



Supercharge Your Mission:

Harnessing the Brainpower of Neurodiversity

Eleccion LLC © 2023 Proprietary
All Rights Reserved. Any unauthorized review, use,
disclosure or distribution is prohibited.

Eleccion, LLC | Authored by Rumbidzai Mufuka, PhD; Sonya Holt, contributor | May 2023
info@eleccionllc.com | eleccionllc.com

Executive Summary

“It’s not that we need to form new organizations. It’s simply that we have to awaken to new ways of thinking. It is time to create the new models that have in them the complexity that makes the older systems obsolete.”

Don Edward Beck

Competition for talent is only getting more difficult, particularly in the DC Metro Area. With Amazon, Boeing, Microsoft and others expanding in Northern Virginia, all organizations must do more than business as usual to attract and retain the best talent for the mission. And the best talent for tomorrow’s mission doesn’t look exactly like the talent for yesterday’s mission. In fact, today’s challenges require new, radical, and divergent ways of thinking. And study after study demonstrates the best solutions come from teams with individuals that see the world in different ways. This neurodiverse workplace has a mix of individuals whose unique strengths and talents can collectively improve performance outcomes through the practice of Neurodiversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (nDEIA).

For more than 10 years, companies like Microsoft, Accenture, and EY have developed targeted initiatives to attract neurodivergent talent to enhance organizational diversity. These programs are specifically designed to address challenges in the hiring process, support strengths-based performance, and foster inclusion. Inclusion means more than diversity - it means creating an equitable environment where every employee has what they need to best contribute to an ever-evolving mission. Our workforce has come to expect this: 2017 Deloitte research found that 80% of respondents said evidence of inclusion is important when choosing an employer, and 39% said they would leave for a more inclusive employer.

Can your talent development lifecycle attract and retain neurodivergent people? Is your cultural infrastructure ready to handle talent with higher expectations for inclusion and accessibility?

Envisioning and designing an organization that can attract and retain such talent is a complex endeavor. Organizational Experimentation™ (OrgX) offers a robust, proactive, iterative structure for implementing fundamental organizational change. Persistent and exploratory in nature, it allows for constant insertion of new ideas, rapid innovation, and intentional scaling to the enterprise. The emphasis shifts from implementing a singular “right answer” to developing an organization that continually evolves and gets out of its own way to solve challenges at speed and at scale. The OrgX framework is a proven model for transformation that can be applied to assessment, recruitment, team building, and broader nDEIA goals for a neurodiverse workforce that meets mission needs.

We cannot continue to employ the same talent development methods within the same cultural infrastructure and expect different results. Simply put...new ways of thinking are required to attract new ways of thinking about new challenges. The mission demands it - it’s time to **#SuperchargeYourMission**.

Tapping into an Abundance of Talent

Evolving technical challenges across private, public, and non-profit sectors require talent that brings new solutions and rapid innovation to keep pace with change. We face **increasing competition for that talent**, and our clients, shareholders, and **employees expect a demonstrable commitment to diversity that is also inclusive**. Leaders struggle to meet these demands and will often attempt well-intended, but superficial approaches to these challenges: increasing referral bonuses, creating employee-resource groups, sponsoring volunteer activities for example. There is nothing wrong with these kinds of efforts, but what if there was an opportunity to tap into a bigger, more dynamic pool of talent ready to tackle complex challenges, while also enhancing an organizational culture of inclusion? Wouldn't that be worth pursuing?

Attracting, recruiting, and embracing all forms of workforce diversity is likely to have a positive impact on our **ability to build a dynamic talent pipeline that can innovate rapidly to meet the mission**. Many organizations have implemented top-down diversity and inclusion initiatives along with culture change programs to improve (for example) recruitment or career development. Yet, progress is slow. According to a 2023 GAO report, the intelligence community (IC) has fallen short of government benchmarks. Turnover for employees with self-identified disabilities is high - many leave after two years.¹ Taken together, the IC is missing out on a range of talent, including neurodivergent employees. Data on this population is not captured broadly or consistently in the government, but an estimated 20% of the US population falls into a neurodivergent category. Despite having a range of unique analytical skills and technical abilities, thirty to forty percent are unemployed, or 8x the average. This untapped talent has the potential to offer new, radical, and divergent ways of solving mission critical problems, but to access it, an organization must be willing to shed traditional ways of building teams and create a culture that embraces and enables all people.

Recent research on autism-spectrum disorder and dyslexia suggests that neurodivergent individuals can excel at specific tasks, particularly those that require **attention to detail, pattern recognition, data analysis, and innovative problem-solving abilities**.

Simply streamlining reasonable accommodations and instituting training on inclusivity are not enough to close existing gaps. Without a shift in our mindset, an integrated strategic plan, and meaningful culture changes, an organization risks disappointing new recruits, alienating the existing workforce, and leaving managers more frustrated than inspired. A neurodiverse workforce is only as successful as the supporting infrastructure allows.

Diverse Thought Brings New Solutions & Rapid Innovation

Neurodiversity describes the idea that everyone experiences and interacts with the world around them in different ways and there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving. Differences outside the "norm" are not necessarily deficits. Although the term can refer to the diversity of all people, neurodiversity and neurodivergence are often used in the context of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as ADHD or learning differences.²

¹ GAO-23-106254 Federal Workforce: Strengthening DEIA Federal Workforce: Strengthening Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-106254.pdf>)

² Neurodiversity refers to the concept that differences in brain functioning within the human population are normal. People with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and other neurological differences are collectively referred to as neurodivergent individuals.

Activities to recruit neurodivergent or differently abled talent are not new, even in government, but only recently are the benefits of a neurodiverse workforce beginning to be understood in “white-collar” or tech roles. There are innovative examples of companies of all sizes that are embracing neurodiversity for a competitive advantage. Organizations as small as Virginia-based Enabled Intelligence (AI training, 25+ employees, founded in 2020) and as large as Germany-based SAP (enterprise software, 109k employees, operating for 50 years) have created or redesigned programs specifically to recruit and integrate neurodivergent individuals. These examples demonstrate that organizations of any size and at any stage of maturity can find a way to make neurodiversity an enduring and key component to fulfilling their mission.

Success sits at the intersection of organizational maturity and a neurodiversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (nDEIA) journey. It isn’t possible to set a goal for one without understanding the other. Rather, we must assess an organization’s ability to communicate, implement, and manage change alongside their programs to support a diverse and equitable workplace.

So, where is an organization to start? There are key points of leverage that accelerate an organization’s progress towards their goal by integrating nDEIA into all aspects of fulfilling their mission because it improves outcomes, not only because it’s the right thing to do or a legal requirement. These areas of focus include: **organizational and nDEIA assessment, culture transformation, training, and mission integration.** We’ll briefly summarize the OrgX approach to each of these, with additional details in the appendix.

OrgX Approach and Implementation

Organizational Experimentation™(OrgX) is designed to address the challenge of how to affect fundamental change in traditional organizations. Developed with a systems engineering mindset, and based on more than 20 years of experience in IC and commercial environments, it addresses the shortcomings of traditional change initiatives and focuses on developing an adept learning organization. It does this through constant insertion of new ideas, rapid experimentation, and embracing fundamental concepts of innovation, design thinking, performance improvement, and agile methodologies.



At a high level, the OrgX framework allows us to **observe** trends and be inspired by successes and experiments surrounding us, **assess** our current state, organizational opportunities and needs, **envision** what might be possible, **incubate** ideas in a hub ready for change, **iterate** quickly to learn and grow, and ultimately **scale** robust ideas to the larger enterprise. OrgX supplants traditional strategic initiatives and change management efforts with an evolutionary framework for innovation.

Applying OrgX to Assessments

The OrgX framework provides a systematic approach for assessing nDEIA and organizational maturity and improving an organization’s innovative capacity to make transformational change in both areas simultaneously. It’s important to assess the organization and its nDEIA journey together because strengths or weaknesses in one inevitably affect the other. The framework includes several phases, each with its

own focus and set of activities. In the assessment phase, the nDEIA effort primarily leverages the Observe and Assess Phases of the OrgX framework.

- ✓ **Observe:** This phase is all about bringing insights from outside the organization to influence and inspire the nDEIA work. It can be similar to traditional “benchmarking” but is more organic and becomes an ongoing practice within the organization. By folding “Observation Time” into regular business rhythms, we continue to learn, grow, and evolve.
- ✓ **Assess:** This includes a review of the organization's mission, vision, and values, as well as an analysis of its structure, processes, culture of inclusion and equity, and resources related to hiring, talent investment, and performance assessments. This may also include a review of hiring practices such as orientation, interviews, testing, and communications. This goal is to understand the current state and uncover insights into both challenges and bright spots.

By applying OrgX at the assessment phase, we not only get a snapshot of existing practices, we lay the foundation for an iterative approach to change where organizational culture meets nDEIA practices.

OrgX and Cultural Transformation

Beyond the initial assessment, successful implementation of nDEIA objectives requires ongoing cultural transformation. The OrgX framework provides an enduring iterative change approach through the Envision, Incubate, Iterate, and Scale phases.

- ✓ **Envision:** This phase allows stakeholders across the organization to participate in developing creative solutions to the challenges and goals developed in the assessment phase. The goal is to establish stakeholder buy-in for a range of potential solutions to the organization's challenges.
- ✓ **Incubate:** In this phase we try our ideas and see what works and what we can learn. This involves testing and refining ideas, prototypes, and experiments in a safe and supportive environment, where failure is seen as an opportunity to learn and improve.
- ✓ **Iterate:** The next phase of the OrgX framework involves iterating quickly to learn and grow. This involves a continuous feedback loop, where the organization tests and refines its ideas based on feedback from stakeholders and other sources. It includes regular check-ins and progress reviews, as well as ongoing data collection and analysis to track the organization's performance.
- ✓ **Scale:** The last phase of the OrgX framework scales robust ideas to the larger enterprise. This involves replicating successful ideas across the organization and leveraging them to drive growth and innovation. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation ensure ideas continue to deliver value over time.

By following the phases of the OrgX framework, organizations can develop a shared understanding of their challenges and opportunities related to nDEIA efforts, generate creative solutions, and implement them in a way that aligns with goals for innovation. Even with a proven model and a robust implementation approach, the task of transforming an entrenched legacy organization is substantial. Some additional considerations for implementing OrgX for culture change in an IC environment include:

- **Leadership and Communication:** As with any large-scale change initiative, leadership buy-in is essential at all levels. In the case of diversifying the talent pool, the business case should be self-evident, embedded, and internalized; not based on goodwill or compliance. Communication about the work ahead should begin with direct engagement at all levels across multiple channels, providing additional opportunities for engagement, new ideas, and initiatives, not just updates.

Leaders should reiterate the mission critical need, foster enablement, and demonstrate how meeting nDEIA goals has improved outcomes.

- **“Change Ready” Hubs:** Beyond leadership vision and buy-in, it is essential that the first hubs for OrgX implementation are culturally receptive and appropriately structured. Culturally, the organization or team should be open to innovation, recognize that structural functions are important to mission success, and have an ability for self-reflection. Teams and leaders with a history of recruiting or supporting neurodivergent talent might be good candidates, or groups with a reputation for thinking outside the box.
- **Rigid processes and systems:** The government is hard-wired for hierarchy and bureaucracy. The most well-known and applicable example is the “Accommodations Dilemma,” which requires a person to formally identify as disabled to access accommodations.³ The result is people who hide differences to avoid stigmatization and forgo support at the expense of their mental health and performance. While it’s too much to take on all these processes and systems at once, we might “detach” the process from the desired outcome while working for holistic change. For example, a mission center may expand its professional development budget to include more wide-ranging requests related to improving workspaces.

According to employers participating in a 2019 survey published by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy, 56% of accommodations cost absolutely nothing to make, while the rest typically cost only \$500 per employee with a disability.

As a community, we don’t have to change everything all at once. But we do need to do something soon, or we will continue to struggle to meet our mission needs and much needed talent will remain on the sidelines.

OrgX and Training

A consequential step on the nDEIA journey is moving beyond compliance, or what is legally required. This may apply to employee accommodations requests, interviews, or promotion panels. Typical training teaches what you *cannot* do (i.e. ask interview questions related to protected classes), but does not usually explain what you *can* do to support candidates (i.e. send interview questions 24 hours in advance). Without much bureaucratic red-tape, a manager *can* ask an employee what environmental changes they may need to support their performance, like softer lighting, security-approved noise canceling headphones, or a desk away from the entrance. A manager *can* institute 360-degree feedback to understand how employees may prefer written instructions, notes after a meeting, and regular check-ins. These are all examples of moving away from an “accommodations” mindset and towards “universal design” that provides support for everyone to perform at their best.

Applying the OrgX process to an assessment of compliance-based training would uncover opportunities for improving every stage of the talent development lifecycle, from recruitment to retention. With a shift in perspective, a revamp of job descriptions, interviews, and hiring practices can focus on what is possible to grow the pool of talent, rather than what isn’t. Testing new approaches, revising, and implementing – always with a focus on shared goals moves an organization beyond compliance to a strategic and integrated understanding that nDEIA principles are critical to fulfill the mission.

³ Weinbaum, Cortney, Omair Khan, Teresa D. Thomas, and Bradley D. Stein, Neurodiversity and National Security: How to Tackle National Security Challenges with a Wider Range of Cognitive Talents. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1875-1.html. Also available in print form.

OrgX and Mission Integration

Organizations don't need to wait for the perfect infrastructure or redesigned policies to benefit from neurodiverse talent. In fact, there's no time to lose when it comes to capitalizing on the best talent to meet critical mission needs. *'Future of Work'* models, whether in the IC or elsewhere, likely will include a partnership that connects neurodivergent talent on the outside to projects on the inside, with liaison support to connect the two sides.

Proof Points: Dynamic approach applied to data annotation.

- Turnaround time reduced from 6-12mos to 1mo.
- 10-20% higher accuracy and fewer false positives.
- Client access to a flexible team that can spin up on unique or uncommon taskings quickly.
- A dedicated training team to translate requirements into accurate taskings for projects.

Think of a liaison as a bridge between where you are now and where you'd like to be in the future, allowing an organization to reap the benefits of neurodiversity today. Companies like Enabled Intelligence (EI) are helping to fill that gap by connecting the IC to the external talent needed for mission critical work. To successfully connect the

high side (classified) mission to outside talent, we need an integration approach that understands both worlds. Eleccion has successfully built the bridge that translates high side requirements into instructions for outside teams and supports integration into data models. The relationship also works in reverse, with Eleccion helping EI make its capabilities known to the mission owner.

This powerful partnership requires adequate lead time for problem identification and stakeholder discovery, especially if an organization lacks in-house expertise on artificial intelligence, machine learning, and programming. Eleccion fills that gap in technical expertise by working closely with an IC program manager and a change ready team that keeps open channels of communications and allows visibility into workflows. As quickly as the problems change, so do the solutions - both sides must be nimble and ever evolving. An OrgX assessment of readiness for change and nDEIA implementation can reveal how best to build this bridge to faster and more accurate solutions to hard problems.

OrgX Benefits

Applying the OrgX framework to transformational change in support of nDEIA efforts will result in:

- **Innovation for the Mission:** The most successful and innovative organizations will more easily attract, recruit, and support the right talent at the right time to outperform the competition. Diverse and inclusive cognitive contributions will produce more accurate solutions, more quickly, and in direct alignment with mission needs. In 2020, JPMorgan's Autism-at-Work program noted neurodivergent employees made fewer errors and were 90% to 140% more productive than others.
- **Expanded Talent Pool:** Nearly 1 in 20 people are neurodivergent and 40 companies in the Neurodiversity @ Work Roundtable (e.g. General Dynamics, Optum, and Lockheed Martin) have committed to connecting with this talent because they recognize their unique strengths offer a competitive edge. In addition to a more productive workforce, members have reported higher retention rates, job satisfaction, and attendance among neurodivergent employees.
- **Inclusive Environment for Everyone:** Expectations for strategic integration and demonstrated success of nDEIA initiatives are higher than ever, across all stakeholders, not just the target employees. Why? Because an inclusive culture benefits everyone. Leaders who have built successful teams with neurodivergent talent are examples of what is possible when what an individual needs to thrive and contribute to the mission is prioritized over process or compliance. **#SuperchargeYourMission**

Appendix

I. Talent Acquisition vs Talent Investment

Traditional Talent Acquisition Approach	OrgX + Talent Investment Approach
Organizational Preparation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Top-down mandate to hit targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Holistic needs assessment, from recruitment to retention ▪ “Beyond EEOC” training for managers and teams
Recruitment Process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Narrow Outreach ▪ Heavy reliance on referrals ▪ Overly specific or vague job descriptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Targeted and Expansive Outreach ▪ Job Description Tailored to Skills & Performance
Interview Process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hypothetical focus ▪ Legally required accommodations only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment of relevant skills ▪ Realistic job-related questions ▪ Flexible and conversational ▪ Advance preparation aka no “surprises”
Orientation Process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One option for participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multiple options for participation (i.e. in-person, virtual, hybrid, small or large group) ▪ “Environmental accommodations” welcomed
Performance Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on individual performance ▪ Appraisals by hierarchical supervisor ▪ Few, vague, or no metrics or measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on team performance and contributions ▪ Internal and external peer-review processes for individual performance ▪ Clear metrics and measures for performance
Professional Development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sporadic training for new projects ▪ Opportunities upon request 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing training for new projects ▪ Opportunities shared widely ▪ All accommodations considered ▪ Capitalizing on strengths

II. OrgX Assessment Sample Workplan

Phase	Description	Outcomes
Observe		
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Observation Time: prioritize inspiration, learning, and exposure to new ideas. Leadership buy-in is essential! Establish a benchmark metric for Observation time (~5%). Identify likely places to find new ideas: commercial equivalents? Similar skillsets/disciplines? Training/Self-management experts? Consider field trips: Morning Star, W. L. Gore, Zappos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-understood expectations of Observation Time and metrics Observation target list – inventory of places to look for inspiration
Sustainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support ongoing Observation Time by delivering new ideas/content. Establish supporting Observation experiences: “field trips” to relevant sites, artistic/creative experiences. Target 5% of staff time on average. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing infusion of new ideas. Organization is known as a resource for what’s on the horizon. Common lexicon for innovation
Assess		
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform initial assessment of the organization, to include culture and readiness for change; stakeholders, innovation engines, risk tolerance, processes, “sacred cows”, bright spots, etc. Define boundaries of OrgX Greenhouse: Where should we start? What do we control and what don’t we? How do we manage our interfaces? Do we have sufficient diversity of thought/perspectives? Develop connections with internal stakeholders. These will be places to experiment and scale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder Register Innovation Heat Map OrgX CONOPs document Defined Roles (X-Team)
Sustainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Periodic Assessment Sessions: What has changed? Where are we making progress? Are our assumptions still valid? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated Assessment documents
Envision		
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an understanding of how experiments are defined – specific, actionable, repeatable, and achievable. Establish meeting rhythm/processes to define and vet hypotheses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiment Template
Sustainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defined processes/meetings to discuss, vet and agree on hypotheses to be tested and receive feedback on requirements, structure, etc. Innovation management support may be in-person (e.g. facilitated, creative meetings) or virtual (e.g. Brightidea tool) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vetted, defined experiments with regular input from team
Incubate		
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify role of Experiment Leads and train leads on expectations of growth monitoring and reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common understanding of experiment approach
Sustainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Experiment Leads in fostering and sheltering their experiments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher probability of experiment success
Iterate		

Phase	Description	Outcomes
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish regular status review for ongoing experiments: progress, growth, obstacles ▪ Implement decision framework for iteration: What's working? What is not? Where do we go next? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experiment Health Template
Sustainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitor experiment dashboard: What is underway? How is it going? Do we need to iterate? ▪ Review completed experiments to identify next steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Blue: Scale as-is ○ Green: Mature it ○ Yellow: Evolve to a new hypothesis ○ Red: Dead end – kill it! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dashboard Review ▪ Experiment Results ▪ Blue Experiments move to Scale Phase ▪ Green and Yellow enter Envision phase again
Scale		
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish the definition of scaling: automation, training, accessibility, policy, exposure, transition, etc. ▪ Establish templates for Launch plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create open minded thinking about how we can affect the enterprise ▪ Launch Plan Template
Sustainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create launch plan for Blue experiments – What are the next steps for this idea? How will we support it over time? Where will it take root outside OrgX? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Launch Plan for each Blue Experiment

To Supercharge your mission contact:

Craig Ridley, co-founder + enabling partner
craig@eleccionllc.com
703 307 1508

Deanna Doan, co-founder + enabling partner
deanna@eleccionllc.com
703 505 5542