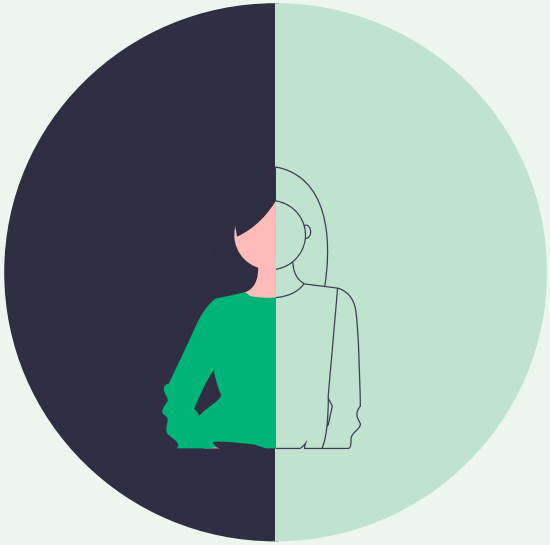
Neuronormativity corresponds in some ways to an “unwritten rule” that defines which ways of thinking, communicating and behaving are judged as “normal” and, therefore, considered socially “appropriate.” In turn, this also indicates that those who diverge from the norm are “deviants” and, as a result, are judged as “less desirable” or “inadequate.”[17]
Neuronormativity is expressed in social expectations and affects all our ways of:

- communicating, expressing our ideas, conducting a conversation;
- perceiving, interpreting and understanding information;
- expressing our emotions;
- accomplishing a task or doing an activity;
- directing or maintaining our attention;
- directing and maintaining our gaze;
- etc.

Denigrating, stigmatizing or penalizing someone (or a group of people) on the basis of neuronormative expectations is a form of discrimination referred to as neuroableism.

In the workplace, as in all of society, autistic people may experience discomfort or different forms of violence due to neuronormative expectations. To avoid stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion, they resort to various strategies, intellectualized or not, to dissimulate or modify their spontaneous reactions and conform to what they perceive as expected in a given situation of communication[18, 19]. This is called masking - sometimes referred to as “social camouflaging.”

What is masking (or social camouflaging)?



Masking (or social camouflaging) consists of hiding or modifying one's behaviour, actions or communication to make them more in line with what is perceived as expected in a given situation. Masking can take different forms and involve:

- learning to imitate facial expressions, gestures, intonations or neuronormative social codes;
- hiding one's emotions or passions;
- ignoring sensory aggressions and forcing oneself to remain in an environment which is sensorially overstimulating or hostile;
- preparing scripts and practising speaking up or responding;
- forcing oneself to look others in the eyes or express oneself orally;
- holding back or preventing oneself from moving or "stimming," that is, making repetitive movements of self-stimulation or self-regulation, such as wiggling one's legs, fiddling with one's hair, rocking, or wiggling one's fingers[20].

Masking can have many harmful effects:

- On an individual level: fatigue and exhaustion, stress and anxiety, confusion and a feeling of a loss of identity, isolation or self-exclusion, a reduced sense of well-being, and an increase in rates of depression and suicidality[21].
- On a social and relational level: negation of the autistic identity, additional obstacles to accessing the support or inclusion measured requested.
- On an organizational level: maintenance and reinforcement of inequitable management and supervisory practices, staff retention difficulties, resignations or dismissals.

Thought-provoking questions

for the development of a reflective practice to support neuromixed communication in the workplace

1. How can the communication styles of autistic people be different from or similar to those of allistic people?

2. Are the methods of communication encouraged in your workplace inclusive and accessible, or do they create obstacles for neuromixed communication?

3. In your workplace, what would be the consequences of pressure for “normalization” of social behaviour for autistic people?

4. What actions could allistic people undertake to compensate for the disadvantages posed by the neuronormative norms and expectations for communication at work?

5. What actions will you take to better understand and respect the differences in various ways of communicating at work?



Principle 3: Getting involved and establishing a dialogue



Neuromixed communication is a shared responsibility which must be built on a genuine understanding of each person's needs and preferences. It is crucial to create a space for dialogue to encourage the adoption of practices that respect the different modalities and styles of communication. It is important to think about the modalities put in place for a first exchange to ensure that it is not based on neuronormative expectations, especially if they are not necessary for the accomplishment of the required tasks. For example, imagine that you have created a space for dialogue for colleagues to discuss ways of improving your communication practices. If the meeting is expected to be held in person and exchanges are to be only orally, we must ask who will really feel comfortable expressing themselves fully and freely. We must also question how this approach reproduces and reinforces neuronormative practices and how it disadvantages those who communicate (or prefer to communicate) other than orally or those who need some time to identify and formulate their demands. No form of communication should be posited as a universal requirement, least of all in the context of a dialogue aimed at exploring ways to foster neuromixed communication.

A dialogue and communication which go beyond words

It would be erroneous to think that dialogue can only occur through verbal language or that it is only possible between people deemed “capable” of clearly expressing their needs and preferences.

For diverse reasons, a person may not be in a position to precisely express a need. They may lack words, means or energy to do so. They may also hesitate to express their preferences, for fear of being invalidated or discredited.

Nonetheless, even if a person does not formulate their needs or preferences in words, this does not signify that the person is not expressing them. Paraverbal and nonverbal communication, as well as silences, can reveal a great deal about the needs and preferences of a person.

You may then deduce that your mode of communication is not aligned with the needs or preferences of the person with whom you are exchanging or that the context is not propitious if, for example, you observe that this person:

- changes position or begins to “stim,” that is, makes repetitive movements of self-stimulation or self-regulation;
- moves away before you are finished with your explanations;
- leaves to isolate themselves after your exchange;
- shifts the conversation to another subject;
- turns to another person to ask them for explanations;
- tells you that they do not understand;
- does not follow up on your exchange.

Although it may be easier and quicker to adapt one’s way of communicating with people who clearly express their needs and preferences, most often one must go through a process of trial and error, with a series of attempts, observations and adjustments. In certain cases, it can be useful to call on a trusted third party to help explore possible communication strategies.

Remember that allistic people are often advantaged by the communication practices in place in most workplaces. It is crucial to explore different options in order to come to an agreement with each person on the most appropriate and efficient ways of communicating with that person, without imposing one's own preferences or prioritizing the ways of doing things that are perceived as the most common. To do so, it is essential to practise active listening, be on the lookout for paraverbal and nonverbal cues, be open-minded and avoid value judgments. This is a good starting point for developing the stance of an ally.

How to act as an ally?

In the context of neuromixed communication, acting as an ally signifies actively supporting and respecting those whose communication styles and preferences may deviate from common ways of communicating. This involves several key actions:

- **Actively listening** to those with whom you are communicating, in particular those whose ways or styles of communication differ from yours or from the majority of those with whom you work. This means making an effort to understand their needs, preferences and experiences.
- **Demonstrate openness and respect for communication differences**. This signifies avoiding judging a person's skills or motivation at work based on the way they express themselves or interact.
- **Offer active support** to those whose communication style differs from that of the majority. This may mean supporting them in difficult situations or working to change the communication norms which are a source of exclusion.
- **Denounce injustices and defend rights in alliance with those concerned (and not in their place).**
- **Keep learning**. This means never ceasing to learn about the different forms of communication and the experiences of those who communicate in a way different from one's own. This also leads to continuing one's reflection on ways to apply inclusive practices in daily life.



As communication needs and practices evolve over time and vary according to contexts, it is vital to encourage an open dialogue and to work to maintain channels of communication throughout the working relationship. Whether formally or informally, do not hesitate to ask questions and to verify that the means of communication in place are still appropriate. If this is not the case, be sure to make the necessary adjustments.

To create an environment in which people will feel at ease communicating in their own way and expressing their needs, it is important to regularly demonstrate your willingness to adapt and to compromise. However, you must be aware that, even with the greatest openness and the best efforts on your part, certain people might not be comfortable or feel sufficiently safe to freely express their needs. They might also lack the resources or the energy necessary to do so. This is not only possible, but also completely valid and legitimate.

If this is the case, do not forget that paraverbal and nonverbal communication, as well as silences, may also provide precious information.

Thought-provoking questions

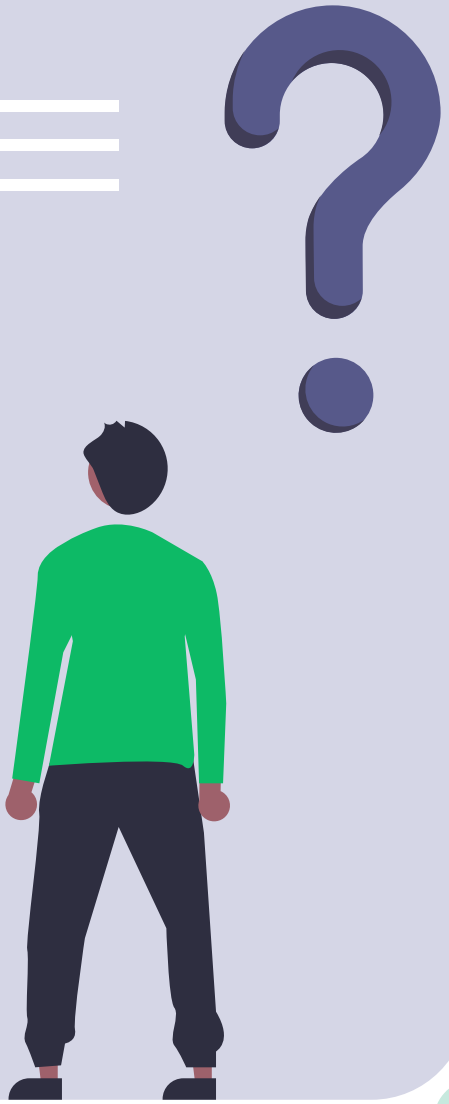
for the development of a reflective practice to support neuromixed communication in the workplace

1. How do you determine the best way of communicating with a person who expresses themselves differently from you? What factors do you take into account?

2. The ideas of a person whose communication style differs from yours may not always be immediately clear to you. What strategies can you use to understand the message being communicated?

3. What is the importance of flexibility in interpersonal communication, in particular when this concerns people whose communication styles and preferences differ from your own or from those of the majority of people you encounter at work?

4. How can reflective practice help you to overcome the challenges of neuromixed communication in the workplace?



PART 3

Illustrated communication principles



As we have mentioned in the previous section, improvement in neuromixed communication is based on three key principles:

1
Communicating is a collective effort

2
Compensating for disadvantages generated by neuronormative expectations in communication

3
Getting involved and establishing a dialogue

The following section will illustrate how these principles can be put into practice in different contexts, whether in:

- welcoming employees;
- creating environments which foster the well-being of the entire team;
- defusing a communication problem;
- providing continuous support.

ILLUSTRATION **A**

Welcoming employees

Maïka, an allistic employee, presents herself in her new workplace. She is greeted with a warm smile from Diago, the employer who was awaiting her arrival. At the entrance, it is indicated on a board: “Today, April 7, welcoming an employee.” Diago introduces her to Saël, an autistic employee who has worked in the organization as a warehouse clerk for several years and who waves at her. Maïka and Saël will sometimes have to collaborate. Diago facilitates the introductions and encourages a climate of openness in their exchanges, stressing the importance of respecting the differences in the modes of communication.



Maïka listens attentively, taking note of Diago’s words. She too personally commits to doing her best to actively contribute to ensuring that each person’s communication needs and preferences are respected.

As the week goes by, Maïka, Saël and Diago continue to engage in dialogue and learn to know each other better, thus contributing to the creation of an inclusive and respectful workspace.

ILLUSTRATION **B**

Creating environments which foster the well-being of the entire team

In a cooperative, open-plan work environment, two allistic employees, Maïka and Mylène, work together on a project. Beside them, one can see the door of a mixed toilet (non-gendered).

Later, in the "Quiet Den," Mylène does some stretches, on a yoga mat. Beside her, Alex works on payroll preparation.



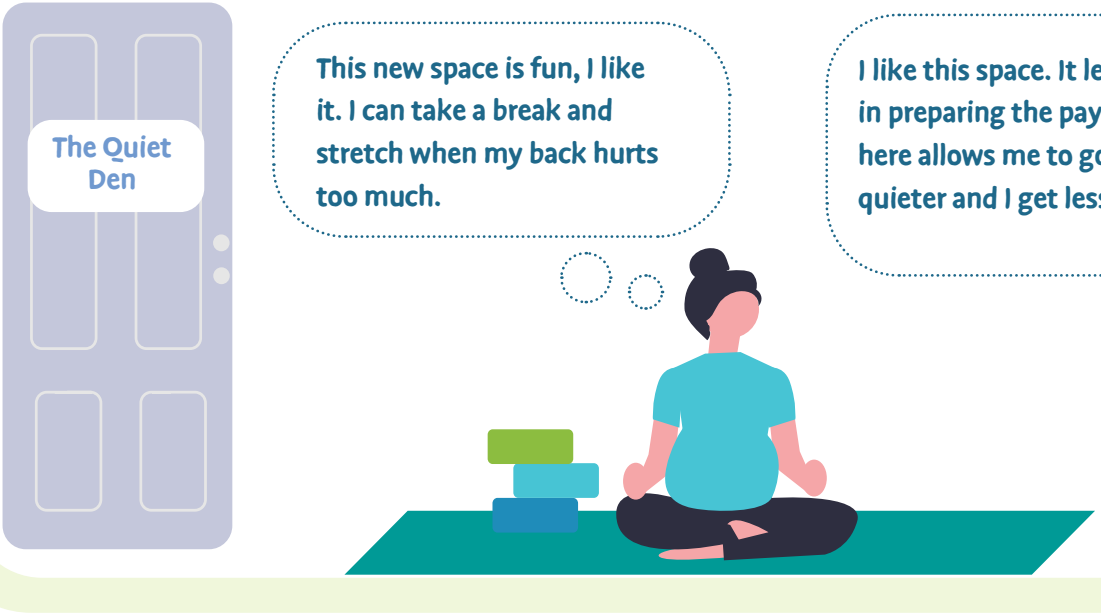


ILLUSTRATION C

Defusing a communication problem

Maïka, an allistic employee, arrives at work. Saël, her autistic colleague, greets her but Maïka doesn't answer him. Saël wonders what is going on:



Later in the afternoon, Maïka notices that Saël is acting differently. After reflection, she asks him:

Have I done something that made you uncomfortable?

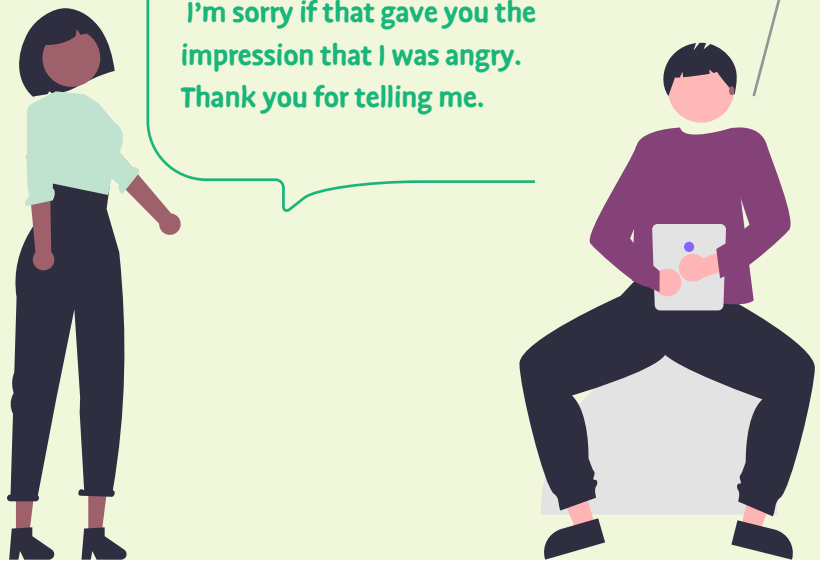
Saël uses his mobile device to write his response, which is then read by the speech synthesizer:

This morning, I greeted you, but you didn't respond.

Are you angry with me?

Oh no, not at all. In fact, it's just that I was preoccupied this morning. I wasn't paying attention; I didn't see you.

I'm sorry if that gave you the impression that I was angry. Thank you for telling me.



An open and honest dialogue, without over-interpretation, allows to defuse the communication problem. Being aware that communication problems are often rooted in neuronormative interpretations, Maïka took the initiative to clarify the situation.

ILLUSTRATION D

Providing continuous support

In the scene, we observe a meeting, led by Diago, the employer. Alex, an Autistic employee, is gently "stimming," manipulating a sensory object, while Mylène, an allistic employee, is standing at the back of the room. Two people are participating in the meeting remotely: one has turned off the camera; the other's camera is on.

Alex is in the process of expressing a complex idea, taking the time to explain in depth a problem encountered in compensation management. Mylène seems to have lost focus, her attention drifting away from Alex's words, unable to understand the idea as it was explained.



"Stimming" refers to repetitive movements of self-stimulation and self-regulation, such as wiggling one's legs, fiddling with one's hair, rocking, wiggling one's fingers.

"Infodumping" refers to a dumping of information which takes the form of an extremely detailed exposé, done in one go, on a subject of interest. This form of expression is common for autistic people and autistic communities.

It is possible and legitimate that the needs of one person might be hard to reconcile with those of another, as is the case between the need to express an idea in detail and depth to be sure to explain it well versus the need to have access to direct and targeted information to understand it well. When this is the case, what is important is to find a middle ground. Here, thanks to the mediation of Diago, Alex can express their ideas in a way that is natural for them, and Mylène can understand the key idea that Alex wants to communicate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is vital to understand that communication must be the fruit of a collective effort. Each person has a role to play to facilitate exchanges and mutual understanding. Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that, while all forms of communication are theoretically legitimate, neuronormative practices in place in most workplaces may disadvantage certain people, including Autistics. Consequently, establishing a dialogue is essential to improve neuromixed communication and to determine, together, the best practices to put in place to create a welcoming and inclusive workplace environment. Such a balanced and respectful approach underscores the importance of collaboration in the workplace.

Transparent communication, where all parties' needs for expression and communication are fully taken into account, is likely to benefit the greatest number – and not only autistic people. Many recommendations frequently formulated as favourable to neuromixed communication could, in fact, be applied universally, since they are likely to benefit a vast array of people. In the same way as access ramps not only make it easier for those in wheelchairs to get around but also prove useful for parents with strollers, cyclists, and those with suitcases with wheels, etc. – as well as being often appreciated by children who throw themselves on them with great joy –, communication strategies benefit from being discussed and implemented with a universal approach.

For example, being sure, when writing, to organize the information in different clearly identified sections and to utilize clear codes to highlight important elements, such as deadlines or tasks to be done, is helpful for a good number of people, both allistics and Autistics. When information is transmitted orally, being sure to summarize the information so that each person can focus on and store away the key ideas, rather than be swamped with details, also seems like a good communication practice for everyone. Thus, means considered essential to allow autistic people to access and retain fulfilling employment could also facilitate the life of many allistic people. We bet that such an approach could have a ripple effect which would altogether increase the participation, satisfaction and performance at work of the entire team.

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