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Neurodiversity good for business Surrey study shows

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Businesses and policymakers risk missing out on workforce potential by misunderstanding neurodiverse conditions and the biological differences that shape entrepreneurial strengths, according to new research led by the University of Surrey. Instead of considering ADHD, dyslexia and bipolar conditions only as static clinical challenges, researchers build on the existing entrepreneurship literature to argue that these conditions can equip people with unique abilities that drive entrepreneurial action, innovation, and business growth.

In a study, published in Neurodiversity in Entrepreneurship, researchers carried out a systematic review of scientific evidence published between 2011 and 2023, mapping 139 papers and 28 core studies across business and management. Importantly, they focused on using organisational neuroscience evidence, spanning from brain activations to genetic mechanisms linked to ADHD, dyslexia and bipolar conditions.

Researchers found evidence that entrepreneurs with ADHD often show high entrepreneurial alertness and strong performance in innovation and risk taking. Dyslexic entrepreneurs may instead compensate for reading and writing challenges by developing advanced delegation strategies to accelerate business growth. Meanwhile, traits linked to bipolar conditions correlate with creativity, idea generation and willingness to pursue bold ventures.

Dr Sebastiano Massaro, co-author of the study and Associate Professor (Reader) of Organisational Neuroscience at the University of Surrey, said:

“We often behave as if neurodiversity automatically means a deficit. The biological evidence shows something completely different. These conditions span a continuum and there is strong evidence that in entrepreneurial contexts they bring valuable strengths. Simply put, we need to stop treating them as problems to be fixed.”

The research advocate for a shift in how businesses support programmes and employers view

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neurodiversity. It argues for business environments that value difference rather than seeking to normalise it and calls for practical organisational strategies that actively harness neurodiverse strengths. The study also highlights policy implications, noting that entrepreneurial settings can provide pathways to work and equality for people who are often miscategorised as unemployable.

Dr Sebastiano Massaro continued:

"To the best of our knowledge, we are presenting the first grounded explanation of why neurodiversity matters in business by drawing a direct connection between neural mechanisms and entrepreneurial behaviour. If universities, industry and governments overlook how these biological foundations impact entrepreneurship, they might miss valuable capability hidden in plain sight."

Surrey University

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