The Measure Pod: #68 The untapped potential of neurodiverse talent in data and tech (with Marc Crawley @ Diversita)

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### Intro

[00:00:15] **Dara:** On today's episode, we're joined by Marc Crawley from Diversita, who talks to us about neurodiversity in the tech space and his work in recruitment on both the candidate and employer side working with neurodivergent, tech professionals.

[00:00:29] **Daniel:** And there's a bunch of links in the show notes for this episode, so be sure to check it out, including links to Diverita's website where you can see all of their webinars, resources, and links off to everything that Marc mentions.

[00:00:40] **Daniel:** Enjoy.

[00:00:41] **Dara:** Enjoy. Hello and welcome back to The Measure Pod, a podcast for people in the analytics world to talk about all things data and analytics related. I'm Dara, I'm CEO at Measurelab.

[00:00:52] **Daniel:** And I'm Dan, I'm an analytics consultant and trainer at Measurelab.

[00:00:55] **Dara:** We're also joined today by a guest, who is Marc Crawley from Diversita. So Marc, first and foremost, welcome to The Measure Pod. Thanks for agreeing to come on and talk to Dan and I.

[00:01:06] **Marc:** Thank you. No, I'm really, really pleased to be on here. It's yeah, it's a first for me, so thanks for having me.

[00:01:11] **Dara:** No, you're more than welcome and we'll be nice, honestly. And we always kick things off, instead of us doing a really bad job of introducing guests, we put the pressure on them and say, look, introduce yourself. So, for the benefit of our listeners, could you give us, in as much or as little detail as you want, a little bit about your journey?

[00:01:28] **Marc:** Where do I start? Well, I've worked in technology recruitment for around 17 years, actually coming up to 18 years now, and up until Christmas 2021, I was working for a large corporation, and I'd worked for another large organisation prior to that as well in various leadership positions. But I'd sort of come to a decision really and a realisation that I wanted to do something that I had a bit more personal passion for. So while I'd built quite a good career within technology recruitment and that space, I was keen to move into an area that I felt I could contribute maybe a little bit more positively to.

[00:02:05] **Marc:** My personal story around neurodiversity is that my son is autistic. He's 15 now, and he was diagnosed when he was 3. As he was getting towards the end of his educational journey in particular, and we could start to see some obstacles that we were going to have to navigate. That combined with once he's navigated those obstacles, he'll go into the workplace. And working with hundreds and hundreds of companies over the years, particularly enterprise size organisations of a thousand people plus, I could see some really, really prohibitive interview and application processes for most candidates, to be honest, within technology, but particularly for neurodivergent applicants.

[00:02:44] **Marc:** So, we wanted to do something that combined a personal passion to help Thomas' future and to contribute to the neurodiversity community, but whilst staying in the lane of professionalism that we had. So myself and my wife, I mean when I say we, I'm talking about myself and my wife and my oldest son. So we are literally a family organisation. We decided to start Diversita and what we actually do is we work with predominantly experienced neurodivergent technologists. And so if you are someone who identifies as neurodivergent, and you work in technology, that's the candidate pool that we try and assist and try to help with as well.

[00:03:19] **Marc:** We're an agency that's dedicated to that, and we're the only dedicated technology recruitment agency that focuses on neurodiversity. Adjacent to that, we offer audits of interviewing application processes, which is my particular passion to try and make sure we try and improve this for companies. And then we also offer awareness sessions for companies as well, and particularly people leaders, talent acquisition and people in human resources to try and make sure they at least, at the very least, have a conversational understanding around neurodiversity, which I think is really lacking in this space. So that was, when did we start? April, 2022. So we're in month 10 now, and it's been a bit of a whirlwind yeah. We dragged into loads of different areas, one of the key parts that we really enjoy working with is our social impact side. So my wife Julia looks after that and we have a mentoring program at the moment where we help young neurodivergent technologists and partner them up with experienced neurodivergent technologists, so we've got their own journey. So yeah, there's a lot going on and yeah, we're really excited about what the next couple of years would look like as well.

[00:04:22] **Dara:** Amazing, I'm really looking forward to digging in, but I'm going to try and control myself and just pull back a little bit first. Just one thing I wanted to say straight off the bat is like, the whole idea of doing something kind of purpose focused, often people have to move away from their area of expertise. Whereas you manage to kind of use your vast experience to kind of pile that into something that you genuinely care about which is amazing, because obviously you had built up that extensive career in tech recruitment. You haven't had to completely move away from that to do something more purpose driven.

[00:04:48] **Marc:** It's weird you say that, that was the main, I wouldn't say concern we had, but I'd be lying if I said that I don't sometimes suffer from imposter syndrome like a lot of people will start a brand new business. But equally so this is a community which means, and quite rightly so a lot to a lot of people, right. There's a lot of things that need to change and we want to be part of that positive change as well, but we don't just want to do it from an idealistic perspective. We'll be coming with all of this passion without having, so practical solutions of what we try and define ourselves as at Diversita as well. It's all very well me wanting to try and do some positive things. But if I've got the opportunity to use my expertise, I feel not only is it an opportunity, it's an obligation right from my side to do that as well. So again, I'll sort of start to go into sounding too idealistic now, right? But it, but it is genuinely where we come from on this as well. Because trust me, there's a lot of other recruitment businesses I could have set up, right? But this is definitely something that we are really, really keen to, to make sure that it gets some traction as well.

[00:05:46] **Marc:** And I think one of the most important parts is the community we're going into is very collaborative as well. So we had to reverse that mentality a little bit when we entered into this. And we work with a lot of other recruitment organisations to try and upskill them as well. So again, I think that shows that we've come into this with the right intentions as well.

### Topic

[00:06:02] **Dara:** And sorry, I said I was going to hold back and not get too into it. So we should probably start at the top. And could you just help us with a kind of definition of what is neurodiversity or what would, what would lead somebody to identify as a neurodivergent candidate?

[00:06:16] **Marc:** Yeah, absolutely. So the concept around neurodiversity is relatively recent and without getting too much into the science around it, it's a term that was coined predominantly by a psychologist called Judy Singer, where it's ultimately, it's around a different way of thinking. So if you are autistic, dyslexic, ADHD, I have dyscalculia, dyspraxia, tourettes. It's not necessarily seen as something to be fixed or something to be repaired or necessarily a disability. Now there's some conflicts around whether it's a disability, but that's predominantly about the way support is given in the UK as well. But the idea around neurodiversity is that it's simply a different way if you processing information. Now, because of that, it can sometimes create what we call, it's like a spiky profile.

[00:07:07] **Marc:** What a spiky profile means is that if you think of most, what we call neurotypical individuals, they will have quite a well-rounded set of strengths and challenges within the way they operate on a day-to-day basis. Neurodivergent individuals tend to have, for the most part, an inch-wide mile-deep series of strengths that are offset sometimes by challenges as well. So if you imagine that circle, there's some key strengths popping out there, but there's also some challenges there. So neurodiversity is as I've mentioned already, it's not something that necessarily needs to be fixed, and it's really positive to see in the neurodiversity community at the moment as well that they're really trying to push the fact that companies should embrace neurodivergent applicants. Embrace these strengths while making sure they also understand that there are challenges that need to be accommodated.

[00:07:58] **Marc:** If you get your head around that quite quickly, what you can do then is create a really diverse team, with a diverse range of strengths and challenges, and this is why, particularly in certain instances, it lends itself quite well to certain areas in technology. There's sometimes a bit of a cliche detachment to, for example, autistic candidates and technology, but it's not necessarily always the case, but there are some strengths that autistic individuals tend to show that can sometimes lend itself quite well to certain roles within technology as well. So that's the term neurodiversity. The more general phrase is, so neurodivergent tends to be when you're talking about an individual, so you would say an individual is neurodivergent, you would say a group is neurodiverse as well. So grammatically it's important for people to start to understand and upskill as well.

[00:08:45] **Daniel:** So Marc, it's probably no secret that the world of data analytics and the stuff that me and Dara work in has a tendency to attract a higher number or higher percentage maybe than an average industry or organisation of neurodiverse people. I'd love to get your input around, you know, why do you think that is and how does that happen per industry? How does an industry have like a way of attracting certain types of people or maybe precluding some people from being able to enter?

[00:09:08] **Marc:** So I suppose the first part of question is the representation of neurodiverse individuals within technology. Now, I'd be lying if I said there are a lot of stats out there to support the fact that there is a high percentage as well. So just to give some context, around 20% of the UK is considered neurodivergent as well. So it's, it's a really, but that's a cross, obviously, a range of different neuro diversities based on some very, very limited studies that we've done at Diversa. So we would say it's probably closer to 30% within technology and probably a slightly higher percentage within what we call bottom up thinking roles. So data analysis, anything that requires a foundational level of detail as well. Again, this is not anything I don't believe to do with the fact that, I suppose the cliched attachment to computers and autistic individuals sitting in their bedroom just programming.

[00:09:58] **Marc:** It's more around, again the cognitive strength of the spiky profile that lend itself to that type of analytical behaviour as well. So I don't want to get too much into the psychology, but it's probably the best way to try and understand why more people who consider themselves neurodivergent are attracted to technology, and particularly in that area, in those areas. However, very conversely, there are a lot of candidates that are dyslexic, ADHD, that will be considered top-down thinkers, so tend to look at, they tend to be very, very strong at solutions outside of the detail. So looking at creativity, looking at wide strategy within areas, looking at pattern recognition and areas like that. So anything that's outside of bottom-up thinking or the detail it can lend itself to different parts of neurodiversity. And this is why such an interesting subject because there are so many different strengths associated with the different groups within that as well.

[00:10:52] **Marc:** Now you have to remind me, Daniel, of the second part of question now.

[00:10:55] **Daniel:** I was just thinking around how does an industry attract different levels of neurodiversity? Like how does that happen? If there's like a UK average, then why is that not potentially evenly represented through marketing, through tech, through customer service and things like that.

[00:11:09] **Marc:** So again, it comes down really to, I believe the strengths that you look for within a technology area. They tend to be quite siloed roles within certain spaces. I'm not an expert in data analysis, but it tends to be a role which has again, quite a defined focus around it. And I think those parameters are quite attractive, again, particularly to autistic applicants as well. Roles outside of that, that don't require that level of detail are also very attractive as well. We had a [recent blog](https://www.diversita.co.uk/latest-diversita-news) shared by a guy called Anthony Peacock, who's dyslexic and he has always struggled grammatically, always struggled with some of the more well known challenges around dyslexia.

[00:11:45] **Marc:** But when it comes to C++, and when it comes to a programming language, it made sense because it wasn't, didn't have the confines and restrictions of the type of language that was being taught in schools, etc. So again, it can have different attractions for different people I believe.

[00:11:59] **Dara:** So Marc, you've got a huge amount of experience working in the kind of broader recruitment sector within tech, and now you're specialising in working with your neurodivergent candidates and helping employers to be more prepared to hire these candidates and support them. So what are some of the differences in terms of your process now compared to how it was when you worked in the kind of previous recruitment roles that you were in.

[00:12:21] **Marc:** So I think the difference is they're quite stark on both sides, right? So if we look at candidates for a start, so if I looked at what my previous organisations would do to attract candidates and to discuss with candidates and discuss them, role suitability with candidates, etc. For the most part, there was zero to incredibly little amount of consideration given around any adjustments that may be needed through our process or any accommodations for any challenges, needs or, or anything at all.

[00:12:54] **Marc:** But when I also used to work with organisations and companies, there was for the most part, again, never really a drive to look at a diverse range of candidates other than perhaps gender, which particularly in the last five years started to be more prevalent. So the key difference now is, first of all, the candidate pool that we are working with. We are an organisation that when a candidate approaches us or if we send a candidate to a client, the candidate has had a conversation with us around their neurodiversity and their neurodiversity journey as well. And that level of transparency and honesty is a great foundation to build a really, really good trusting relationship with a candidate. So if, for example, we're working with a candidate who's dyslexic, we would've had that conversation about the strengths and challenges associated with individuals with dyslexia.

[00:13:40] **Marc:** We would also talk around any accommodations or adjustments that they ideally would need during the interview and application process. And then we would also have a conversation about if you are onboarded somewhere, again in an ideal world, what would you need? What would you ideally need for an organisation to see the best of you. The only challenge here, if, I'll be really honest, actually not the only challenge, but one of the main challenges here is this concept called disclosure. Where candidates who are neurodivergent can be hesitant about talking quite openly around their neurodiversity. And that's normally to do with the fact that they haven't had the opportunity to talk about it in the workplace before. They find it may be prohibitive in their careers journey. So we try and be that, I suppose that link, like any recruitment agency is between a candidate and the right organisation as well. So that conversation with candidates is very, very different than what it is before.

[00:14:31] **Marc:** And the average candidate qualification call that we used to do in my old recruitment world was around 30 minutes. The conversations now can take up to around two hours and rightly so, and it should, and that's what we love doing, right? We love working with, don't want to sound too Jerry Maguire here, but we love working far less candidates, right? And understanding everything we need to know about that candidate as well. Now on top of that, once we've had that conversation, there is a tech match, right? So we need to understand a person's technical qualifications, what they do, what they love to do, where they want to be in terms of career aspirations, etc. as well.

[00:15:04] **Marc:** So we understand a candidate from the same perspective as we would previously, but with that foundation understanding around their neurodiversity. The companies we talk to and the organisations you talk to, at the very least, have to have an appetite around accommodating candidates within their organisation. This is really important, and organisations aren't always going to get it right straight away, but the key area we focus on initially, it's the application and interview process, because it's just not fit for purpose, it really isn't. It's so far away from where it needs to be in terms of the understanding and the adjustments that are being made that it's highly prohibitive to a neurodiverse applicant as well.

[00:15:43] **Marc:** So, the conversations with companies are far more consultative than they would've been in my previous role, whereas we would've been quite submissive and quite subservient to the clients. It's my responsibility, my obligation to make sure that we say to companies, you need to change this before you start entering into this space as well. You need to have an application interview process that is flexible enough to accommodate, for the most part, most of the adjustments you're going to be asked for. So, and then listen, there's so much to talk about afterwards in terms of onboarding, but the initial conversations are really around that as well, because once a candidate is onboarded, you then have the challenge of really accommodating these strengths and challenges within organisations. And this is where training for people leaders, training for development managers, etc. come into play as well.

[00:16:30] **Dara:** So just sticking on that application process part of it, what are some of the examples of where that falls short to the mark when it's a maybe a kind of typical application process that an employer might have. Why is it not fit for purpose? What are some of the reasons why?

[00:16:42] **Marc:** So we count the application process from example, the job specifications. So when a job specification is put together for a role or an advert is put out for a role, we see some highly prohibitive language, great communication skills is one of them. Subjective comments, like we want a real go getter. This is a high-level, high-pressure environment, etc. These type of comments and that are not really quantifiable for the most part during an interview and application process can really, really, they can really put off a lot of candidate applying as well. And again, when I started working on gender equality recruitment about five years ago, again, when you see these on job specifications, again, they can be quite prohibitive to work in mothers etc. as well. So it starts really with, when you are writing a job specification, what do you actually need right? And are you putting your company and are you putting the team in the best light as well?

[00:17:34] **Marc:** If a candidate is lucky enough to get through and get to the interview process at that point as well. Oddly, any companies I've sort of worked with in the past and in my recruitment journey would ask around for adjustments with any real appetite to change things as well. So for example, a dyslexic candidate, one of the biggest adjustments we get asked for is time, right? So dyslexia is predominantly around information processing. So the way you take in information, the way you digest it, a lot of dyslexic applicants can say, look, I can write down what I want to say, I just need a little bit extra time to do it. So when we get interview processes that won't allow extra time, even verbal communication, even when someone asks a question but there's quite a defined delay in the answer. Again, that's something that needs to change as well, so again, if there is a interview process that is predominantly written communication that can be quite prohibitive to dyslexic candidates.

[00:18:27] **Marc:** If there is any part of an interview process, which is really, really looking at personality fit within an organisation, this can be quite prohibitive to particularly autistic applicants as well. So there's a lot of things that would need to change, but ultimately it's really around having the appetite to offer adjustments, you haven't got to understand every single one. And sometimes companies need to obviously try and navigate through this as well, but the idea of not having a unified interview process is really a concept that companies need to try and move towards. I understand you want to qualify people the right way, and that's really, really important. I understand that you need to make sure someone fundamentally can do the job that they're applying for, but there's certain parts of it that don't need to be in there.

[00:19:07] **Marc:** I've read something on LinkedIn today where a, a line manager decided to test a candidate by swapping roles with the receptionist at the organisation. So when the individual come in, they sat on reception, the candidate didn't know that this was the person they had the interview with, and they tried to engage in conversation. There was one candidate who's making very little eye contact, wasn't really engaged in conversation, and the candidate got rejected there. We have to move away from this, we have to move away from making decisions in the lift on the way to the interview room and making decisions based around the handshake and all of these type of things as well. But we can help companies navigate this and if we can't, there's loads of other companies out there that can help as well.

[00:19:47] **Dara:** My mind's just gone off to all sorts of different places. But with the kind of main thing that's, that stood out for me and I don't know that maybe this is a, a difficult question to answer. I found myself thinking about is there sometimes a blurry line? So you mentioned about like right back at the job specification. So I guess what I'm getting at is it's maybe tricky to separate out sometimes what's actually the requirements of the role versus maybe what people think are the requirements of the role. Because even when you said about, when you listed out some of those prohibitive languages, like good communicator, almost everyone who's ever put that on a job spec, they've just copy and pasted it from somewhere else. It's very boilerplate, so the person writing the job spec might not be the person who's potentially best equipped to understand what type of candidate they're actually looking for, and then the person who's maybe assessing that candidate might be somebody else again. So you've got lots of people involved in the process who might have varying degrees of knowledge around what might be prohibitive language, what qualities are actually being looked for. So it's probably not a straightforward thing in many cases to actually have end-to-end, to make sure that the job spec is written in the correct way, that candidates are screened in the correct way and that the candidates are actually interviewed in a correct way?

[00:20:55] **Marc:** Couldn't agree more.

[00:20:56] **Dara:** That's not really a question I realised.

[00:20:59] **Marc:** Listen, there are a lot of moving parts in any interview application and then onboarding process. I get that, what I struggle with is not getting it right at the start right? Even Selfridges will have a specialised person doing their window displays, right, to make sure they're correct, to make sure that they're absolutely spot on because that's the first thing people see. If a candidate wants to stick to the right process to apply for a role within an organisation, one of the first things they're going to see, if it's about that role in particular, is the job specification. But you are absolutely right there Dara, a lot of the time, it's just cut and pasted by a dev manager who's taken the previous one and changed a couple of things to make sure that it looks a little bit different to the one previously as well. But it's so important because people will read that job spec, particularly neurodivergent applicants, and think I can't do that. It's not to say that you can't have great communication skills written on a job spec, you just need to explain we need great communication skills because this person is a people leader within the area and they need to deal with high level stakeholders. As long as you give it some context, it can sometimes be fine, it's just when it's in there as you mentioned the cut and paste or just a general comment, it will turn off candidates.

[00:22:05] **Dara:** So if we're kind of stepping through the process then, so let's say we've got a well-written job spec that doesn't have any prohibitive language in it, we then start to speak to candidates. What are some of the adjustments that might need to be made during the interview process, whether it's maybe a first interview or a kind of further interview that's maybe a little bit more further into the process.

[00:22:24] **Marc:** So just in between those two stages, every company should have joined the application. The question should be, are there any adjustments that we can offer? So we can see the best of you joining an interview process as well. So you're not asking people necessary to disclose, you don't have to get into the ins and outs of someone's neurodiversity or any particular diagnosis, but it is really important that conversation takes place at one point as well. The foundation behind this is really important. Ideally, companies then have a list of adjustments that they can offer that they know they can offer as well. It's not going to cover everything that people ask for, I get that. But for the most part, if organisations have a list of adjustments, then that's really, really useful.

[00:23:05] **Marc:** And then when you get to the interview process, at that point, you've had a situation where the candidate applied for a role that the job specification looks like something they're quite comfortable doing. The candidate has a good experience so far because they've been asked for any adjustments. The adjustments have been agreed and discussed with the person doing the interview. So already there's a load of things here that don't happen in any other interview process normally, and you've got this foundational level of understanding where the process from that point can start to be more around the skills, it can be more about the job itself, it can be more about career ambitions, etc. because all of this other stuff is in place.

[00:23:43] **Marc:** In terms of the type of things that people ask for, I mentioned already, it's exhaustive. There can be a lot I get that, but there are some things that can be universal for the most part. The most common adjustments we get asked for from autistic applicants tend to be sensory, tend to be around the fact that I prefer a room with natural lighting. I'd prefer a room without a ticking clock, I prefer if it's okay just to interview with two people rather than a three in person interview. I'd rather do a remote interview first if that's okay. And that's really important to try and accommodate because all of those things I've listed there don't really cost, unless you have a building which has got no windows at all, right?

[00:24:20] **Marc:** So everything there is something that can be accommodated, again candidates who are dyslexic, it tends to be around time and ideally a discussion around the type of role you're going to be doing, a discussion around skills set, as opposed to anything that's written or anything that can be quite prohibited as well. So again, we can help and if it's not us, other organisations can help companies really understand different type of adjustments that they can offer, or should be offering really for the most part as well. They're never going to cover everything, and there's going to be some things that can't be, but sometimes just the fact that they are offering adjustments is very, very different to most companies out there.

[00:24:59] **Daniel:** So if we flip this on its head and say we are the candidate and we've gone through this process, we've found a job that is accommodating and has made adjustments for us and we are happy to go through. So again, thinking from the candidate's perspective, is there any kind of red flags or if there's anyone that's kind of thinking about going through this process themselves that identifies as neurodiverse, what can they look out for? What can be good indicators or maybe even indicators of good companies that might not have made these adjustments yet because they didn't know it was a thing to begin with. I'm just wondering how they can get the best experience out of this process.

[00:25:32] **Marc:** But this is why I believe that an organisation like us is needed because the recruitment agent in a neurotypical application process is that bridge, right? And can asked questions on behalf of their candidates and can also answer some of the questions candidates without having to go to the organisation because they know their organisation relatively well. So this is why it's, I believe that our role in this is important. Now, if you are applying directly to an organisation and you see something in there that you're not happy with or you don't believe you can do, then the best thing is to ask whether it's a hundred percent necessary. Look, I'm not necessarily a people person, would this mean my application would be declined? That question, and the way that questions answered can probably tell you a lot about the company from that point onwards.

[00:26:15] **Marc:** Every company I ever work with or I'm about to work with or about to have a meeting with including you guys. I'll always Google the name and neurodiversity straight away and see what comes up. Because the way organisations are approaching this subject again, can be quite important, having an appetite around it. So the red flags in the early process, the problem is there can be so many at this stage because a lot of companies aren't really set up for it, and it can be a bit of a leap of faith really, where you think, well, I can't do this, but I will apply for the role and I'll see where it goes from that point onwards. It's normally the second red flag I would imagine, which is probably the bigger one. And once you get into the interview process, you can just tell that they're not looking to accommodate any neurodiversity traits all in their jobs.

[00:26:59] **Dara:** I've got a follow up on that. So if an organisation, I don't know it, it might be interesting if you've experienced this, actually. If an organisation is serious about being more inclusive and say they work with somebody like you Marc, and you give them advice and you improve the kind of, you know, the recruitment process from job spec right through to selection. There's the rest of the organisation then as well, and more is needed than just working on the recruitment process. Because let's say that person then gets hired and even if the company makes some accommodations, they'll have colleagues that might not be as aware and informed potentially of what some of those accommodations mean and why they're in place. So is there internal training needed within that company itself to help the people internally understand why some of those accommodations have been made. If you decided as a company you wanted to be more inclusive and you invested in improving the recruitment process, but you didn't invest in educating your existing team, then you could end up with an issue where you do bring in candidates and you place them in positions but then there could be internal issues where they're working with colleagues who don't fully understand why these changes have been made.

[00:28:06] **Marc:** A hundred percent. The changes that need to be made are obviously throughout organisations, it's not just the interview and application process that needs to change. But there's two points make on that. First of all, at Diversita and when we set it up, it was important we stayed in our lane, right? So we understand recruitment and application processes. We understand how to present candidates we believe in, in the best light. On top of that, I believe that we are in a position where we can bring people up to a conversational level around neurodiversity, that for the most part tends to be decision makers, interview processes, HR and talent acquisitions. So that's the starting point, right? And I think that's the part where people sometimes get it wrong.

[00:28:44] **Marc:** What I believe happens after that is you create a nice problem to try and solve within your organisation, because you're absolutely right, that awareness and understanding needs to wash through everyone through those companies. The challenge is Dara, is that companies, I believe, certainly the ones I talk to who don't look to try and start this process, are so overwhelmed by the subject, it's where do they start. Do they need to rip up their organisation top to bottom to make sure that everyone has an in-depth understanding around neurodiversity before they even put their foot in the water.

[00:29:19] **Marc:** The other thing is that if they do start, I believe, to start to try and get it right in the recruitment process. You'll start to see more people comfortable within organisations disclosing around their own neurodiversity and I already mentioned this percentage around 20% of the population and obviously the workforce being more divergent. That starts to change internally, so it could just expand. So once you show that you are an organisation that does care around this, particularly in bringing people into the organisation, that could start to expand outwards. However, companies can also start to make the change just internally. They can start to build up what they call employee resource groups and start to really, really look at errors. If I'm going to be really honest, we're quite comfortable with companies changing any way they wish, right? But they need to change, they need to change.

[00:30:05] **Marc:** The part we could play in it I think at Diversita is the recruitment process. If that's the first part they play in it, if that's the first stage they make and the first step they make, then fantastic. But you're absolutely right, there will be other steps to make and there's partners that we sometimes work with that can help people with that as well. We have job coaching partners that we work with that can offer support to candidates throughout the first six to nine months of their employment, but you're absolutely right, there are a lot of other things to change within companies as well.

[00:30:31] **Dara:** And is there any support offered for again, for companies who have a willingness to make these changes, but maybe need some kind of support in terms of, so even, for example, like some of the accommodations if they involve investment, are there any kind of government schemes or grants that companies can look to use to help improve the support that they can in turn offer?

[00:30:50] **Marc:** Yeah, absolutely. So once a candidate is onboarded, there is a government scheme called [Access to Work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work) where it's not always perfect, but it does give organisations support in a variety of areas to make sure that candidates for the most part get what they need as well. And that can include tools like Grammarly or tools to help dyslexic candidates. It can include paying for job coaches to give for example, autistic candidates some support particularly in the early stages of employment, it's a really, really wide reach and access to work works across physical disabilities as well. But it's a scheme I think most organisations would know about. I think what they don't necessarily use it for is neurodiversity and it's sometimes called invisible disabilities, which is not a phrase we use, but things outside of physical disabilities.

[00:31:38] **Daniel:** Something that's come up, Marc, around something you spoke about earlier is around the whole concept and the whole timing of disclosure, and whether or not that's needed, whether that's not needed or when a good time is to do that. Because if you've got a candidate that's coming in that might have disclosed their difference on the way in, but they're not quite comfortable to share that with their colleagues and all of a sudden the whole company gets training on how to work with autistic people. You know, it's not going to be very subtle, and I'm just wondering like, what is the current, I suppose, approach to disclosure. Is it needed? Is it a timing thing? And I'm sure it's not one size fits all, but what is the advice you would give to a candidate about going through this process? What should they do?

[00:32:12] **Marc:** So if we look at a candidate applying for a role through Diversita, for example, we don't tend to focus around the neurodiversity, we focus on the adjustments. But look, by proxy, if a candidate comes to us, then an organisation is going to know that they're neurodivergent. If you work for an organisation and you haven't disclosed, you have to look at the reasons why, I think is really important. The concept of masking or hiding your neurodiversity within an organisation is normally because you're not comfortable to do so. Now it could be that the company you work for, you really like, you believe they will be receptive to it but there's also a fear factor there and I one hundred percent get that, I really do.

[00:32:47] **Marc:** The challenge, I think, around disclosure is that for the companies that do have an appetite to support and do have an appetite to try and change, if there is no disclosure from an employee, then sometimes it's difficult to know how they can be supported as well from that point on. So, it’s a really difficult concept and I would never advise anyone to disclose or not to disclose. All I would say is that during, particularly the process that we look after, the application process, some level of disclosure, even if it's just asking for adjustments, can really create a strong foundation of making sure that the organisation sees the best part of that candidate during that process, and that by proxy I think will obviously help someone once they're onboarded at a company as well. But I've also seen loads of examples where people have disclosed and it's caused all sorts of problems internally and lack of understanding as well. There's no right or wrong answer to it really, to be honest, Daniel. But all I would say is that if you do feel comfortable and it is received well, it can be really, really powerful and really, really empowering for the rest of your career as well.

[00:33:56] **Dara:** And I guess that's another reason for employers to use the right kind of language and give clear signs that differences will be understood and supported. Like you mentioned earlier, where if you offered during the interview process a set of potential adjustments, then you're already giving that indication that maybe there's less of a need for that fear factor. Because we've actually had a guest on before who has experienced negative effects from disclosing. So she started a position, everything was going brilliantly. She got on really well with her colleagues and then she felt comfortable to disclose and then once she did, things changed and it went sour pretty quickly. And hopefully this is something that's changing over time and people will experience that less and less, but I guess it is a risk when maybe you get the job without having to disclose, you haven't had any signals from the company, and then you take the risk, you disclose, and then it goes badly. So the company's responsibility is to kind of demonstrate clearly that it's a safe environment and that somebody, if they wish, it's still their decision, but if they wish to disclose that, at least they've seen some signs that company is actually somewhat aware, supportive, at least giving the right signals.

[00:35:03] **Marc:** Yeah, definitely. I think if you show that you are trying to raise awareness and like you say, do the right things, people do feel more comfortable. The other point I think to be made here though is that the person who you report directly to needs to have a really good understanding and be someone who you feel comfortable enough to talk to. And some of the best advocates we see at companies, are people that do this, they take it upon themselves to make changes internally as well as opposed to being driven by the wider organisation. So that individual that you work for on a day-to-day basis can be the best advocate. The flip side is they can also be the person that also causes you to not disclose and to mask as well.

[00:35:44] **Marc:** But an example, the other day I had a candidate who approached us who was dyslexic, was disclosed internally, was very honest around their dyslexia on their signature, on their emails. And when they'd send out emails to a relatively small company, there'd be grammatical errors and there'd be a few mistakes here and there, but there was nothing that was misunderstood in the email, right? There was nothing offensive, the message couldn't be misunderstood. And in the end, their manager said, look, from now on I want to rewrite all your emails for you because I think that will help you and we need to be sure that the spelling's correct. No one had complained or anything like that. It was just, it's a concept called ableism where people, and if I'm giving them the benefit of doubt, are trying to do what they think is the right thing, but then end up just becoming patronising and almost diminish I think what that person is sometimes going through.

[00:36:34] **Marc:** So I think it's an adjustment for a lot of people, but sometimes that day-to-day manager, if someone discloses you, you can't tell, you can't imagine how hard that's been for someone to do. And the responsibility on that from that point onwards to educate yourself around neurodiversity from that point onwards can really, really change organisations from sort of within as well. So people leaders, and anyone who manages people is one of my key passions for doing a webinar in a few months time with a couple of people leaders. Because again, I think that's a really powerful voice to be heard within companies.

[00:37:05] **Daniel:** So Marc, I want to do a bit of a hand break turn actually, and just say that it's not a podcast in the 2020s if we don't mention Covid, and I can imagine how, well, tell us how did COVID affect the recruitment industry for neurodiverse talent pools really? Because I can imagine it had quite an impact, but I'd love to get your experience from the field around how positive or negative this has been for the people you work with?

[00:37:28] **Marc:** Well again, trying to make sure that I always stay in my lane of expertise. I wasn't working in that field during the height of COVID by any stretch. I think for the most part there's been some really positive outcomes for neurodivergent employees, particularly hybrid working and working in environments where you haven't got to sit there until your manager leaves. You haven't got to sit there with someone on your shoulder, you haven't got to engage sometimes in small talk that you don't want to, you haven't got to go to social events that you don't want to, and you can control your day. And you can also control some of the adjustments that you make on a day-to-day basis to ensure that you feel comfortable and that you had set those right foundations to do your job the right way. So if I look at my son, my son Thomas, who's autistic, he has a variety of management techniques that he uses on a day-to-day basis to control certain ticks, etc. as well that he has and if you are sitting in an office for 40 hours a week, that can be exhausted trying to mask that as well.

[00:38:29] **Marc:** So I think hybrid working and the move away from that on your shoulder management has been an incredibly positive one for neurodivergent candidates as well. However, there's obviously a flip side to it as well where sometimes not being able to be given one-on-one support sometimes people, particularly if you're a good manager, seeing people within a team that maybe need that little bit of additional help, that disconnect can sometimes be a bit of a struggle as well. But look, I don't see a huge amount of negatives that have come out of it and I think this is also why we're starting to see more people disclosing now, and more people are comfortable around it because they know that this role is going to be remote. This role is going to be a position where you know what I can deliver what I'm supposed to deliver by the end of the week, and that really suits me because I can do it in the way I want it as well.

[00:39:17] **Marc:** So candidates who are ADHD for example, use a trait called hyperfocus where they can work into really, really intense levels but it causes a bit of burnout. Now, what that will mean is they can work ridiculously hard for a certain period, but then may not, they just want to sit on the sofa for sort of three or four hours just to almost recharge. Now, you can't be able to do that in a work environment if you're sitting in an office as well. So for the most part, I think it's been positive to answer your question.

[00:39:46] **Dara:** So two more questions for you, the second last one is where can people find out more about you or about Diversita, or if they want to get in touch with you? How can they do so?

[00:39:56] **Marc:** Okay, so I'm not brilliant around certain areas of social media, but I'm on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/marc-crawley-diversita/), you can definitely contact me through LinkedIn and it's Marc Crawley, and [Diversita is on there](https://www.linkedin.com/company/diversita-co-uk/) as well. And yeah, I'd like to think that we are very visible in that space. We have a website, [diversita.co.uk](https://www.diversita.co.uk/) as well that will have links and contact numbers and everything that you would need. We started doing [TikTok](https://www.tiktok.com/%40diversita.uk?lang=en) now, I'd like to say I understand that, but I don't really, but we'll be starting to get videos on there as well, which is good, and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/diversita.co.uk/) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/MarcCrawley4) here as well.

### Wind down

[00:40:26] **Dara:** And the last question, which some people think is the easiest and some people think is the hardest, what do you like to do outside of work to wind down?

[00:40:35] **Marc:** So I am the geekiest of geeky people. I'm the least recruiter-y person you've ever met, so I love anything sci-fi, Star Wars, retro toys, video games, all that sort of stuff as well. I'm a big Tottenham fan as well, so I love football. I like to keep fit as well, I play football and then I bought a Peloton during lockdown, which was a good investment I think as well. But myself and my son go to a lot of comic cons and things like that as well. Yeah, so I could yeah, bore you with my special interests all day long, but luckily because all of us, including my wife, my sons, we all have very similar interests as well. And Disney, as much as I don't agree with their current working from home policy, I love Disney, we like Disney a lot as well.

### Outro

[00:41:16] **Dara:** I think you'd get on with a lot of people at Measurelab, to be honest, a lot of similar interests. That's it for this week, to hear more from me and Dan on GA4 and other analytics related topics, all our previous episodes are available in our archive at [measurelab.co.uk/podcast](https://www.measurelab.co.uk/podcast/?utm_medium=podcast&utm_source=transcript&utm_campaign=68) or you can simply use whatever app you're using right now to listen to this, to go back and listen to previous episodes.

[00:41:40] **Daniel:** And if you want to suggest a topic for something me and Dara should be talking about, or if you want to suggest a guest who we should be talking to there's a [Google Form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeMwfzg9TdNKeZYRxHci_y0D9up4EyAL5zNMYZNE9P_82fz3Q/viewform) in the show notes that you can fill out and leave us a note. Or alternatively, you can just email us at podcast@measurelab.co.uk to get in touch with us both directly.

[00:41:56] **Dara:** Our theme is from Confidential, you can find a link to their music in the show notes. So on behalf of Dan and I, thanks for listening, see you next time.