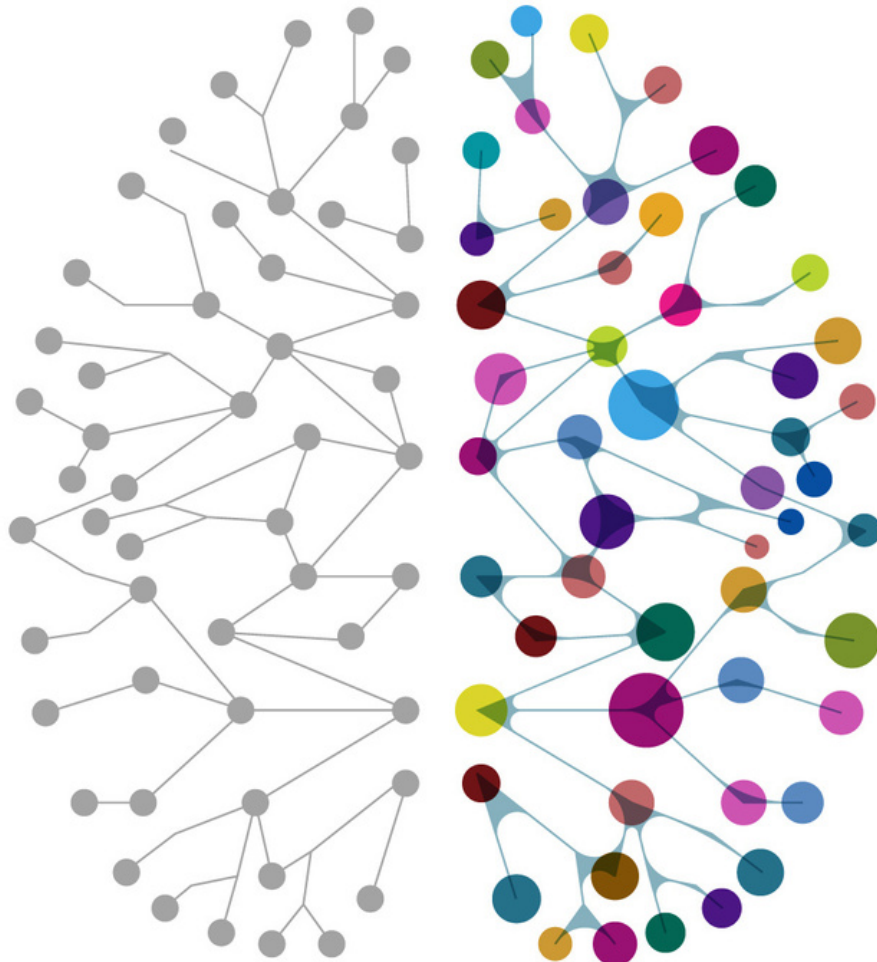


Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage

What can organisations learn from neuroscience and neurodivergent individuals when shaping the future of work?

Executive Report



The business case is clear - now it's time for action

Neurodiverse teams are 30% more productive than neurotypical ones (5). Yet, many studies confirm that many individuals identifying as neurodivergent are either unemployed, or struggle to be their best at work.

Research has also established a conclusive connection between specific factors in our work environment and our ways of working that can impact brain health and cognitive performance.

Our brains are largely structured in the same way; the factors that can make our brains healthy and work well are relatively universal, irrespective of who we are and what type of work that we do.

Yet, the extent to which something (e.g. noise) is impacting one person compared to another is often more individual. Thus, the same environment can impact two individuals very differently.

Science is also illustrating that many of the factors within our work environment that support neurodivergent individuals, are similar to the factors that influence brain health, cognitive performance and productivity amongst the "neurotypical" population.

The objective of this report is to share conclusions from our survey and roundtable; to summarise lived experience, latest research and legal requirements on what companies can do to create more neuroinclusive work environments.



Neurodiversity is quickly moving up the corporate agenda

Actions, however, are largely reactive and legally driven. Many leaders understand the importance of being neuroinclusive and have started to introduce the topic for conversation, but a question we wanted to explore was: is there too much talk and not enough tangible action?

One specific question we were keen to explore in relation to this was; are there things organisations can learn from both neuroscience and neurodivergent individuals that can support more brain-friendly and neuroinclusive workplaces?

A roundtable to facilitate action

To answer this question, [flow²thrive](#) and [AmbiCare](#) conducted a survey targeting neurodivergent individuals and hosted a roundtable in Stockholm, attended by a group of inspiring HR/D&I professionals, legal and neuroarchitecture experts.

The survey covered questions related to factors that can positively impact health and performance in:

- Physical and digital work-environments
- Culture and ways of working
- Life outside of work

During the roundtable the group explored:

- The science behind brain health & performance
- How to design brain-friendly office spaces
- Insights from neurodivergent individuals
- Examples of different practices within businesses
- Legal considerations; what companies can & must do

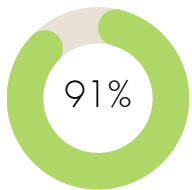
This report, covers the key findings from the survey and summary conclusions from the roundtable.

A detailed report covering survey results has also been developed and can be downloaded here: ambicare.se

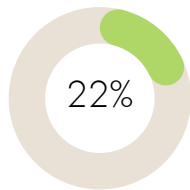
A rapidly emerging topic in the Nordics

Neurodiversity as a topic within businesses in the Nordics appears to be at an early, yet rapidly emerging stage.

There are no statistics on how Nordic organisations are incorporating neurodiversity into their D&I strategies and agendas. Looking internationally however, a study by Birkbeck University illustrates that 91% of UK employers have a D&I policy, but only 22% include a focus on neurodivergence in their policy.



Say they have a D&I policy (1)



Include neurodivergence in their policy (1)

The participants in our roundtable concluded that approaches within Nordic businesses are largely legally driven and often reactive, but the landscape and dialogue seems to be changing.

It was felt that neurodiversity is more broadly talked about in global organisations, compared to Swedish/Nordic businesses. There is therefore now an opportunity to be a pioneer, to start moving beyond a legal, reactive perspective, become more neuroinclusive and make neurodiversity a competitive advantage.

”

The Swedish labour market is slowly but surely embracing neurodiversity, legal boundaries have yet to be developed in case law. As lawyers, we often find clients seeking guidance when an issue has already occurred, which is also reflected in the scarce case law that currently exists. With a more proactive approach, many of the cases that come to us today could have been prevented.

Jenny Welander Wadström, Partner & Head of Employment Practice, Roschier, Attorneys

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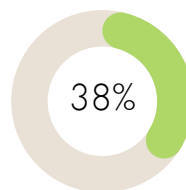
There is now an opportunity to be a pioneer, to start moving beyond the legal, awareness raising, reactive perspective and make neurodiversity and inclusivity a competitive advantage

”

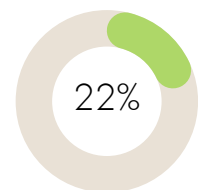
We do a lot of awareness raising activities at a global, and European level. We have Employee Resource Groups and web based training for employees and managers. Within TCS we're now trying to take some more decisive action by running design thinking workshops and setting priorities to set a clear focus on D&I, tailored to the wants and needs of our employees.

Jenny Henckel Anderson, HR Manager, Tata Consultancy Services Sverige AB

”



Address neurodiversity at least within one area



Conversation, awareness raising

The roundtable group concluded that the vast majority of global businesses seem to start with awareness raising activities and by reviewing recruitment processes.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and awareness focused activities seem to be the most common activities/initiatives within organisations in the Nordics.

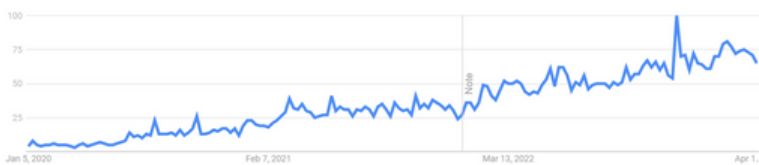
International organisations also seem to experience more and stronger top-level sponsorship, with increasing interest and focus on creating an environment of inclusion overall.

The double awareness conundrum

A sharp rise in interest past five years

Whilst the level of interest has risen sharply, a lack of awareness around the meaning and importance of neurodiversity in business still remains.

This, combined with legal restrictions related to collecting personal data and information related to an individual's diagnosis and/or specific needs, often makes it hard to move forward in a proactive manner.



“

Stringent legal regulations around the processing of sensitive personal data, can be a constraint when trying to identify proactive measures. Gathering data about, what in legal terms, is a psychological disability can be complex and is, in many cases, unlawful. This can, of course, be a hurdle for the employer who is unable to take supportive measures that would otherwise have made work easier for those requiring support.

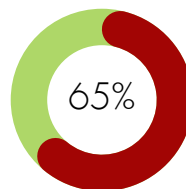
Jenny Welander Wadström, Partner & Head of Employment Practice, Roschier, Attorneys

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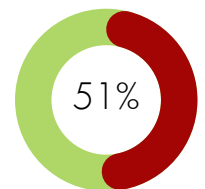
Limited awareness of the meaning and importance of neurodiversity in business

1

Interest is on the increase, but awareness and understanding of neurodiversity by leaders, managers and decisions makers appears to still be low.



Lack of understanding of neurodiversity by managers & decision makers (1)

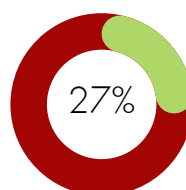


Lack of understanding and knowledge about diagnosis among colleagues (3)

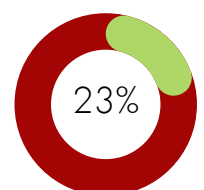
Mental and legal restrictions to share or obtain information

2

Individuals are often reluctant to talk with their employer about their diagnosis. At the same time, employers are legally restricted from asking, yet have a legal duty to make adjustments.



Talk about their diagnosis during interview stage (3)



Tell their employer after employment (3)

An unsupportive & unhealthy work environment

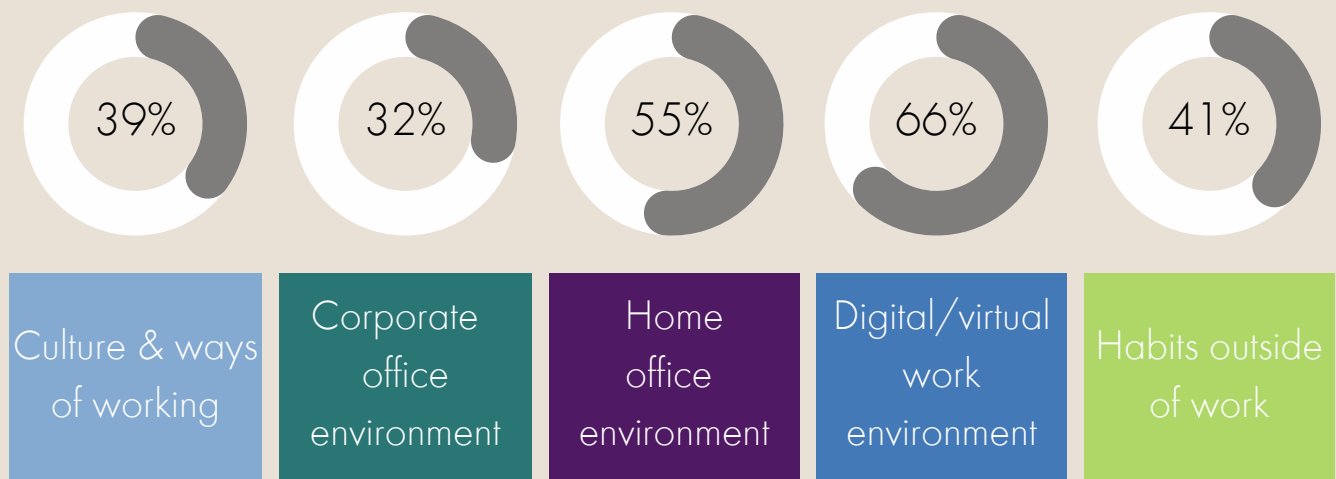
Awareness of what can impact wellbeing and productivity at work is high amongst neurodivergent individuals. However, few of the individuals who identify as neurodivergent consider their work environment to be supportive.

Survey participants were asked about factors and support tools in their corporate office, home and virtual work environment, as well as the habits and behaviours at and outside of work that influence their wellbeing and performance at work.

The absence of factors that can help neurodivergent individuals to thrive is clear. Less than 40% rate their corporate office environment (32%), culture and ways of working (39%) as supportive of their wellbeing and performance at work.

About half (48%) of the respondents have their own well defined strategies for what can make them thrive at and outside of work, but only 41% feel they are able to maintain non-work-related habits and routines.

Are the factors that you need to feel and perform well at work currently present?
The percentage indicate participants giving a positive response.



Interestingly, the "missing factors" are the same that tend to be on top of most lists when it comes to the topic of wellbeing, hybrid work, employee productivity and performance.

Neuroscientific research & lived experience aligned

Awareness amongst neurodivergent individuals of which factors, at and outside of work, that contribute towards their ability to feel well and be productive at work is high.

The responses to our survey illustrate a high level of consensus with regards to the factors that can impact an individual's ability to do their job well, be productive and thrive.

The vast majority would prefer an environment based on trust and openness, where priorities, expectations and plans are clear, with the individual being able to take accountability for their own work, work flexibly in an environment free from noise, distractions and interruptions.

”

Whilst there are clear trends in terms of what's important to the majority, it is critical to understand the diversity of neurodiversity and the importance of identifying individual needs & requirements.

Thorunn Widö, AmbiCare AB

”

How we work and the environment we work in is key

Accountability & flexibility

92%



"Freedom under responsibility, rules of the game, balance between work and free time"

Clarity of expectations, plans, priorities

89%



"Clear plans & expectations, no last minute canceling meetings, help to prioritize"

Openness, trust, supportive attitude

89%



"Open-mindedness, ok to show vulnerability, ask for help, ability to be yourself"

Distraction free: auditory silence

89%



"Silent work space: visually closed spaces, be on my own & not talk during parts of day"

How we sit, move, rest, recover and the visual environment is also important

Movement, at and outside of work

55%



"Regular exercise. Keto diet. Meeting up with friends"

Rest & restorative time

48%



"Possibility to take breaks when I need to and to be able to set my own schedule"

Seating & desk arrangements

42%



"Good equipment (large screen, keyboard, mouse) and also a good chair here too"

Right light & visual silence

36%



"A desk near a wall, where nobody can walk behind me and I can view to the whole place"

Concluding thoughts: how to prioritise?

Back to the original question: What can organisations learn from neuroscience and neurodivergent individuals when shaping the future of work?

The short answer is – a lot. Neuroscientific research has, by now, established a conclusive connection between certain work and lifestyle factors, wellbeing and cognitive performance*.

As humans, we thrive in environments where we feel psychologically safe, trusted by our colleagues, have a sense of belonging, and are surrounded by people with an open, supportive attitude, free from auditory and visual distractions and interrupting elements.

We need to feel accountable, be clear on plans, expectations, priorities, and we require autonomy and flexibility to deliver good work. How we sit, move, rest, and recover is also critical; fundamentally impacting how we generate and consume brain energy.

Yet, as we've seen in the survey data, many of these critical factors are absent in today's work environments and cultures. This is further backed up by research and flow²thrive's own index data point in the same direction: interruptions in our work environment and unhealthy living habits contribute negatively to how employees feel and their potential to perform well.

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Interestingly, the factors proven by research to contribute towards brain health and performance are similar to those that individuals identifying as neurodivergent tend to consider important, and also highlighted in their responses to our survey.

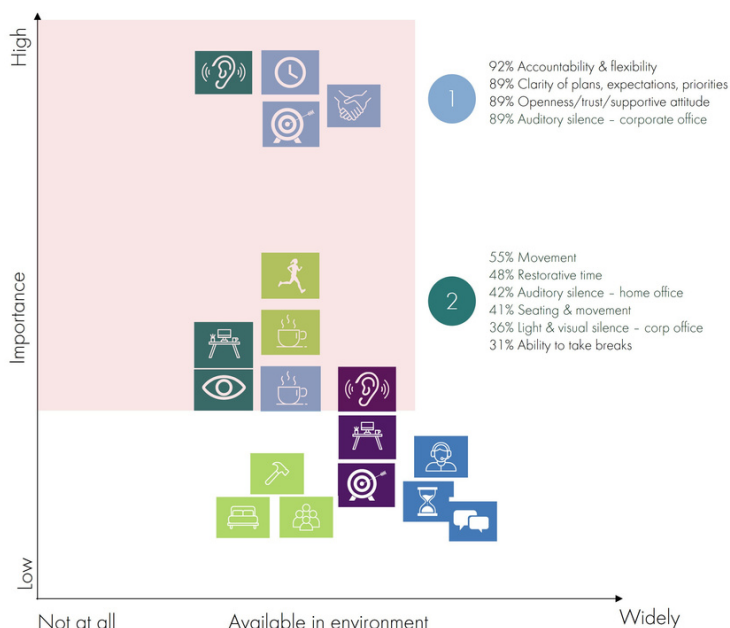
How we work, the environment we work within and our life outside of work are key factors, currently working against our potential to be our best.

Linda Jarnhamn, Founder, flow²thrive

”

How, and the extent to which these factors impact us often differ between individuals.

Prioritisation matrix: survey results



There are, as an example, significant differences in our needs for and how we balance social scenarios, stimulation and silence.

How the brain perceives something as “interrupting” or not, and the severity of the same will also vary greatly between individuals diagnosed with ADHD, autism or dyslexia, or an individual who is suffering from e.g. burnout or depression, and so will the impact on the work performed.

Finding balance between universal and individual work solutions that contribute towards well functioning brains across the entire organisation will be key.

However, as we've seen, this can sometimes be difficult to implement as employees are reluctant to talk about their challenges and needs, and employers are restrained from asking for legal reasons.

This brings us to the question: how to design work environments that work for all?

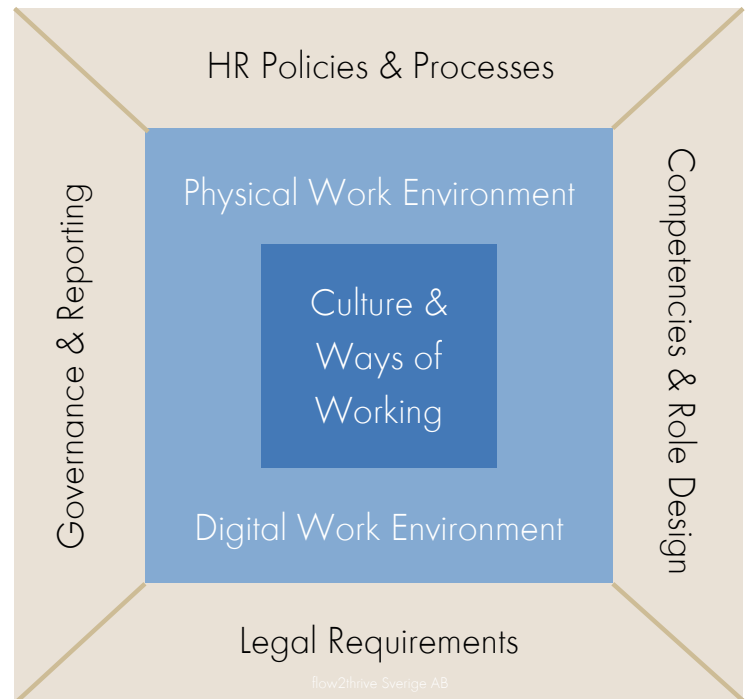
Concluding thoughts: where to start?

Start from the inside out.
Create a work environment where all
brains can thrive.

It's tempting to start in the way that most organisations will have done before you. By initiating awareness raising activities about neurodiversity. By reviewing and changing HR/people policies. By starting to report on activities in the annual or ESG report. This will feel safe: "We've done something, progress has been made, we can report on it".

Instead, do the opposite. Start from the inside out. Create a work environment where all brains can thrive.

Start by focusing on creating an open, honest environment with a high level of curiosity around how the brain works. How we're similar yet different.



“Research confirms: colours such as red, sharp contrasts, movement, conversations and other disturbing sounds often prevalent in office environments can be either distracting, or activating. Designing for focus means limiting distractions and can be implemented differently for different types of work: individual, group work, larger meetings, by building rooms, dividing spaces, equipping workstations or individuals with distraction-reducing tools.

Lukasz Krupinski, Neuro-architect, ÅWL Arkitekter

Instill a sense of urgency to explore and develop more brain friendly places, spaces and ways of working. By creating a common understanding of factors that make our brains thrive, we open up for natural curiosity and conversations around what's important and what we need to change at collective, and individual levels.

Start with the things that are absent/unsatisfactory but matter the most to your employees. The environmental aspects, work habits and behaviours that are not just considered important to them, but also backed up by science to have significant impact on an individual's ability to do their job well.

Create change from the inside out, to provide a solid foundation for all other work going forward

Universal brain awareness: Build awareness of what makes a human brain healthy & work well

Individualised solutions: Focus on what matters, identify individual adjustments/support required

“The most important thing is to create a culture where we respect each other and where it's ok to be who you are. A culture where it is natural to talk about what is difficult and the specific support, or support tools that you need to perform well”

Malin Allard, Unicus

Authors



THORUNN WIDÖ

AmbiCare

Thorunn is one of the co-founders and the inventor of QuietFrames noise cancelling glasses. She has worked in global corporations with supply chain, finance and logistics. She has an extensive knowledge around stress management, ADHD/autism and neuroscience.



MIA SKOOG

AmbiCare

Mia is the second co-founder of QuietFrames noise cancelling glasses. She has 15 years of experience working with employee health initiatives and creating healthy and sustainable workplaces.



LINDA JARNHAMN

flow²thrive

Linda is the founder of flow²thrive, a neuroscience-based, data-driven, employee wellbeing consulting business. With a passion for brain health and cognitive performance optimisation, she strives to transform the world of work by applying neuroscience to the heart of people and culture practices.

Contact us

AmbiCare

ABOUT AMBICARE

AmbiCare helps workplaces to increase well-being and to reduce stress in open spaces. QuietFrames noise cancelling glasses increases people's ability to focus and gives the user more energy for important things in life.

Website

www.ambicare.se

Email Address

info@ambicare.se



ABOUT FLOW2THRIVE

We put the human brain at the center of our work. By using our proprietary neuroscience-based methodology and tools, we work with our clients to help them challenge and change their own thinking and practices; to take a truly human-centric approach to work.

Website

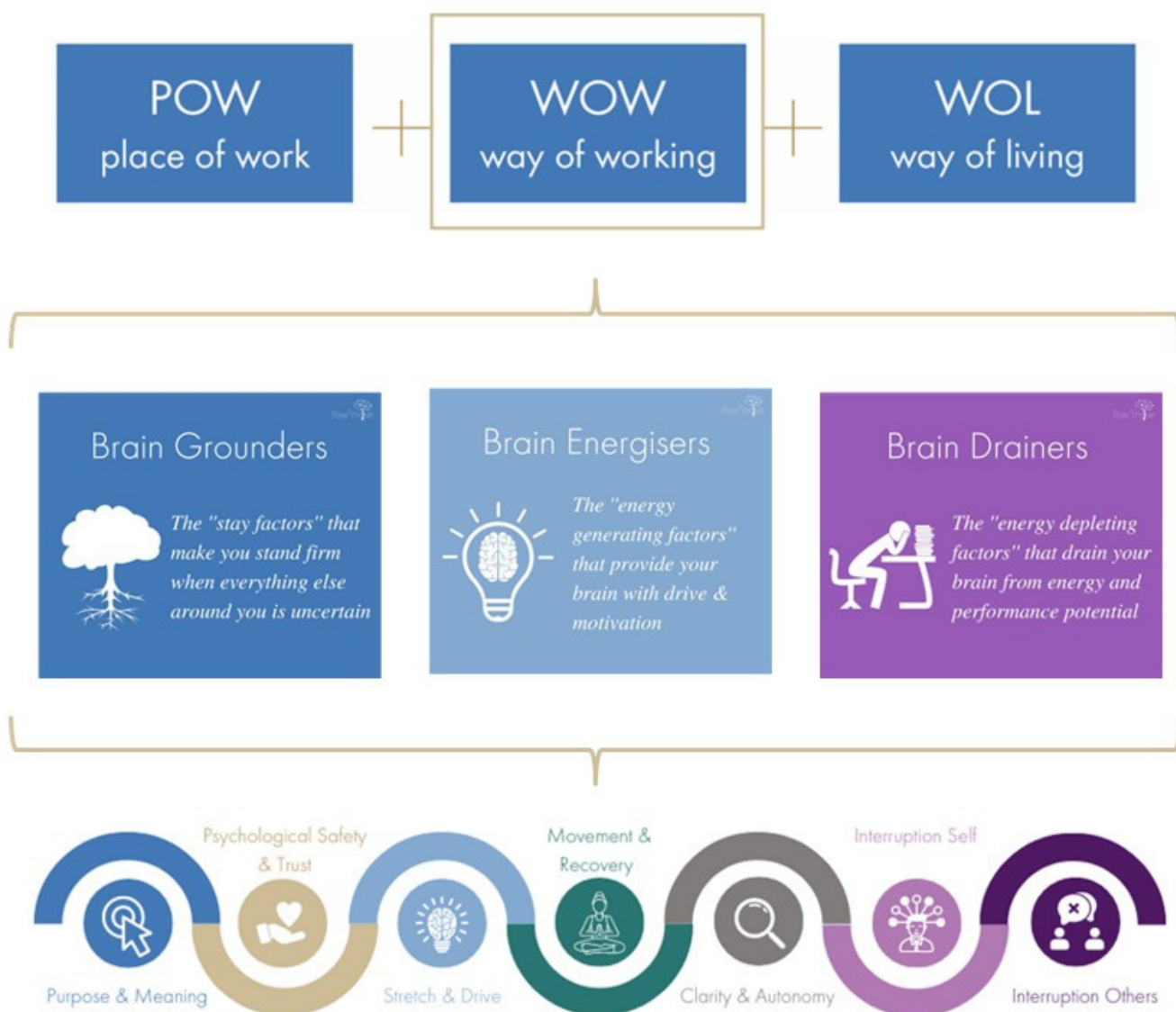
www.flow2thrive.com

Email Address

info@flow2thrive.com

Introducing the flow²thrive Way of Working Model

A science-based, holistic model to start shaping new habits and norms that ultimately will optimise wellbeing, productivity & performance. The model goes to the core of the human brain; what makes it be and work well – irrespective of where you work or what type of work you do. It includes habits which, backed up by neuroscience, will contribute towards brain health and cognitive performance optimisation. The model will help you think about your ways of working, basic fundamentals and micro habits in a new, different way.



With a fundamental shift from time to energy optimisation, the model can serve as a starting point for questioning how we spend our time and energy, individually, across the function and organisation a whole. To do this, we need courage, courage to let go of our old habits and beliefs. Are you ready to get challenged?

Visual noise cancelling® for increased performance and well-being

60 - 80% of the impressions the brain processes every day come from vision. Studies show that visual distractors adds to the burden on the brain and that cognitive performance increases up to 10% when visual noise is reduced. For neurodiverse individuals, a reduced perceptual visual load can impact cognitive performance even more.

Focus is a basic prerequisite for performing at your best. Yet, many employees find that their office does not support their need for being able to work without distractions or being interrupted by colleagues.

This is one of the reasons to why AmbiCare invented QuietFrames noise cancelling glasses.



QuietFrames noise cancelling glasses has a soft shielding that reduces impressions from the periphery and mitigates flickering light from above. Part of the lenses are nearly opaque to provide ultimate shielding.

With QuietFrames you can find "your own space" to focus anywhere in an open, or activity-based office space. When wearing them you show your colleagues that you don't want to be disturbed. The psychological effect when putting them on, puts you in a focus mode and makes you more productive.

“

"It's like closing the door in an open office space."

"The most flexible desk screen on the market."

"I think QuietFrames is a great alternative that makes it possible to stay focused in an open work environment."

"An easy and flexible solution that can make it more attractive to be in the office."

”

QuietFrames
Stay focused. Improve your quality of life.

High level demographic information



103 respondents started survey
 Number of responses per questions vary
 Predominately female (73%)
 Majoriy from Sweden (76%)
 Between 31 - 50 years old
 ADHD/ADD (39%)
 Autism (20%)
 Many identifying/diagnosed with more than one



Roundtable Experts



JENNY WELANDER WADSTRÖM

Partner & Head of Employment Practice,
 Roschier, Attorneys



LUKASZ KRUPINSKI

Neuro-architect, ÅWL Arkitekter



MALIN ALLARD

Recruitment & Quality, Unicus

Sources

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